

Immigration

This fact sheet provides you with an overview of the topic of immigration before and during vocational education and training. You will learn, in a condensed form how to proceed if you want to train a migrated person.



Definition of immigration

Immigration means the movement of people to and from countries. Migrants have not always lived in the same country. As a result, they often speak different languages and bring with them different skills, (professional) experience, academic and cultural backgrounds and migration stories.

Migrants are part of the domestic qualified workforce pool

Switzerland is home to young people and (young) adults who, for example, have immigrated from EU/EFTA or third countries in the course of family reunification. Others have fled and have been recognised as refugees in Switzerland, are provisionally admitted or have received protection status S. All of these people are part of the domestic labour force pool. Many of these (predominantly young) people do not yet have a professional qualification.

By training a person from this group, you are helping to improve their career prospects and making the most of the **pool** of domestic labour and qualified workers. Certain legal requirements have to be observed depending on the residence status of these persons. This also applies if you want to train people who live in a border area of Switzerland.

[Please refer to the table on page 3.](#)

Vocational education and training is crucial for the integration of migrants

Host companies can play an important role in integration by giving foreign young people and young adults living in Switzerland the **same opportunities** as Swiss young people. They deliberately include not only language skills and academic achievements in the decision-making process, but also their **motivation** and **potentials**. For host companies and VET trainers, it is important to know that young people from abroad can be among the good or even the best learners and are highly motivated to do a good job. This also applies to late immigrant young people and young adults who only came to Switzerland after completing their compulsory schooling. They first have to learn the local language and sometimes catch up on school material (basic skills); this usually means that they can only start an apprenticeship when they come of age. For this reason, host companies should also offer apprenticeships to adults with an immigration background.

Foreign young people and young adults who have sufficient basic skills and potential can start an apprenticeship straight away. Low-threshold solutions are two-year VET programmes for the Federal VET Certificate (FVC). If language barriers prevent a direct entry into more challenging paths, foreign-language learners can also enter vocational education and training via the Integration Pre-Apprenticeship Programme (INVOL) and/or shorter training courses.

Integration Pre-Apprenticeship Programme (INVOL)

To enable refugees and late-stage immigrants to prepare for an apprenticeship, the Integration Pre-Apprenticeship Programme (INVOL) was launched in 2018 and became a regular offer in 2024. The INVOL lasts **one year** and has a **dual** structure. This means that the participants usually work three days a week in a company and go to school for two days. In the process, they learn the necessary **basic skills** as well as the linguistic and **technical principles** in an occupational field before entering vocational education and training (Federal VET Certificate or Federal VET Diploma).

What can you do as a VET trainer?

Even during the application process, as a VET trainer, you can help make sure that foreign young people and young adults are given the **same opportunities to get them started**. Once you have chosen a migrant, it is important that they receive the same support as everyone else and are given any additional help they need, such as a language course or a remedial course at a VET school. If you are unfamiliar with the culture of the country from which the learner comes, it makes sense to find out about the country and its people as well as its culture and religion, or to ask the learner to tell you about them.

Misunderstandings can arise if different cultures collide. These can be addressed and avoided through mutual **interest** and **respect**.

Positive impact on the host company

A company that champions migrants makes an **important contribution** to the integration of young people from abroad and also supports the Federal Council's strategy to strengthen the promotion of the domestic labour force pool. As a rule, these young people are highly motivated once they have found an apprenticeship.

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Legal situation

In Switzerland, starting an apprenticeship is considered to be taking up gainful employment. Depending on the foreign national's identity card category, they can either take up gainful employment without any further ado; in other cases, however, **the beginning of employment** has to be reported, or may even be **subject to approval**. If you have any questions or are uncertain about the legal provisions and administrative processes, we recommend that you contact the responsible cantonal labour market or migration authority.

Before concluding an apprenticeship contract, the host company must ask the relevant offices about any necessary **notifications** or **approvals** and then take the necessary steps.

[Please refer to the table on page 3.](#)

The conclusion of an apprenticeship contract (or an INVOL contract) is possible with the following residence permits – or under certain circumstances:

Residence permit	Prerequisites Conclusion of apprenticeship or INVOL contract
C permit – settlement permit (EU/EFTA and third countries)	- Apprenticeship contract: not subject to registration and/or approval - INVOL contract: not subject to registration and/or approval
B permit – (EU/EFTA)	- Apprenticeship contract: not subject to registration and/or approval - INVOL contract: not subject to registration and/or approval
B permit – (third-country nationals)	- Apprenticeship contract: not subject to registration and/or approval - INVOL contract: not subject to registration and/or approval
B permit – (recognised refugees)	- Apprenticeship contract: Duty to report - INVOL contract: not subject to registration and/or approval
F permit – (provisionally admitted persons, with or without refugee status)	- Apprenticeship contract: Duty to report - INVOL contract: not subject to registration and/or approval
S permit – (persons in need of protection)	- Apprenticeship contract: Duty to report - INVOL contract: not subject to registration and/or approval
L permit – Short-term residence permit (EU/EFTA)	- Apprenticeship contract: not subject to registration and/or approval - INVOL contract: Persons with an L permit are generally not in the INVOL target group
G permit – * Cross-border commuter permit (EU/EFTA)	- Apprenticeship contract: not subject to registration and/or approval - INVOL contract: Persons with a G permit are generally not in the INVOL target group
N permit – (asylum seekers)	- Apprenticeship contract: requirement of authorisation - INVOL contract: Persons in the asylum procedure (N permit) are generally not in the INVOL target group
Undocumented	- Apprenticeship contract: requirement of authorisation - INVOL contract: Undocumented foreigners are generally not in the INVOL target group

* Cross-border commuters who have an apprenticeship contract receive a cross-border commuter permit for the duration of their employment.

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General information on the free movement of persons

Under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFM) between Switzerland and the EU, nationals of EU/EFTA member states have the right to enter and reside in Switzerland and to take up a job in Switzerland – provided that the conditions set out in the agreement are met. The same applies in principle to the members of their family from third countries.

Third countries are states that are **not contracting parties** or **member states** of the European Union or the European Economic Area.

Several conditions have to be met before nationals outside the scope of the AFM (third-country nationals who are not family members of EU/EFTA nationals) can be employed:

- Quota
- National and EU/EFTA priority
- Salary and employment conditions
- Personal requirements

The legal provisions can be found in the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (FNIA) and in the Ordinance on Admission, Period of Stay and Employment (ASEO).

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Legal basis

FNIA (Federal Act of 16 December 2005 on Foreign Nationals and Integration, SR 142.20)

AFMP (Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons, in force since 1 June 2002, between the EC and its Member States, of the one part, and Switzerland, of the other part, SR 0.142.112.681)

OFMP (Ordinance on the Free Movement of Persons, SR 142.203)

OFMP directives (Directives and explanations of the State Secretariat for Migration on the Ordinance on the Free Movement of Persons.)

VZAE, The legal regulations for third-country nationals – persons from non-EU countries – can be found in the Federal Council Ordinance (Ordinance of 24 October 2007 on Admission, Period of Stay and Employment, SR 142.201)

AsylA (Asylum Act of 26 June 1998, SR 142.31)

(Laws can be accessed with SR numbers at: → fedlex.admin.ch)

Wichtige Links

→ vocationaleducation.ch/addresses

List of cantonal VET offices. Point of contact for initial information and referral to specialist units.

→ vocationaleducation.ch/glossary

All important VET terms are described in short and informative texts.

→ iiz.ch

Website of Interinstitutional Cooperation IIC on Educational Integration

→ kiknet-sem.org

SEM website with information and teaching material for schools

→ rechte-der-lernenden.ch

Youth Commission of the Swiss Trade Union Federation: “I know my rights”

→ sem.admin.ch

State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)

Address list of cantonal migration offices, employment offices and integration delegates

Overview of the various foreign national identity cards, the work permits associated with them and provisions for new arrivals to Switzerland. Information for the attention of host companies and for the attention of young people and young adults with protection status p.

→ sem.admin.ch/invol

State Secretariat for Migration – Federal Integration Pre-Apprenticeship Programme (INVOL)

→ zukunftsattherkunft.ch

Website with lots of tips for the fair selection of apprentices.

Further literature

→ ehb.swiss

Sonja Engelage, Migration und Berufsbildung in der Schweiz, Zurich, 2018 Seismo Verlag

→ terra-cognita.ch

Federal Commission on Migration (FCM), Terra cognita, Schweizer Zeitschrift zu Integration und Migration

Migration – Prepared in collaboration with the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) → sem.admin.ch

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This and other fact sheets can be found at:

→ vocationaleducation.ch/factsheets
