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Fact sheet for people travelling to Switzerland within the “International Geneva” context: issuing of visas, entry, exit and travel within the Schengen area

The aim of this fact sheet is to outline the conditions for issuing visas to persons invited in a multilateral context (International Geneva) by institutional beneficiaries in Switzerland including holders of legitimization cards issued by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). It also provides details about entry, exit and travel within the Schengen area. Those concerned are mainly:

- Individuals invited to meetings hosted by [international organisations having concluded a headquarters agreement with Switzerland](#)¹;
- Individuals employed by said organisations or other institutional beneficiaries who are eligible for a legitimization card issued by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA);
- Staff members and official visitors of diplomatic and permanent missions in Switzerland;
- Individuals officially invited to events when Switzerland plays its role as provider of “good offices”, those on official professional visits, etc.

Visa applications for any of the aforementioned individuals fall respectively within the responsibilities of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office and to the other international organisations in Geneva (the Swiss Mission).

However, the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and the Swiss embassies/consulates abroad are responsible for processing visa applications for the following individuals:

- Invitees of holders of a [legitimation card issued by the FDFA](#)² (see 4 below)
- Representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGO's) (see 5 below)

1. General Information

Switzerland is party to the Schengen-Dublin agreements and abides with Schengen regulations for issuing visas in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 18 April 1961, applicable by analogy to permanent missions and agreements concluded with international organisations.

Schengen regulations distinguish between short- and long-stay visas:

- Short-stay visas do not exceed 90 days (see 3a below).
- Long-stay national visas are for more than 90 days. The issuing of long-stay visas is subject to national procedures. Holders of long-stay visas subsequently receive a Swiss residence or work permit (see 3b below).

Please note this fact sheet only mentions certain visa related regulations. Further guidelines and regulations are available on the [SEM website](#)³.

2. Persons requiring a visa and where to lodge their application

The list of nationalities subject to visa requirements is available [here](#)⁴. The relevant authorities of the applicant's main country of destination are responsible for processing the visa application. For example, if the main destination is Switzerland, the visa application must be lodged with the Swiss Embassy or

¹ URL : https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/mission-onu-omc-aele-geneve/fr/documents/Tableau-des-OI_FR.pdf

² URL : <https://www.eda.admin.ch/missions/mission-onu-geneve/en/home/manual-regime-privileges-and-immunities/introduction/legitimation-card.html>

³ URL : <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/themen/einreise.html>

⁴ URL : https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/publiservice/weisungen-kreisschreiben/visa/liste1_staatsangehoerigkeit.html



Consulate responsible for the applicant's place of residence (regardless of nationality). This [link](#)⁵ indicates which Swiss Embassy or Consulate is responsible for the applicant's place of residence.

It is highly recommended that the applicant consults the Swiss Embassy or Consulate website in advance to gather information on how visa applications should be submitted, required supporting documents and appointment deadlines. Such matters differ depending on the local context.

If Switzerland does not have a consular representation in a given country, it may be represented by another Schengen State (see list above) where it is possible to submit certain types of visa applications for Switzerland. These are mainly short-stay Schengen visas (type C), which do not allow applicants to engage in gainful activity. The applicants are responsible for ensuring their application can be processed by the representing State. The Swiss Embassy or Consulate responsible for their place of residence or the representing State can provide them with this information.

3. Official Visits

People visiting Switzerland in an official capacity (government delegates and/or those invited by international organisations having concluded a seat agreement with Switzerland) should consult the Swiss Mission's document "Entry Visas for Switzerland" (refer to "Documents" [here](#)⁶).

A facilitated visa application procedure is available for these persons who are subject to visa requirements and invited to participate in international conferences and meetings. Organisations, diplomatic missions/representations and sending States (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MOFA) are nonetheless expected to respect visa application deadlines and processing requirements. These may vary and it is therefore highly recommended that applicants begin the application procedure well in advance (at the latest 20 days but no earlier than 6 months before the date of departure). It is important to note that the processing of a visa application cannot begin until a complete application file with all required information has been submitted. It may not be possible to process an incomplete or late visa application.

a. Short-stay visa/Schengen visa (up to 90 days maximum)

These are type C visas for short stays (90 days maximum within a period of 180 days). They are issued with either single or multiple entries. Delegates travelling to Switzerland within the "International Geneva" context, usually have single-entry visas valid for the duration of the event they are attending. Requests and reasons for multiple-entry visas must be stipulated in the inviting party's invitation letter.

It is the applicant's responsibility to pay special attention to both the validity of their visa and the length of stay allowed in the Schengen area. This may differ and depends on the number of days spent in the Schengen area during previous visits. Holders of a valid Schengen visa should therefore use this [tool](#)⁷ to calculate the number of days they are authorised to spend in the Schengen area based on their previous visits. The Embassy or Consulate where the visa was issued can also be contacted with all queries regarding this matter.

Government representatives, international civil servants, interns, consultants, experts, etc. who have a contract with an [organisation having concluded an agreement with Switzerland](#)⁸ or are nominated by their government to work for a diplomatic mission for a period of up to 90 days, will usually receive a type C short-stay visa.

Under exceptional and urgent circumstances, Swiss Embassies or Consulates may issue visas with limited territorial validity (LTV) in accordance with Schengen regulations. This only applies to individual cases that are duly justified. A holder of an LTV visa which is only valid for Switzerland, cannot visit nor transit through another Schengen State (enter and exit the Schengen area via Switzerland only).

⁵ URL : <https://www.swiss-visa.ch/ivis2/#/i210-select-country>

⁶ URL : <https://www.eda.admin.ch/missions/mission-onu-geneve/en/home/manual-regime-privileges-and-immunities/introduction/manual-visas.html>

⁷ URL : <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/themen/einreise/aufenthaltsrechner.html>

⁸ https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/mission-onu-omc-aele-geneve/fr/documents/Tableau-des-OI_FR.pdf



In general, the following documents must be submitted with a type C short-stay (official visit) visa application:

- A completed [Schengen visa application form](#)⁹ signed by the applicant ;
- A valid travel document recognised by Switzerland (must be valid for at least three months after the return date and issued within the last ten years) and a copy thereof ;
- If necessary, a valid residence permit or equivalent thereof (e.g. entry and/or exit visa) which authorises the applicant to exit and return to her/his country of residence ;
- A recent passport photograph ;
- An invitation letter from an organisation having concluded a headquarters agreement with Switzerland stating the applicant's family and first names (as in passport) and the purpose and length of stay. This letter must also specify if the inviting party covers travel, accommodation and any other costs related to the stay ;
- A note verbale from the sending State (for officials only) ;
- Proof of travel health insurance covering a minimum of 30'000 euros valid for all Member States having signed the Schengen Agreements (for ordinary passport holders only) ;
- **The Swiss Embassy or Consulate may request additional documents. Hotel reservations and travel itineraries are often required.**

It is the responsibility of all visa holders to ensure, before their departure, that their visa is valid for the entire duration of their stay as it is generally not possible to extend its validity after their arrival in Switzerland.

b. Long-stay/national visas (stay of more than 90 days)

Type D visas are national visas for stays of more than 90 days which are issued in accordance with the national regulations of each Schengen State.

Holders of a D type visa whose stay in Switzerland is regularised by a FDFA legitimisation card, must refer to the [guidelines regarding the issuance of FDFA legitimisation cards](#)¹⁰. These guidelines also provide information about visa procedures.

In general, the following documents must be submitted with a type D (official stay) visa application:

- A national type D visa application form completed and signed by the applicant (it is available [here](#)¹¹);
- A valid travel document (must be valid for at least three months after the return date and issued within the last ten years) and a copy thereof;
- If necessary, a valid residence permit or equivalent thereof (e.g. entry and/or exit visa) which authorises the applicant to exit and return to her/his country of residence;
- Two recent passport photographs;
- A personal letter of invitation from an international organisation or an employment contract/note verbale from the sending State with all necessary employment details and the applicant's family and first names (as in passport);
- Any additional documents as requested by the Embassy or Consulate.

4. Private visits

The SEM and the Swiss Embassy or Consulate responsible for the applicant's place of residence are responsible for processing visa applications for private visits. [The Swiss Embassy or Consulate responsible for the applicant's place of residence](#)¹² can provide further information on this matter.

Invitees of an FDFA legitimisation card-holder are not required to submit a declaration of sponsorship form approved by local authorities in Switzerland.

¹⁰ URL : <https://www.eda.admin.ch/missions/mission-onu-geneve/en/home/manual-regime-privileges-and-immunities/introduction/legitimation-card.html>

¹¹ URL : <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/themen/einreise/visumantragsformular.html>

¹² URL : <https://www.swiss-visa.ch/ivis2/#/i210-select-country>



The Embassy or Consulate requests the following documents:

- Inviting party letter of invitation which guarantees invitee's return to home country and that all costs related to the invitee's entire stay will be covered;
- Copy of both sides of the inviting party's legitimation card (if in doubt, the authenticity and validity of the legitimation card can be verified by the FDFA Protocol or the Swiss Mission);
- Visa application form (with passport photo);
- Travel document and copy thereof;
- Flight reservation;
- Travel health insurance (if necessary);
- Certificate issued by employer, university registration card or equivalent.

5. Invitee of a non-governmental organisation (NGO)

The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and the Swiss Embassy or Consulate are responsible for processing the visa applications of NGO invitees. [The Swiss Embassy or Consulate responsible for the applicant's place of residence](#)¹³ can provide further information on this matter.

For ease of reference, the Swiss Mission provides a "Checklist for inviting participants to meetings in Switzerland at the invitation of a non-governmental organisation (NGO)" with practical information on the visa application procedure and a sample invitation letter for NGO delegates (refer to "Documents" [here](#)).

6. UN Laissez-Passer

Holders of a valid UN laissez-passer (UNLP) can enter Switzerland without a visa for a maximum of 90 days regardless of the purpose of stay and nationality. UNLP-holders do not have to use their national passports to enter Switzerland.

If UNLP-holders have to transit through or travel to another Schengen country, they must make sure they fulfill the visa and travel document requirements for that particular Schengen country. It is their responsibility to check this matter with the relevant authorities.

For stays of more than 90 days (e.g. employment) in Switzerland, UNLP-holders must check with the Swiss Embassy or Consulate responsible for their place of residence if they are subject to visa requirements. Upon entry to Switzerland they must present their national passport and, when required, their valid visa.

UNLP-holders with United Nations insurance cover, are not obliged to present proof of travel health insurance.

7. Crossing borders and travel with the Schengen area

A person crossing the border to exit Switzerland or travelling within the Schengen area, must travel with a valid travel document (issued within the last ten years and valid for at least three months after the departure date from Switzerland) which is recognised in the Schengen area and a valid residence permit or visa covering the entire travel period.

Holders of a valid legitimation card

A valid FDFA legitimation card also serves as a residence permit and allows its holder to travel within the Schengen area for a maximum of 90 days within a period of 180 days (without engaging in gainful activity). FDFA legitimation card-holders should check their card is valid for their entire stay abroad. If the card has expired or cannot be presented upon request, its holder may be refused entry or even be expelled from the Schengen area (see below "*Holders of expired long-stay visas or legitimation cards*").

Switzerland has provided Schengen authorities with specimens of FDFA legitimation cards which are recognised as residence permits. Despite this, there have been rare cases when Schengen border

¹³ URL : <https://www.swiss-visa.ch/ivis2/#/i210-select-country>



authorities have not recognised these cards. As a precautionary measure, FDFA legitimisation card-holders can print out a list of these residence permits and, if need be, show it to the Schengen border authorities. This list can be found in annex 20, part II of the Schengen manual (see pages 62-73 Switzerland). This annex is available on the [SEM website](#)¹⁴.

In the event of difficulties, immigration authorities of the Schengen area can contact the International Police at Geneva Airport for clarification: tel. +41 22 427 58 30 (until midnight) or tel. +41 22 427 92 20 (24h/24h).

Holders of a valid long-stay visa

Holders of valid type D long-stay visas are permitted to travel within the Schengen area for stays of up to 90 days within a 180-day period without engaging in gainful activity.

Holders of expired long-stay visas or legitimisation cards

In accordance with Swiss law, type D long-stay visas suspend the number of authorised days for a short stay in Switzerland (maximum 90 days in a 180-day period). As a result, holders of an expired D type visa (provided they are not subject to a visa as a tourist) may remain in Switzerland for another 90 days (without gainful activity). However, if they wish to transit through or visit another Schengen country for a short stay with their expired type D visa, they are entirely responsible for checking with the relevant authorities of that particular country about its visa and travel document requirements.

The above mentioned also applies to holders of an expired legitimisation card (provided they are not subject to a visa as a tourist), who may remain in Switzerland for another 90 days (without gainful activity). However, if they wish to transit through or visit another Schengen country for a short stay with their expired legitimisation card, they are entirely responsible for checking with the relevant authorities of that particular country about its visa and travel document requirements. In such instances, it is wise to request for the extension of the legitimisation card validity.

End of official duties and departure from the Schengen area

If need be, FDFA legitimisation card-holders (excl. interns and volunteers) may request an extension of the validity of their card for a period of up to two months as of the final date of their official duties. They may keep their legitimisation card during this extended period of stay. Those who are not nationals of a Schengen country must leave Switzerland with a valid legitimisation card. Their legitimisation card must be returned before it expires to either the Swiss Embassy or Consulate in their country of destination or to the relevant international organisation or permanent mission.

For more detailed information on visa regulations, please consult the [State Secretariat for Migration \(SEM\)](#)¹⁵ website or the Swiss Embassy/Consulate responsible for the applicant's place of residence.

¹⁴ URL : <https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/rechtsgrundlagen/weisungen/visa/vhb/sh-anh20p2-f.pdf>

¹⁵ URL : <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/publiservice/weisungen-kreisschreiben/visa.html>