

Naturalisation and the political community

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Foreign residents who wish to become Swiss citizens must meet federal and cantonal requirements. Since 2018, the federal law has required ten years of residence, a permanent residence permit and successful integration, including oral skills in a national language at level B1 and written skills at level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference.¹ The cantons may set higher requirements, while the municipalities decide on the naturalisation of their residents. In Zug, where the canton requires oral German at level B2 and written German at level B1, the citizens' council of the municipality conducts an interview on history, politics and the rights and duties of Swiss citizens.²

The language requirement means that English-speaking residents who do not learn German cannot become Swiss citizens. Many of them do not wish to, since they plan to stay only for a limited time. Those who stay longer and wish to take part in the political life of the canton must learn German. The canton's political community is therefore German-speaking and composed of citizens, while nearly a third of its residents are foreigners without political rights. In a direct democracy, where citizens vote on many questions several times a year, this exclusion is felt more strongly than in representative democracies. It means that the international community, which contributes a large share of the canton's economic output and tax revenues, has no direct voice in the decisions that affect it.

1 Notes

1. Federal Act of 20 June 2014 on Swiss Citizenship (BüG), text on droit-bilingue.ch, Art. 9 para. 1 (permanent residence permit and at least ten years of residence, three of them in the five years before the application), Art. 12 para. 1 lit. c (communication in a national language in everyday situations, orally and in writing) and para. 3 (cantons may add integration criteria); SEM, "Becoming a Swiss citizen",

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sem.admin.ch: SCA (SR 141.0) and Citizenship Ordinance in force from 1 January 2018; Ordinance of 17 June 2016 on Swiss Citizenship (BüV, SR 141.01), Art. 6 para. 1 (oral skills at least B1 and written skills at least A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference) and Art. 32 (entry into force 1 January 2018), consolidated text of 9 July 2019 on data.globalcit.eu. ↩

2. Canton of Zug, "Ordentliche Einbürgerung", zg.ch: language skills at level B1 written and B2 oral; the Bürgerrat assesses the application and conducts the staatsbürgerliches Gespräch (history, political science, rights and duties of Swiss citizens), which is mandatory for applicants who did not complete Swiss schooling; amended cantonal citizenship law in force since 1 January 2025. ↩

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