

# Visa and Residence Permit - Guidelines for International Master's (MSc) Degree Students

Have you been admitted to a Master's (MSc) degree programme at ETH Zurich? The below guidelines will help you to complete the immigration formalities. Please follow them carefully.

## 1. Do you need a visa?

The first step is to find out whether you need a visa to enter Switzerland. Citizens of the following EU or EFTA countries and nationals of *Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and UK (even after 1.1.2021)* are exempted from the visa obligation:<sup>1</sup>

**EU countries:** *Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden*

**EFTA countries:** *Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway*

Nationals of all other countries must apply for a visa at the Swiss embassy or consulate responsible for their place of domicile.<sup>2</sup> If you are unsure whether or not you need a visa, please ask at the local Swiss representation office.

**Please note** that it normally takes 6-12 weeks to obtain a visa.

### Schengen visas from other states:

Although Switzerland has signed the Schengen/Dublin agreement, a Schengen visa from another state continues to entitle the holder only to enter and travel through Switzerland, **not** to take up residence. The latter requires a national "D" visa.

## 2. Procedure for students with no visa obligation

If you are a national of an EU or EFTA country, you do not need to obtain a visa before entering Switzerland. However, you are obliged to register and apply for a residence permit at the Residents' Registration Office after arrival (**see box on page 2**).

Nationals of *Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore* do not require visas to enter Switzerland. However, to obtain a residence permit they must submit the same documents (except the visa application form) as students who are subject to a visa obligation. The difference is that they can hand in these documents at the Resident's Registration Office after arrival and will then directly get their residence permit.

<sup>1</sup> This list is not complete, and entry requirements can change at any time. For the latest information, please see [https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/publiservice/weisungen-kreisschreiben/visa/liste1\\_staatsangehoerigkeit.html](https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/publiservice/weisungen-kreisschreiben/visa/liste1_staatsangehoerigkeit.html)

<sup>2</sup> A list with the addresses of all Swiss representations abroad can be found at <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/representations-and-travel-advice.html>. Please note that visa applications must be submitted to an embassy or a consulate general (not a consulate).

## Applying for your residence permit (EU/EFTA citizens):

You are obliged to apply for your residence permit at the Residents' Registration Office<sup>3</sup> in charge of your place of domicile **within 14 days of arrival**.

Bring along a copy of your ETH Zurich matriculation confirmation, your passport and proof of sufficient financial means (for EU and EFTA citizens this is normally only a written declaration of support by a family member or a written guarantee from a Swiss resident that living expenses during the stay in Switzerland will be covered; citizens of Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore require the same financial proof as students with visa obligation).

A few weeks after you have submitted your documents you will receive an invitation to pick up your residence permit. The permit is usually valid for one year, but it can be extended if your studies take longer. Please note that you must submit updated proof of sufficient financial means for each extension.

## 3. Procedure for students with visa obligation

Your visa application must be accompanied by **all** the documents in the list below. This list was prepared by ETH in cooperation with the Canton of Zurich Migration Office and meets official requirements. Please note that if any document is missing this may generate a delay of several weeks. If the Swiss representation office where you live requests any additional documents, enclose these too.

To study, you require a national "D" visa. This visa is valid for 3 months only and permits you to enter Switzerland once. After entry you will receive a residence permit for Switzerland, which also allows you to travel within the Schengen area for up to three months in every half-year.

Please also consult the **visa FAQ's** on the ETH website: <https://www.ethz.ch/en/studies/international-immigration-housing/visa/faq.html>

### 3.1 Visa application documents (to be handed in at the nearest Swiss embassy or consulate general)

- **Cover sheet for visa application (recommended)**  
Please use the checklist on the ETH homepage<sup>4</sup> as the cover sheet for your visa application. It will help you to ensure that you have included all the documents requested and enable the Swiss authorities to locate relevant information more quickly.
- **Authorisation / "Vollmacht" (highly recommended!)**  
With this document you authorise ETH Zurich, if indicated, to get information from the Migration Office of the Canton of Zurich regarding the progress of your entry application. Please note that this document does not mean that ETH can speed up the process. Please fill in Appendix 2, sign it and submit it to the embassy with your visa application. Some embassies might tell you that this is not necessary. If this happens to you, insist and explain that giving ETH an authorisation will facilitate the whole procedure enormously! **The document may NOT be used by visiting students!**
- **Visa application form**  
The visa application form is provided free of charge by the local Swiss representation where you live, or can be downloaded from the internet in PDF format.<sup>5</sup> Normally it must be submitted in triplicate. Most representations require you to appear in person; please find out about this in advance. **Please note that a student visa is normally valid from 2-3 weeks before the start of the semester.** If you wish to enter Switzerland earlier than this you must mention this in your visa application and provide detailed reasons.

<sup>3</sup> In the city of Zurich this office is called a "Kreisbüro"; every city district has a "Kreisbüro" which is responsible for registering all persons living in that district. Please see <https://www.ethz.ch/en/studies/international-immigration-housing/residence-permit.html>. In other cities the office is called an "Einwohnerkontrolle".

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/main/education/internationales/pdf-en/checklist-visa-master.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/themen/einreise/visumantragsformular.html> (Important: Select "National type D visa application form".)

- **Passport**  
Copy of the first few (relevant) pages of your passport. Your passport must be valid for at least 3 months beyond the planned duration of your stay. This is very important – your visa will not be approved if your passport expires earlier!
- **Passport photographs**  
3 current passport photographs
- **ETH Zurich confirmation of registration**  
Enclose the official ETH “Confirmation of Registration” and “Matriculation Confirmation” (“Bescheinigung zu Händen der zuständigen Behörden“) documents which you will receive from the ETH Admissions Office once you have returned the registration form plus the signed declaration of acceptance. Please note that the letter entitled “Admission to Master’s Programme” is not sufficient to obtain a visa.
- **Curriculum vitae / language skills**  
Curriculum vitae in table form in German or English; list language skills in detail. See the example in Appendix 1.
- **Copy of your Bachelor’s diploma**  
Copy and certified translation into German or English. **Please note:** Some embassies require to see the original diplomas. Please check with the embassy BEFORE you send along your originals to the ETH Admissions Office!
- **Letter of motivation / Reasons why you want to study in Switzerland**  
Please provide a written personal statement in which you declare the reasons why you wish to study in the Canton of Zurich (keep it short! A few sentences are sufficient!).
- **Future plans**  
Outline your plans after completing your studies (also here: keep it short!).
- **Evidence of sufficient financial means**  
You must produce evidence that you can finance your stay in Switzerland by handing in a bank statement or proof of a scholarship decision. The Canton of Zurich Migration Office does only accept bank statements from banks domiciled in Switzerland<sup>6</sup> (a Swiss bank or a foreign bank with a branch in Switzerland). **You must show that you have CHF 21,000.00 available. The account must be your own (not your parents’!) and the account balance must be stated in Swiss Francs, Euros or US Dollars** either on the bank statement or in an additional letter from the bank.

### Financial evidence (bank statement):

Even large, internationally active banks are not acceptable if they have no branches in Switzerland! Examples of acceptable banks are **Citibank, China Construction Bank, HSBC, Deutsche Bank (etc.)**. Please do NOT choose Raiffeisen Bank. Although it is on the list it has never been accepted.

**The Zurich Migration Office is extremely strict about the financial requirement and this is where students make most mistakes.** It is crucial that you follow the instructions above very carefully (most embassies do not know the detailed requirements of each of the 26 cantons in Switzerland and may not be able to tell you the correct requirements!)

**Letters from parents declaring financial support are NOT accepted.**

For those who have relatives in Switzerland: An alternative is to submit a so-called “**guarantee declaration**”.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Please see <https://www.finma.ch/en/~media/finma/dokumente/bewilligungstraeger/pdf/beh.pdf?la=en> for a list of banks with branches in Switzerland

<sup>7</sup> This means that a solvent resident of Switzerland (Swiss citizen or foreigner with B or C permit) guarantees to cover your living expenses up to CHF 21,000.00, any expenses incurred through accidents and illness, and your return trip. The appropriate form will be sent to your home address by the Migration Office of the Canton of Zurich (or to ETH, if you handed in an authorization form) once they have received your visa application.

- **Confirmation of tuition fee payment (if required by the embassy)**

Many embassies require a confirmation of tuition fee payment. However, at ETH it is not possible to pay fees in advance. The letter found at <https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/main/education/internationales/pdf-en/confirmation-tuition-fees.pdf> confirms this. Please print it and enclose it with your visa application if required.

## 3.2 What happens next?

Your application for a student visa will be forwarded to the responsible authorities in Switzerland for their decision. The Migration Office of the respective canton reserves the right to ask for additional documents and information. You will be notified by post as soon as your visa is ready for collection.

Please be aware that admission to ETH Zurich does not automatically imply that the Migration Office will grant you a visa. **Under no circumstances should you enter Switzerland with a tourist visa!**

### Visa refusal reasons:

Please note that there is no guarantee for a visa. The decision is the sole responsibility of the responsible migration office.

- Visa applications from students **older than 30 years** are usually refused. The legal basis for this can be found [here](#) (Migrationsamt des Kantons Zürich -> Aus- und Weiterbildung aus Drittstaaten - in German only).
- Visa applications from students who **already have a degree at the desired level** may also be rejected.

## 3.3 Costs

You will pay three different fees during the visa procedure: fees to the consulate when you apply for a visa; a fee of CHF 95.00 to the Swiss canton responsible for your visa application for the visa authorization document; and a fee of CHF 182.00 for the residence permit when you register at the Residents' Registration Office ("Kreisbüro") in Zurich.

### Applying for your residence permit (non-EU/EFTA citizens):

To study in Switzerland **a residence permit is essential**. This permit and your passport also entitle you to enter any Schengen state without an additional visa. You must apply for the residence permit in person at the Residents' Registration Office ("Kreisbüro") in the district where you live **within 14 days of your arrival in Switzerland**. Remember to bring your ETH confirmation of matriculation, your rental contract and your passport. Since 2011 biometric data have also been recorded for non-EU/EFTA citizens.

Please note that for non-EU/EFTA citizens **the entire period of studies in Switzerland may not exceed 8 years**. This period covers undergraduate and graduate degrees and any post-doctorate period. You will be invited to collect your permit within a few weeks of presenting your documents to the "Kreisbüro". The permit is normally valid for one year and can be renewed if your studies take longer. **Please note that every extension must be accompanied by proof of financial means amounting to at least CHF 21,000.00.**

## 4. Additional information

### 4.1 Employment in the Canton of Zurich

During the semester you are allowed to undertake paid employment for a maximum of 15 hours per week. During the semester break you may work up to 100%. **In both cases all non-EU/EFTA students must have a work permit, which can only be obtained after the residence permit has been issued.** For further information, see <https://www.ethz.ch/en/studies/international-immigration-housing/employment.html>.

## 4.2 Useful links

- **State Secretariat for Migration:**  
<https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home.html>
- **Canton of Zurich Migration Office:**  
<https://www.zh.ch/de/sicherheitsdirektion/migrationsamt.html>
- **Cantonal immigration and labour market authorities (address list):**  
[https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale\\_behoerden/adressen\\_kantone\\_und.html](https://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/ueberuns/kontakt/kantonale_behoerden/adressen_kantone_und.html)
- **Housing Office of ETH and the University Zurich:**  
<https://www.wohnen.ethz.ch/en>
- **Health insurance requirements in Switzerland:**  
<https://www.ethz.ch/en/studies/international-immigration-housing/health-insurance.html>
- **Information for Master's degree students at ETH Zurich:**  
<https://ethz.ch/en/studies/master.html>

October 2020 / awa

# APPENDIX 1

## Sample CV for students subject to a visa obligation

Molly Example

+86-12-3456789

[example@yahoo.com](mailto:example@yahoo.com)

## Curriculum Vitae

### PERSONAL DETAILS

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Name: Molly Example  
Date of birth: 01.01.1996  
Place of birth: City, Country  
Nationality: XX  
Marital status: single

### EDUCATION

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Since 10/2015 **BSc. Mechanical Engineering and Automation**  
University of XX, Country  
Expected graduation date: 01.08.2018

02/2017 – 09/2017 **University of XX, City (Country)**  
Exchange semester

09/2009 – 07/2015 **School, City**  
High School Degree (Grade: A)

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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12/2013 – 05/2014 **ABB Shanghai Motors Co., Shanghai (China)**  
Corporate Responsibility, Internship

### VOLUNTARY AND PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

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08/2015 **Title of Organization, City (Country)**  
Workcamp in a soup kitchen for homeless and refugees

### LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Chinese: Native  
English: Fluent (C1/IELTS 7.0)  
German: Beginner (A1)

### ADDITIONAL SKILLS

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Computing: MS Office (Word, PowerPoint, Excel), Outlook, Basic knowledge SAP

City, Date, Signature

# APPENDIX 2

## Authorisation (“Vollmacht”)

Student's name and address:

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Place and date:

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## Vollmacht

Hiermit ermächtige ich folgende Person an der ETH Zürich, mich im fremdenpolizeilichen Einreiseverfahren zu vertreten:

ETH Zürich  
International Student Support  
Annina Wanner  
HG F 22.3  
Rämistrasse 101  
8092 Zürich

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## Authorisation

I hereby authorise the following person at ETH Zurich to act for me in the visa procurement procedure:

ETH Zurich  
International Student Support  
Annina Wanner  
HG F 22.3  
Rämistrasse 101  
8092 Zurich

Unterschrift / Signature:

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