

Staffing a family office in Switzerland

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A family office depends on a small number of trusted people. Families from Greater China, Asia, the Middle East and Africa often want to bring a familiar adviser to Switzerland while also hiring local specialists, and both routes come with legal requirements that should be planned early.

1 Work permits for staff from outside the EU and EFTA

Admission of nationals from outside the EU and EFTA is governed by the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act and its ordinances. In general, permits are limited to qualified persons, are subject to annual quotas, and require the employer to show that no suitable candidate could be found on the domestic and EU/EFTA labour market. Salary and working conditions must correspond to local and industry standards. The cantonal labour market authority examines the application before the federal authority gives its approval, so the process takes time and the outcome is never guaranteed.

2 Hiring in Switzerland

Local recruitment is often the more predictable route. Switzerland has an experienced talent pool in wealth management, accounting, legal and investment functions, particularly in Zurich and Geneva. Language skills matter, as German or French may be needed for dealings with authorities, while the family may expect Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic or another language. Clear job descriptions also help with the regulatory analysis, because the tasks staff perform can affect whether the office needs a licence.

3 Employment contracts and notice periods

Employment relationships are governed mainly by the Swiss Code of Obligations, which leaves considerable freedom of contract but contains

mandatory protective provisions. Statutory notice periods apply unless the parties agree otherwise in writing within the legal limits, and they increase with years of service (Art. 335c CO). Dismissal is generally possible without giving cause, although termination can be abusive in certain situations and is excluded during defined protection periods such as illness. Social insurance contributions, occupational pensions and accident insurance must be arranged from the start.

4 Non-compete and confidentiality

Post-employment non-compete clauses are valid only if agreed in writing and if the employee had insight into clientele or business secrets that could cause the employer significant harm. They must be reasonably limited in place, time and subject matter, and the statute sets a general maximum duration except in special circumstances (Art. 340a CO). A court may reduce an excessive restriction. In a family office, a carefully drafted confidentiality clause covering family information is often at least as important as a non-compete.

5 What pays off in practice

- **Planning permits early** leaves room for the labour market test and the authorities' review.
- **Precise job descriptions** support both the permit application and the regulatory analysis.
- **Tailored confidentiality provisions** protect family information beyond what standard templates cover.

6 How Ressos Legal helps

I advise family offices on employment contracts, confidentiality arrangements and the legal framework for bringing key staff to Switzerland. [Contact me](#) for a first conversation.

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