

# Maleachi Bühringer: What Switzerland does right

## 1 Introduction

Switzerland is located in the heart of Europe. Its land area comprises 41,000 km<sup>2</sup>, a size comparable to Belgium or the Netherlands. Switzerland has 8.1 million inhabitants who mainly live in the agglomerations of Zurich, Basel, Bern, Lausanne and Geneva. The population has grown by almost one million since the year 2000, and this growth has been fed almost entirely by immigration. Today about 25% of the people living in Switzerland do not have a Swiss passport. In the bigger cities, foreigners make up between 30-40% of the population. Consequently Switzerland is one of the most international countries in the world with a share of foreigners twice as high as, for example, Germany or France and close to city-states like Singapore, Hong Kong or Monaco. Nevertheless or maybe because of that it is one of the most successful countries in the world with a very high GDP per capita, a very low unemployment rate of only 3% and few social tensions.



## 2 Immigration procedures and administrative issues

Not being an EU member state, Switzerland has slightly different immigration policies from the rest of Europe. One has to distinguish between immigrants having an EU passport and those from third countries. For EU citizens, immigration is easy and straightforward if you have found a permanent job in Switzerland or if you can prove that you are financially independent. This procedure is based on the “Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons” with the EU which came into force on June 1, 2002. This agreement allows citizens from most EU countries to freely live and work in Switzerland if they have a job (there are quotas for people from the newer EU countries such as Romania and Bulgaria). This is the agreement that was defeated in a referendum in 2014, forcing the Swiss government to introduce more stringent restrictions within the next three years.

If you don't have an EU passport, things are much more difficult. Your employer has to prove to the authorities that he has not been able to fill a vacant position with a suitable candidate from Switzerland or an EU member state and therefore has no choice but to hire you. Or else you could marry a Swiss citizen which would allow you to receive a permit to stay. In either case, you can apply for a Swiss passport after having lived for 12 years in Switzerland.

## 3 Conclusion

So what is Switzerland doing right? First of all, Switzerland is a country that is highly attractive to foreigners due to a high standard of living, good career opportunities and an excellent work environment: safety, a clean environment, many international companies, decent salaries and low taxes just to name a few of the advantages. Secondly, the Swiss government has understood that this small country needs immigration to fuel its companies, universities and health care institutions. Accordingly they put a lot of effort into the administration of immigration - meaning that they have worked out clear rules and strategies, easy procedures and well-run immigration bureaus. Finally, because of the country's high attractiveness and good administration, Swiss authorities are able to steer and control their flows of immigration quite well. Permits to work and stay are predominantly given to skilled people from Western Europe. In this way the Swiss ensure that they get enough skilled labour but avoid immigrants who culturally do not fit into their free and modern Western society.