

Swiss citizenship: ordinary naturalisation and dual nationality

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Swiss citizenship is the final step for many long-term residents, bringing political rights and full freedom of movement within Switzerland. The Swiss Citizenship Act, in force since 1 January 2018, sets uniform federal minimum requirements, while cantons and communes add their own conditions and conduct much of the procedure. For applicants from Asia, the Middle East and Africa, the effect on their existing nationality deserves careful attention.

1 Formal requirements under federal law

An applicant for ordinary naturalisation must hold a settlement permit (C permit) at the time of application. Federal law further requires a total of ten years of residence in Switzerland, of which three must fall within the five years preceding the application. Years spent in Switzerland between the ages of eight and eighteen count double, although the actual period of residence must still amount to at least six years. Certain periods, for example on provisional admission, are counted only in part.

2 Integration criteria and language skills

The Act requires that the applicant be successfully integrated, familiar with Swiss living conditions and pose no threat to Switzerland's internal or external security. Integration is assessed by reference to respect for public security and order, respect for the values of the Federal Constitution, participation in economic life or education, and support for the integration of family members. Federal law requires oral language skills at level B1 and written skills at level A2 in a national language. Receipt of social assistance in the years before the application generally excludes naturalisation unless the support has been repaid, and a criminal record can also stand in the way.

3 Three levels: federal, cantonal and communal

Naturalisation in Switzerland involves the Confederation, the canton and the commune. The federal authorities grant the federal naturalisation approval, while the canton and the commune decide on the cantonal and communal citizenship. Cantonal law sets a minimum period of residence in the canton, and many communes also require a certain period of residence locally. These periods differ considerably, so a move between cantons or communes can postpone eligibility. Cantons and communes may also apply their own tests of local knowledge, interviews and fees, and the overall procedure can take a considerable time.

4 Dual nationality

Switzerland permits dual and multiple nationality, so it does not require applicants to give up their existing citizenship. The decisive question is whether the applicant's home country allows its nationals to hold a second nationality. Some countries do not permit dual nationality, including the People's Republic of China, whose nationality law provides in principle that a national who settles abroad and voluntarily acquires a foreign nationality loses Chinese nationality. Other states attach conditions, require a declaration or allow retention only in specific cases. Applicants should obtain advice on their home country's rules before applying.

5 Obligations that come with citizenship

Swiss citizens enjoy the right to vote and stand for election and can no longer be expelled from Switzerland. Male Swiss citizens are generally subject to military service, civilian service or a military service exemption tax, which can be relevant for sons who are naturalised together with their parents.

6 What pays off in practice

- **Plan any change of residence carefully** because moving to another canton or commune can restart the local residence periods required for naturalisation.
- **Clarify the home country's position first** so that the family understands any effect on existing passports, property rights or inheritance at home.

- **Include children in the planning** since minor children are usually included in a parent's application and years of residence during adolescence count double.

7 How Ressos Legal helps

I advise long-term residents on the timing and preparation of naturalisation applications and on the interaction between Swiss citizenship and their existing nationality. [Contact me](#) for a first conversation.

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