



SWITZERLAND | COVID-19 TRAVEL AND IMMIGRATION FAQ

Switzerland has taken drastic measures to halt the spread of COVID-19 by limiting activities and travel to only the absolutely necessary.

The Swiss authorities declared a state of emergency on 16 March, resulting in many cantonal and local authorities closing, with most services offered limited to urgent or priority services.

Swiss representations worldwide are not issuing any type C or D visas until 15 June (except for applicants in an urgent situation or people of high importance working in the health sector).

The Swiss government has introduced a regularly-updated ordinance, “Ordonnance 2 Covid-19”, and a new directive and a government circular have also been introduced to support the implementation of the ordinance.

The Swiss authorities have taken measures to ease the lockdown on the movement of people which came into force on 11 May. Some work applications which were put on hold and some new online registrations will be again processed (details below). Effective 8 June, if the epidemiological situation allows it, it is expected that the processing of applications from all workers who benefit from the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons will resume.

GENERAL MEASURES

- People recommended to stay at home
- Public and private gatherings of > 5 people are prohibited
- Economic measures in force to facilitate access to government aids, loans etc.
- The Federal Council announced a three-step plan to exit the crisis (dates subject to change, depending on the coronavirus situation):
 - **27 April** - small businesses such as hairdressers and garden centers have reopened
 - **11 May** - mandatory schools, other businesses, restaurants, libraries, museums and sports centers have reopened
 - **8 June** - secondary schools and universities will reopen

BORDER CONTROLS

- New ordinance, directive and circular legislation apply for as long as necessary, but for a maximum of six months
- All borders are closed, except for:
 - Swiss nationals
 - People entering from Liechtenstein
 - Holders of valid residence permits (including legitimization cards), cross-border commuter work permits or online registration confirmations
 - Holders of a guarantee of work/residence permit
 - Holders of visa D (for all purposes) or visa C (for the purpose of attending professional consultations as a health sector specialist or official visit of vital importance) issued by Switzerland
 - Persons in transit or transporting goods
 - Specialists in the health sector who need to enter Switzerland for important reasons
 - Cases of particular necessity and emergencies, such as entry to visit close family members (spouse, registered partner and minor children) regardless of the length or frequency of the visit; entry by the foreign spouse and foreign minor children of a Swiss citizen who wish to return to Switzerland with that Swiss citizen from their present home abroad because of the current situation (evacuation). Note that foreign relatives of Swiss citizens will require a residence permit or an assurance thereof, or a visa issued by Switzerland; EU/EFTA national holders of a working contract duly concluded before 25 March and a lease agreement contract taking effect no later than 1 April



Are rights under the Agreement on Freedom of Movement of Persons restricted?

NC: People benefiting from the AFMP (EU/EFTA nationals) who do not possess an existing residence permit, a cross-border permit or an online registration confirmation can no longer enter Switzerland while restrictions at the borders are in place (unless the situation falls under a case of particular necessity and emergency).



I am a Swiss national and my spouse and children are foreigners. Can we all enter Switzerland?

NC: Yes. If you relocate to Switzerland for a long period of time due to a situation of danger (pandemic situation), you, your spouse and children can all enter Switzerland. Entry authorizations will normally be required.



I used the online registration tool, but did not receive confirmation. Can I still enter Switzerland based on the application?

NC: No. You need to have a validated online registration to be able to enter Switzerland.



I concluded an employment contract on 19 March. Can I enter Switzerland?

NC: No. You also need to have a signed lease valid for a property in Switzerland from 1 April at the latest.



I live in an EU country and have an employment contract to work in another. Can I transit through Switzerland?

NC: Yes. Foreigners can transit through Switzerland to go to their workplace if they possess a valid employment contract.

WORK AND RESIDENCE PERMIT APPLICATIONS (NUANCES APPLY PER JURISDICTION)

- **New first-time permit applications (not submitted by 24 March) for EU/EFTA and Non-EU/EFTA nationals:** currently not possible to submit a new first time application unless it falls under the exceptions (listed in FAQ below). There is no fixed end date; decision as the situation evolves.
 - Effective 11 May, new online registrations for service providers will again be processed provided the service provision is based on a written contract signed before 25 March 2020.
 - Effective 8 June, all applications from all workers who benefit from the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons should be processed again if the epidemiological situation allows it.
- **Ongoing first-time permit applications (already submitted but not yet assessed by 24 March):**
 - Effective 11 May, applications for residence permits, cross-border commuter permits, online registrations for local contract and for service providers for a maximum of 90 days a year submitted before 25 March will be processed again.
 - Effective 11 May, non-EU/EFTA nationals' applications submitted before 19 March that were put on hold will be processed by the authorities.
- **Family reunification:** Effective 11 May, family reunification applications for family members of Swiss citizens is again possible. The same applies for family members of people from EU/EFTA states living in Switzerland.
- **Renewals:** still being processed by the authorities with priority for G permit holders who need to cross the border to work in Switzerland.



I am currently outside Switzerland; can I still apply for a Swiss residence permit or work authorization?

NC: As the authorities have declared a state of emergency, all applications from persons outside Switzerland are suspended until further notice. There are exceptions for applications regarding essential services in specific sectors such as medicines, health services, food, energy, logistics, informatics and communication, including maintenance work. This restriction for first applications applies to everyone and every type of authorization: from third-country nationals to EU/EFTA nationals, from B permits to G permits and online registrations. Effective 8 June, it should be possible to submit application for all workers who benefit from the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons.



My cross-border (G) permit renewal application is pending. What should I do?

NC: Cantonal authorities are still issuing permits and you may receive your permit, albeit slightly delayed. If your renewal is urgent and you need your new G permit you should liaise directly with the cantonal authorities.



I am in Switzerland, however my L, B, C or Ci permit needs to be renewed. What should I do?

NC: You should still apply for the renewal of your permit but you might not receive it until the state of emergency is lifted. Even where the cantonal authorities are still issuing permits, renewals are not being prioritized, except for G permits in specific sectors. Under those circumstances, your stay in Switzerland is permitted and if your previous permit allowed you to work, you may continue working while waiting to receive your new permit.



My permit has almost expired but I have not received any due notice from the authorities. What should I do?

NC: Due to the current situation, the automatic sending of due notices for renewals may be suspended depending on the jurisdiction. If you do not receive any due notice after the restrictions are lifted, you should contact the cantonal migration authorities. In the meantime, your presence in the canton is permitted and if your expired permit allowed you to work, you can still do so. Depending on the jurisdiction, you can apply for a renewal without having received due notice from the authorities.



I signed a Swiss employment contract on 15 April and understood that as of 11 May I can submit my application for my work permit. Is that correct?

NC: No, not all applications will be processed again on 11 May. However, some applications will be processed, such as:

- new online registrations for service providers based on a written contract signed before 25 March 2020
- applications for residence permits, cross-border commuter permits, online registrations for local contract and service providers submitted before 25 March which were put on hold
- third-country nationals' applications submitted before 19 March 2020 which were put on hold

VISAS / VISITORS / EXPIRED PERMITS OR VISAS

Due to the circumstances, the authorities are showing flexibility. Those holding visitor status, or holders of expired visas or permits are permitted to be in Switzerland as long as the restrictions are in force and they are unable to regularize their stay or leave Switzerland.

Depending on nationality, return visas can be requested from the cantonal authorities. Overstay will not be sanctioned by the Swiss authorities.



The Swiss authorities approved my application for a work/residence permit and I received my visa approval after 18 March. Can I collect my visa?

NC: Yes, but only effective 11 May, and only for workers from third countries who already have an authorization to work in Switzerland. They are now permitted to collect their visas and enter the country.



I am a third-country national and I submitted my application for a residence permit in Switzerland and received my visa approval before 18 March. Can I collect my visa?

NC: The Swiss authorities have declared that people who have received their visa approvals prior to the restrictions measures of 18 March could still collect their visas at the relevant Swiss representation. However, due to the current situation we do not recommend that visas are collected, as most international flights are suspended. Requesting an extension of the visa approval may be easier than applying for a new visa.



I have a Swiss residence permit that is currently being renewed but I am outside Switzerland. Can I enter Switzerland?

NC: You may have to apply for a return visa at the relevant Swiss representation.



I am an EU/EFTA national stuck in Switzerland on visitor status and cannot go back to my EU/EFTA country. What should I do?

NC: As an EU/EFTA national, you have the right to stay 90 days within any 180-day period in Switzerland. If you cannot leave Switzerland after that period due to the travel restrictions, your overstay will not be sanctioned and your stay in Switzerland is permitted until the restrictions are lifted.



I am already in Switzerland and I have submitted an application for a work/residence permit, but it is pending. Under which circumstances could I start working?

NC: You can only start working if you are an EU/EFTA national on a local Swiss contract and if your complete application was submitted to the relevant authorities. For EU/EFTA nationals on secondment and third-country nationals, stay in Switzerland is permitted until they receive the decision from the Swiss authorities, but they cannot start working.



I collected my visa to travel to Switzerland but due to international travel restrictions I cannot enter Switzerland until the validity of my visa expires. What should I do?

NC: You may ask your relevant Swiss representation or the relevant cantonal migration authorities depending on the type of visa required, for a replacement visa or an extended visa free of charge under certain conditions. This applies only from 15 March to 30 September under the consideration of the general prohibition of visa issuance.



Can my cross-border employees work from home based on their current employment contract?

NC: If the employee has to work from home due to the circumstances, he is still benefits from the Swiss measures and the country where he resides cannot charge him anything. No notification to the Swiss immigration authorities is required.



Can my cross-border employees exceptionally stay in Switzerland and not cross the border?

NC: Yes, the authorities are allowing cross-border workers to remain in Switzerland.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS



I arrived in Switzerland and took up residence. I would like to notify my arrival at the relevant local office but it is closed. What should I do?

NC: Firstly, check if an alternative is possible, either by mail, telephone or on the website. Otherwise, if you cannot register your arrival, your stay in Switzerland is permitted until you can register when the office reopens.



I received an invitation letter to get my biometric data captured, but the office is closed/ my appointment was cancelled. What should I do?

NC: You can reschedule your appointment if possible using the cantonal website. Otherwise, you must go in person to the cantonal office when it reopens.

We're here to help with any requested Swiss immigration actions. [Contact us](#) to schedule a consultation to learn how we can support your business during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and keep up-to-date with the latest COVID-19 travel and immigration updates on our dedicated online resource – [COVID-19: Latest Travel and Immigration Disruption](#). We also invite you to attend or to download one of our [regional webinars](#), which address changes both globally, regionally and country by country.

This white paper was prepared by Alexandre Blanc, Newland Chase Switzerland Country Manager.

This publication is not intended as a substitute for legal advice. Readers are reminded that immigration laws are subject to change. We are not responsible for any loss arising from reliance on this publication. Please contact Newland Chase should you require any additional clarification or case-specific advice.

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