Living & Working in Switzerland
Why make the move?

Switzerland is a fantastic place to live and work and is often referred to as the ‘Heart of Europe’. Bordering with Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Liechtenstein, this is a truly international environment that puts you in prime position for weekends away to neighbouring European cities. In terms of your career, this is an excellent location given the variety and complexity of the work available. Whether you are working for a professional services organisation or within a multinationals corporate (EMEA) HQ, Switzerland offers a great opportunity.

Don’t be put off if you do not speak French or German; English is the language in which business is conducted. Once you are there, you could try to broaden your skill set by picking up other European languages. In addition to German and French this also includes Italian.

Lifestyle

Working in Switzerland offers you the opportunity to strike a good work-life balance, allowing you to make the most of everything that Swiss life has to offer. Candidates looking to relocate to Switzerland are typically professionals with international experience looking to take advantage of the lucrative salaries and other benefits on offer, or simply for a better quality of life for them and their family.

Switzerland is a great choice for those who love the outdoors; particularly those who enjoy sailing, hiking, fishing or swimming. For those who prefer to relax indoors there are a great deal of cafés and restaurants to keep you entertained with some of the larger Cities offering outstanding local culinary experiences.
Working in Switzerland

Most of the international corporations and professional services firms are located in and around Zurich and Geneva. However, other areas like Basel, Zug and Lausanne have also attracted many large household brands. These cities are home to important branches or European headquarters for many FTSE companies, Fortune 500’s, multinationals, banking and financial services clients. The Big Four accounting firms and smaller tax boutiques also have a strong presence in these cities.

An important factor to consider when relocating to Switzerland is the visa and work permit you will require. In recent years, the Swiss government has implemented tighter controls on the distribution of work permits. However, candidates with a European passport who are offered positions will normally be able to secure a work permit quite easily.

Working in Switzerland will provide you with invaluable international experience that will boost your résumé, helping to open doors to other overseas opportunities further down the line.

Switzerland also offers low personal income tax rates in comparison to other European jurisdictions, making it a very attractive destination for professionals. As explained overleaf Switzerland is made up by several cantons, with each one having its own independent tax rate.
Cantons of Switzerland

Switzerland is divided into 26 cantons. There are German and French-speaking cantons, one Italian speaking canton and cantons in which both German and French are spoken. The fourth national language spoken in Switzerland is Romansh, which descends from Vulgar Latin, the spoken language of the Roman Empire. Romansh is only spoken by roughly 1% of the population.

The cantons vary greatly in size and character. The canton of Geneva is virtually made up of just one city. Some others, like Uri, consist almost entirely of mountains and valleys. The cantons also vary greatly in population density. Basel-Town, with its 37 km² (14 square miles) has almost as many inhabitants (c185,000) as the largest canton, Graubünden, whose 200,000 inhabitants are spread across 7,105 km² (2,743 square miles) and 150 valleys. The canton of Zurich has almost 1.5 million inhabitants, while the entire population of some other cantons are literally a few thousand people. Appenzell Inner-Rhodes, for example has a total of 15,688 inhabitants.
Geneva

Geneva is the capital of the canton and is Switzerland’s second largest city. It lies in the south-west, near the border of France and at the western end of Lake Geneva, where the Rhone flows out of the lake.

A number of international organisations and multinationals have their headquarters in Geneva. These include the European headquarters of the UN, the International Olympic Committee, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the UN High Commission for Refugees, CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research alongside multinationals General Mills, Nestle, Richemont and Japan Tobacco International.

Zurich

Located in the North West, Zurich is the most populated city in Switzerland with around 400,000 people. The Mercer Survey named Zurich as the city with the highest standard of living for seven years in succession (2001–2008). In 2009, 2010 and 2011 Zurich was rated 2nd, behind Vienna.

Zurich is the country’s most important economic centre, responsible for a fifth of all national income. In addition to offering a high standard of living, the city boasts an excellent public transport system and a prominent educational centre.

Many major financial institutions and big corporates house their headquarters within Zurich. Companies that can be found here, include UBS, Swiss Re, Hyatt, FIFA and Credit Suisse. The Swiss stock exchange is also located in central Zürich and is currently the 6th largest stock exchange market in the world. Zurich is also globally recognised as the major offshore banking city of the world.
Basel

Basel is Switzerland's third most populous city with approximately 166,000 inhabitants. It is among the most important cultural centres in the country, with people from 150 different nationalities living in the city. Basel is located at the border of both France and Germany and comprises of a large number of theatres and museums. The city boasts a strong sense of internationalism and is perceived as very liberal.

Basel functions as a major industrial centre for the chemical and pharmaceutical industry and is one of the most successful economic regions in the world. The city is home to big companies such as Novartis, Syngenta, Roche, Huntsman and Clariant to name just a few.
The Legal Market

The legal market in Switzerland is relatively unique when compared to other countries in Europe. Whilst most other European countries are mainly locally focused and offer opportunities predominantly for locally qualified lawyers or candidates who are fluent in the local language, the Swiss market is very different and offers plenty of interesting opportunities for lawyers from across Europe. Both the language barrier and the lack of a local qualification are in no way an obstacle. These opportunities can mainly be found in the legal departments of international companies or organisations and to a lesser extent in law firms. Whilst Switzerland is home to the headquarters of international companies from all over the world, the law firm market is still mainly dominated by Swiss law firms who are usually interested in local Swiss lawyers. This dominance is however slowly changing.

From a professionals perspective one of the key advantages for a UK lawyer when moving to a Swiss based multinational’s legal department is the breadth and diversity of work that they will undertake. In-house legal teams in Switzerland are, for the most part, fairly small, and as a consequence the workload offered is much broader.

Law Firms

The key players in the market are Swiss firms with larger and well rounded practices, such as Bar & Karrer, Homburger, Schellenberg Wittmer, Lenz & Staehelin, Pestalozzi, Niederer Kraft & Frey and Froriep Renggli.

Swiss law firms are quite stable and mainly looking for Swiss qualified lawyers to advise on Swiss legal issues. However, there is an increasing number of international firms entering the Swiss market, such as Baker & McKenzie, Akin Gump, Hogan Lovells, Holman Fenwick and King & Spalding which offer greater opportunities for foreign qualified lawyers, especially in the areas of litigation, arbitration, energy and commodities.
In-House

Switzerland is a relatively small country which has undergone significant growth over the last few years. This growth has attracted a range of multinationals who have now established offices in Switzerland with the attractive tax regime within Switzerland driving much of this growth. Switzerland itself also boasts many world leading corporates such as UBS, Credit Suisse, Zurich Financial Services and Swiss Re. In addition FMCG and pharmaceutical companies such as Nestle, General Mills, Novartis and Roche contribute considerably to the economy.

Switzerland has developed into a very attractive base for international companies and organisations. Over the last few years leading international companies such as Amgen, Google, IBM, JTI, Medtronic, ebay, Procter & Gamble and Kraft Food have moved their global or regional headquarters to Switzerland. Company relocations can often result in challenges with employee retention or attraction but when an organisation relocates part of its operation to Switzerland, this is rarely an issue.

These domestic and international corporates are offering exciting opportunities for lawyers from all over Europe. With the business language in the main being English, other languages like German or French are a plus but not always a pre-requisite. A role based in the headquarters of an international corporation very often implies international work and excellent career opportunities.
Tax

The Swiss tax system is structured in three layers; the federal, cantonal and communal (or city) tax, with the majority of the tax sum coming from the cantonal taxes. The amount of tax you pay therefore also depends to a big part on the canton and city in which you live in.

In recent high-profile and well publicised reports, large organisations have been criticised for operating what to many appears to be ‘smoke screen’ or ‘letterbox’ addresses in return for generous tax breaks for the individual employees and organisation. The truth is that while Switzerland does indeed offer very attractive tax rates to inhabitants, the extent of these schemes differ greatly and careful consideration needs to be given to points such as the nationality of the individual, the country of registration of the company and the location of the organisation - i.e. what canton the company is located in.

For a more detailed discussion around Swiss tax rules and implications please speak to one of the world’s leading accountancy firms, BDO. In the first instance please contact:

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Salaries & Benefits

The cost of living in Switzerland is among the highest in the world, however the employees salary reflects this. Salaries in Switzerland are paid once per month and are often based on a 13-month system. That means an annual salary is paid out in 13 installments - one per month until the end of the year when a worker receives two installments.

There are certain deductions taken from an employee at source, for example pension provision and other insurances. However unlike other countries, health insurance is not only mandatory but handled seperately and paid privately. Everyone has the right to choose their own provider and select their private health insurance, with contributions dependent on age and location. Some companies subsidise health insurance contribution for their employees.

The key skill sets that tend to be recruited for in Switzerland are: commercial, corporate, IP, pharmaceutical, energy, IT, compliance and data protection. In addition the banks will look for banking, capital markets and derivatives lawyers. Clearly this list is not exhaustive and there will from time to time be demand for other areas of law.

A guide for legal salaries, regardless of sectors and basing it on the aforementioned areas would be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PQE</th>
<th>Average Salary - CHF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-4 years</td>
<td>120,000 - 150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 years</td>
<td>140,000 - 170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8 years</td>
<td>160,000 - 200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8+ years</td>
<td>180,000+</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The above is an approximate guide only and salaries can vary greatly depending on the company, the role and location. Typically salaries tend to be slightly higher in the Geneva canton compared to Zurich. In addition to base salaries there will also normally be a bonus on top that can of course vary depending upon the company and level of position. A car or car allowance however is not that common in Switzerland and only really applicable to more senior positions.

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Housing & Schooling

Housing
The Swiss housing market is difficult given the limited supply of housing in a small country but below offers a range of opportunities for you to consider.

Renting
The first option available to you is to try and find flats yourself through resources available to the public. You will find listings in the local or regional newspapers but competition for flats is so high that properties are rented within a short amount of time, meaning you will have to react quickly. There are some websites available such as www.homegate.ch or www.immostreet.ch but due to the high demand properties may not always be listed online. Therefore it is advisable to use the help of a real estate or relocation agency. Agents often have access to properties before they become available to the public market. Some companies offer temporary housing for a short period of time when you arrive and can put you in touch with agents who help you with the search.

Purchasing
Buying a property in Switzerland is a costly exercise and most lawyers who relocate there will not purchase a house/flat but will rent instead. It takes time to purchase property and this will also affect the tax situation of the purchaser. Normally, a real estate agent will be able to provide advice with respect to fees and taxes that are involved with a purchase of a property in Switzerland.

Schooling
The public education system in Switzerland has a reputation for high quality and tough standards. You will be able to choose between public and private schooling and will find American, British, German and French schools all over Switzerland. The costs can vary greatly and some of the schools may have waiting lists.

Health Insurance
Everyone arriving in Switzerland who is planning on staying has to organise their own health insurance privately. It is mandatory for all Swiss residents and paid privately, although some employers subsidise the costs or part of it.

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Contact a member of the team

For all positions based in Switzerland, Taylor Root works exclusively with APC International who are our Swiss based licensed partner. All selected applications will be forwarded by Taylor Root to APC International for processing according to Swiss law.

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