

Swiss German in the workplace

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

In the international companies of Zug, English is the language of meetings, e-mails and documents. Swiss German does not disappear, however. Swiss employees speak dialect with each other in the corridors, at lunch and on the telephone before switching to English when a foreign colleague joins the conversation. The pattern is familiar to anyone who has worked in an international company in German-speaking Switzerland. Foreign employees often describe it as a subtle barrier: they understand the formal business of the company, but they miss the informal exchanges in which much of the social life of an office takes place.

Companies deal with this in different ways. Some establish English as the only language in all settings, to avoid excluding foreign colleagues. Others accept the use of dialect in informal settings and encourage their foreign employees to learn German. The approach depends on the composition of the workforce. In a trading house in which most employees are foreigners, English dominates everywhere. In a Swiss company with an international management team, dialect remains the language of most employees, while English is the language of management and of contact with the group. The linguistic culture of each company is shaped by these balances.

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/zug-swiss-german-in-the-workplace