



# GMS Flash Alert

Immigration Edition

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## Switzerland – COVID-19: Closing Borders, Limiting Entry and Visa Issuance FAQs

As an additional step in the fight against COVID-19, Switzerland closed around 130 border crossing points on Tuesday, 17 March 2020, and is now channeling entry only via designated border crossing points.<sup>1</sup>

### WHY THIS MATTERS

Switzerland, like many other countries, is limiting cross-border travel into the country with significant impact for the mobility of a company's international workforce. The closing – for the most part – of Switzerland's borders and other travel, entry-exit, and visa handling matters that have been announced, will impact companies with assignee populations in terms of existing and future assignments inbound to Switzerland or outbound from Switzerland. Employees and their families who may have received offers for an international assignment to Switzerland may need to postpone the commencement of the assignment – or may indeed be already there but on limited term visas. This could cause some anxiety, stress, and inconvenience, especially where plans for relocation are already underway or where they are already in Switzerland on temporary visas.

The changes will require employers to re-consider their personnel and work arrangements due to travel limitations and work permit restrictions.

### Travel/Border Crossing Restrictions, and Limitations on Visa Services

#### Travel Restrictions for Italy, France, Germany, Austria, and Spain

Only Swiss citizens and any persons who have to travel to Switzerland for professional reasons or who otherwise have to enter the country for exceptionally urgent and necessary reasons are permitted to enter by air or land if they are coming from a non-European Union (EU) country or from these five Schengen countries: Italy, France, Germany, Austria,

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and Spain. Even though Liechtenstein borders Switzerland, entry from the country is not yet restricted as Liechtenstein and Switzerland share the same customs region.

Transit and transportation of goods are still permitted.

## **No Entry Visas to Be Issued for Next Three Months**

With a few exceptions, entry at the Schengen external borders is strictly prohibited.<sup>2</sup> Switzerland is thus following the practice of the other Schengen countries. This essentially means that Switzerland will no longer issue Schengen visas for 90 days or until further notice.

National visas (i.e., visas for stays of more than 90 days) for nationals subject to visa requirements are also only to be issued in exceptional cases. Exceptions relate to family members of Swiss citizens who are subject to a visa and have been granted permission for a Swiss residence permit, as well as specialists from the health sector.

## **Q&A – What Does It Mean for You?**

### **Can people still enter Switzerland for work purposes?**

Yes. Although most companies have ordered employees to work from home, some companies may still require their employees to be present (health sector, production of goods, etc.). If you hold a valid work permit for Switzerland, you are still permitted to enter for work reasons. It is recommended that your employer issue a letter confirming the necessity of your travel to your work-place.

### **Are visits to family and friends in Switzerland allowed?**

It depends. If you are entering from one of the above-mentioned five countries or from a non-EU country, your entry to Switzerland will most likely be denied for the time being.

If you require a Schengen visa to enter Switzerland, no Schengen visas will be issued for the next three months.

If the points above do not apply, entry may be permitted for now. However, restrictions can be extended at any time.

In general, any non-essential travel should be avoided as new travel restrictions can be enacted anytime and channeling of entry at certain border points can lead to big delays.

### **Can employees with a valid visa authorisation letter obtain an entry visa?**

No. The Federal Council is suspending the issuance of Schengen visas and national visas for third-country nationals for an initial period of three months. Employees – even if their application may be approved by the Swiss authorities – will not receive the required visa for themselves and their family members. As a result, they may not take up work in Switzerland (initially) for the next three months. Visa authorisations are valid for three months. This deadline can be extended by another three months to avoid the authorisation becoming expired once the travel restrictions have been suspended.

### **Can family members of Swiss citizens obtain an entry visa?**

Yes. People married to a Swiss citizen who have a residence permit in Switzerland are still allowed to enter. In case you need an entry visa, the responsible Swiss embassy will issue one.

## Can Swiss citizens claim support for repatriation from the government?

It depends. Since 16 March 2020, the Federal Council has been recommending Swiss travellers abroad return to their place of residence as long as this is still possible. Otherwise they risk getting stuck abroad. By law, Swiss citizens cannot claim an organised repatriation from a crisis area or in a crisis situation. All travellers are responsible for their own return home.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) supports travel agencies and airlines when it comes to obtaining landing permits or extending deadlines. If required – as anticipated for some destinations – Switzerland will organise return trips.<sup>3</sup> That is possible, but complex. In addition, the funds are limited.

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## KPMG NOTE

Companies should consider the wider implications for any foreign employees who may over-stay due to difficulties of returning home. There can be consequences around immigration, personal tax, and permanent establishment risk.

The KPMG Immigration Team in Switzerland will endeavour to update you regularly on the rapidly evolving situation when important developments occur.<sup>4</sup>

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## FOOTNOTES:

1 For a list of border crossing points that are closed, [click here](#).

2 On travel restrictions for individuals from outside the Schengen Area, [click here](#).

3 For more information on Swiss travellers who are still abroad, see “Swiss travellers abroad should register on the ‘Travel Admin App’”, [click here](#).

4 For information on the Swiss federal government’s steps to address the COVID-19 situation, see: in [French](#); in [German](#); in [Italian](#); in [Romansch](#).

Additionally, for information on measures taken by the Swiss federal government to combat COVID-19, see the U.S. Embassy in Switzerland [webpage](#).

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## Contact us

For additional information or assistance, please contact your local GMS or People Services professional\* or the following professional with the KPMG International member firm in Switzerland:



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\* Please note that KPMG LLP (U.S.) does not provide immigration services. However, KPMG Law LLP in Canada can assist clients with U.S. immigration matters.

**The information contained in this newsletter was submitted by the KPMG International member firm in Switzerland.**

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