

Trustees and the trust industry

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The trustees of Zug administer trusts governed by foreign law for clients around the world. The trust industry of Switzerland grew in the second half of the twentieth century. During that period, the international clients of the Swiss banks used trusts to structure their wealth, and Swiss fiduciaries took on the role of trustee or of administrator for trustees in offshore jurisdictions. Since 2020, the licensing requirement of the Financial Institutions Act has applied to persons who act as trustees on a professional basis in or from Switzerland. It has brought the Swiss trust industry under supervision for the first time.¹

The clients of the trustees are families with international connections: families whose members live in several countries, whose assets are located in several jurisdictions, or who come from common law countries and are familiar with trusts. The trustees of Zug serve families from the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth, Latin America, the Middle East and Asia, as well as Swiss families with foreign connections. Their work combines several tasks. They administer the trust assets, exercise the discretions that the trust instrument confers on them, maintain the relationship with the beneficiaries and comply with the tax and anti-money-laundering rules of the jurisdictions concerned.

The trust industry has been subject to increasing transparency. The automatic exchange of information covers trusts, which are treated as financial institutions or as passive entities depending on their structure. The banks that hold the assets of trusts must identify their beneficial owners. The transparency register, in force from 1 October 2026, covers foreign legal entities with a Swiss connection, while the revised anti-money-laundering law, in force from the same date, will extend due diligence obligations to advisers who form and administer trusts.² The discretion that once characterised the trust industry has given way to a regime of documented transparency towards the authorities.

1 Notes

1. FINMA, "Trustees", finma.ch/de/bewilligung/vermoegensverwalter-und-trustees/trustees/, accessed September 2026: trustees are persons who, on the basis of the instrument creating a trust, professionally manage or dispose of a separate fund for the benefit of beneficiaries or for a specific purpose; commercial activity requiring a FINMA licence under the Financial Institutions Act (FinIA, SR 954.1), in force since 1 January 2020, where gross revenue exceeds CHF 50,000 a year, more than 20 relationships are maintained or trust assets exceed CHF 5 million. ↩
2. Source as cited in the printed edition. ↩

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