



Free movement of persons: EU citizens in Switzerland

For decades, Switzerland has been dependent on foreign workers which it recruited above all in Europe (e.g. Italy, Spain or Portugal). Since 2002, it has been easier for companies in Switzerland to employ EU citizens.

The free movement of persons gives employees from the EU the fundamental right to take up residence in Switzerland. A precondition is that they have an employment contract, are self-employed or financially secure and have comprehensive health insurance. If they are gainfully employed, they are given a residence permit. The wage and employment conditions must, however, be in line with Swiss standards. In certain circumstances, the free movement of persons also applies for pensioners and students, not, however, for the unemployed. These can only enter Switzerland for a limited period of maximum six months to look for employment.

Full freedom of movement has been effective with the 15 old EU member states as well as with Cyprus and Malta since 1 June 2007. Free movement of persons from the remaining EU member states is being introduced in stages. During the first few years, the number of residence permits remains limited (quotas); preference is given to Swiss employees, and the

wage and employment conditions are checked in advance. As part of a second phase, the restrictions are lifted, though quotas can be reintroduced if necessary. Full freedom of movement for persons does not apply until the third stage.

An important factor for companies is the ability to recruit sufficient and suitable personnel quickly during growth phases. Today, the availability of labour is a central factor when deciding on locations. Many sectors are dependent on foreign workers; hospitals and hotels could no longer function without them. The free movement of persons provides access to a wide labour market. This reduces pressure to transfer production abroad, while securing and creating jobs in Switzerland.

The wage and employment conditions of both Swiss and foreign workers are monitored through on-site checks. These have shown that Swiss wage and employment conditions are complied with in the vast majority of cases. Certain risk sectors show a higher number of contraventions. Consequently, the checks are constantly being improved and used in a more targeted manner. If wage dumping is detected, it can result in fines or, in certain circumstances, in the introduction of binding minimum standards.

Experience 2002–2008

In line with demand, many highly to very highly qualified and internationally sought-after employees have immigrated to Switzerland. Since the introduction of full freedom of movement for the 15 “old” EU countries such as Germany, France or the United Kingdom on 1 June 2007, considerably more people from these countries have taken up residence in Switzerland. Immigration from the “new” EU member states such as Poland or Hungary has been moderate and the quotas for residence permits have not been fully used. Free movement of persons from Bulgaria and Romania has only been introduced in stages since 2009.

AGREEMENTS

**Extension to the states joining in 2004:**

Date of signing: 26 October 2004

Approval by the electorate: 25 September 2005

Date effective: 1 April 2006

Extension to Romania and Bulgaria:

Date of signing: 27 May 2008

Approval by the electorate: 8 February 2009

Date effective: 1 June 2009

“ 32 surgical nurses and technical surgical specialists work in our operating rooms; of these 11 are Swiss. Of the 12 support staff, four are Swiss. I have been working here for 20 years and there has always been a need to recruit from abroad. So it is nothing new. As a rule, staff from neighbouring countries can begin work immediately, while those from more distant EU countries frequently experience language problems to start with. The Agreement on the free movement of persons with the EU has lowered administrative barriers and has enabled women to bring their families to Switzerland. In the past, this was not possible and frequently led to serious familial problems. In addition, we no longer have to deal with special permits. The fact is: Without foreigners, we would not be able to fulfil our task of caring for our patients. ”

Brigitte Dubach, Head of Nursing (Operating Rooms)

