Permits and the right to stay

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Switzerland

Tax residence is useless without a right of residence. Nationals of EU and EFTA states obtain a B permit under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons on proof of employment, self-employment or sufficient means, and after five years of continuous residence a C settlement permit, provided integration criteria are met.[1] For third-country nationals the position is harder. Employment requires a quota place, which cantons allocate from annual federal contingents. The employer must also show that no Swiss or EU/EFTA candidate could fill the position, a test that start-ups with specialist blockchain roles can often meet but should not assume.[2] Settlement normally follows after ten years, with five years for nationals of states with which Switzerland has settlement agreements, including the United States and Canada.[3]

Two routes matter for the founder who does not want a quota place. The first is admission without gainful employment for persons over 55 with close ties to Switzerland and sufficient means, which is tailored to retirees but fits a founder who has exited and is taking the lump-sum.[4] The second is the cantonal discretion to admit a person in the important public interest, which cantons including Zug have used to admit wealthy third-country nationals who commit to substantial tax

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contributions, in practice coupled with expenditure-based taxation.[5] Neither route permits work in Switzerland, which aligns with the lump-sum prohibition. A third-country founder who intends to work needs the quota place, or an EU/EFTA passport, or a Swiss or EU spouse.

Singapore

Singapore's system is salary-based and employer-sponsored. The Employment Pass requires a fixed monthly salary of at least S$ 5,600 for a 23-year-old applicant, rising with age to S$ 10,700 at 45. In the financial services sector the thresholds are S$ 6,200 to S$ 11,800. Applicants must also score 40 points under the COMPASS framework unless the salary reaches S$ 22,500 a month.[6] A founder who establishes a Singapore company can sponsor their own pass, provided the company is incorporated, has a registered office and can show that the salary is paid. The Overseas Networks & Expertise Pass is the premium route for senior founders. It requires a fixed monthly salary of at least S$ 30,000 from one employer in the twelve months before application, or a Singapore offer at that level from an established company. The holder may work for several employers and run their own venture for five years at a time.[7] The EntrePass serves early-stage founders backed by recognised venture capital or holding intellectual property. Permanent residence follows after some years of pass-holding or through the Global Investor Programme. That programme requires a business investment of S$ 10 million or more, or a family-office commitment of S$ 200 million in assets under management of which S$ 50 million must be deployed in specified Singapore investments.[8]

The Singapore permit position is in one respect easier and in another harder than the Swiss one. It is easier because there are no quotas and the test is objective: pay the salary, pass COMPASS, obtain the pass. It is harder because the pass is tied to employment, so a founder who sells the business and wishes to stay as a passive investor must either hold permanent residence by then or find a qualifying employer. The MAS and MOM are also alert to "shell" sponsorships in which a company exists only to hold its founder's pass. The COMPASS points for a company with no local employees are low.

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Notes

1. Agreement between the Swiss Confederation and the European Community and its Member States on the Free Movement of Persons of 21 June 1999, SR 0.142.112.681, Annex I, Arts 6, 12 and 24; Foreign Nationals and Integration Act of 16 December 2005 (FNIA; AIG), SR 142.20, Art. 34 and Art. 58a (integration criteria). ↩
2. FNIA, SR 142.20, Arts 18 to 23 (admission for gainful employment; quotas under Art. 20; priority of domestic workers under Art. 21; qualifications under Art. 23). ↩
3. FNIA, SR 142.20, Art. 34 paras 2 and 4; Federal Council Ordinance on Admission, Period of Stay and Employment of 24 October 2007 (ASEO; VZAE), SR 142.201, Art. 62. ↩
4. FNIA, SR 142.20, Art. 28; ASEO, SR 142.201, Art. 25. ↩
5. FNIA, SR 142.20, Art. 30 para. 1 lit. b; ASEO, SR 142.201, Art. 32 (important public interests, including significant cantonal fiscal interests). ↩
6. Ministry of Manpower, "Eligibility for Employment Pass", as updated 28 April 2026 (thresholds for applications before 1 January 2027; higher thresholds of S$ 6,000 and S$ 6,600 announced for applications from 1 January 2027). ↩
7. Ministry of Manpower, "Eligibility for Overseas Networks & Expertise Pass" (S$ 30,000 fixed monthly salary; established company with market capitalisation of at least US$ 500 million or annual revenue of at least US$ 200 million; five-year validity; renewal conditions). ↩
8. Economic Development Board, Global Investor Programme, conditions as revised 15 March 2023 (investment options A, B and C and the S$ 200 million family office option). ↩

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