



Working as an architect in Switzerland

(Right of establishment, temporary provision of services
and public procurement contracts)

Explanations of the roles and powers of the various Swiss authorities in relation to foreign professional qualifications

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Introduction

Under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP¹), professionals from the EU can have their qualifications recognised if the profession for which they are qualified in their country of origin is regulated in Switzerland.

This document aims to describe the Swiss regulations in the sector concerned. Regulated professions are those that are subject to specific training requirements and where access to the profession in question is only possible for professionals holding a specific qualification that is defined in relation to the Swiss education system. Foreign professionals can only access a regulated profession or occupation once their qualifications have been recognised.

If holders of foreign professional qualifications wish to pursue a profession or occupation other than those described in this document, they are free to do so without obtaining recognition of their qualifications (non-regulated profession). In this case it is the job market which will dictate their chances of finding employment or being awarded jobs in the case of self-employed person.

1. Generalities

Rules on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications in architecture vary according to where the architect comes from (EU/EFTA or third state), which canton he/she wishes to carry out the professional activity and the type of activity that he/she wishes to carry out (domiciliation in Switzerland, temporary provision of services, submission of a bid for a public procurement contract, etc). This information sheet provides an overview of attestations and recognition that can be obtained from the different Swiss competent authorities, the criteria applied and how the procedure unfolds¹.

¹ This explanatory note does not take into account cases in which access to the profession is given by virtue of the bilateral agreement between Switzerland and Italy on access to the civil engineering and architecture professions (SR 0.142.114.547).

2. How access to the profession is regulated in Switzerland

a. Federal and cantonal authority to regulate access to the profession

In Switzerland, there is no federal legislation regulating access to the architect profession. This means that each canton has the authority to establish criteria for access to the profession, or to simply leave the profession unregulated. In cantons where there is no legislation (i.e. profession is not regulated), access is possible without prior recognition of the foreign qualification. In cantons that have enacted legislation and require a qualification (i.e. profession is regulated), the recognition of foreign qualifications must take place before commencement of the activity in Switzerland.

In both cases (i.e. profession is regulated or profession is not regulated), architects that carry out activities in Switzerland must adhere to professional practices and rules in force in Switzerland as well as the building code, which contains rules recognised by the profession, specifically those drawn up by the Swiss Society of Engineers and Architects (SIA).

b. Cantons that regulate access to the profession

Seven cantons regulate access to the profession:

- In the Canton of [Geneva](#), in order to be able to sign building permits and supervise work, architects must obtain a listing in the *Tableau des mandataires professionnellement qualifiés* (MPQ). In addition to holding a degree in architecture, the person wishing to be listed must also show at least two years of professional experience.
- In the Canton of [Neuchatel](#), architects must be listed in the cantonal *registre neuchâtelois des architectes, des ingénieurs civils, des urbanistes et des aménagistes*. In order to do this, a Bachelor's or Master's degree from a Swiss university of applied sciences, a cantonal university or federal institute of technology is required. A listing in the register authorises the person to fully exercise his/her profession, i.e. drawing up and signing construction plans and commissioning construction work.
- In the Canton of [Vaud](#), registration with the REG (3 years of professional experience required) is mandatory in order to sign construction plans. Architects wishing to provide services without being established in the Canton of Vaud must be qualified and have their foreign professional qualifications recognised before starting the activity (regulated profession). However, in such cases, no formal authorisation to practice is issued. The architect providing the services will merely have to provide proof that his/her professional qualifications have been recognised when submitting a building permit application to the competent cantonal authority. Recognised architects include holders of a Master's degree awarded by a Swiss cantonal university or federal institute of technology and holders of a Bachelor's or Master's degree awarded by a Swiss university of applied sciences.
- In the Canton of [Fribourg](#), registration with the REG (3 years of professional experience required) is compulsory in order to sign building permits. Architects wishing to provide services without being established on the territory of the Canton of Fribourg must be qualified and have their foreign professional qualifications recognised before starting their activity (regulated profession). However, in such cases, no formal authorisation to practice is issued. The architect providing the services will merely have to provide proof that his/her professional qualifications have been recognised when submitting a building permit application to the competent cantonal authority.
- In the Canton of [Ticino](#), the person must obtain authorisation from the *Ordine Ingegneri e Architetti del Canton Ticino (OTIA)* in order to work as an architect. This authorisation is also specifically requested both when applying for a building permit (Art. 4 of Building Code) and for

the project study and execution phases for contracts subject to legislation on public procurement contracts (Art. 34 al. 1 let. d of RLCPubb/CIAP). It is therefore specifically required in order to sign building permit applications and to manage construction. This requirement applies both to architects domiciled in Switzerland and to architects who only provide services on a temporary basis. The authorisation to work as an architect is required regardless of whether the architect is domiciled in Switzerland or will be working as a service provider.

- In the cantons of [Lucerne](#) and [Valais](#), architects must have the necessary training in order to sign the blueprints required for building permit applications. However, there is no procedure for registration with a professional association or register, nor is there any requirement to obtain authorisation to work in this profession. The qualifications are then checked in each individual case, usually at the communal level, when a building permit application is submitted.

In the other cantons, the architectural profession is not regulated. This means that the foreign architect does not need to obtain recognition of his/her professional qualifications and may work directly on the basis of his/her foreign qualification.

It goes without saying that once a foreign qualification has been recognised, the qualification holder enjoys the same rights as holders of a Swiss qualification. The only exception is the right to use a legally protected qualification title. A foreign qualification holder may use his/her foreign educational title instead.

3. Legal bases applying to the recognition of foreign qualifications

a. *List of legal bases*

Foreign architects may seek recognition of their professional qualifications when this right is granted under an international agreement or national legislation. Moreover, when a legal basis provides for the recognition of foreign qualifications, it establishes the conditions for this. These legal bases are as follows:

- Agreement du 21 June 1999 on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP)²: this agreement allows citizens of EU/EFTA countries to seek recognition of their professional qualifications if they are fully qualified, in their country of origin, to work in the profession in question. If they are not fully qualified (e.g. because they did not pass a state examination prescribed by their national legislation or because they did not meet the conditions for mandatory registration with a national association of architects), then they may not invoke the AFMP to seek recognition of their professional qualifications.

The AFMP refers to its Annex III to Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications. For architects holding a qualification listed in Annex 5.7.1 or Annex VI of the Directive, this directive provides for automatic recognition (i.e. no need to examine the content of training). For architects who are fully qualified in their country of origin but whose qualification is not listed in either of these two annexes, recognition of the qualification will require comparison of training content and possible compensatory measures.

- Ordinance of 23 November 2016 to the Higher Education Act³: this ordinance provides for recognition of foreign qualifications that are comparable to a degree programme at a Swiss higher education institution. This recognition is only possible if the profession is regulated in

² SR 0.142.112.681.

³ HEdO, SR 414.201.

Switzerland. This ordinance also applies to citizens of third countries. It establishes various criteria, namely equivalence of durations, levels and content of training. Training must also include acquisition of practical skills.

If the conditions for recognition are met, this procedure leads to recognition of equivalence with a Bachelor's degree or a Master's degree in architecture.

When an architect does not meet the conditions of any legal basis, he/she is unable to obtain recognition of his/her qualifications in Switzerland. This would be the case, for instance, of architects that are not fully qualified to work in this profession in their country of origin (e.g. Italian architect who has not taken the national examination *esame di stato*; a French architect holding a Master's degree without the HMONP post-qualification diploma, or a Belgian architect who has not yet completed his three-year internship, etc.).

Apart from this formal legal basis, Swiss institutions sometimes offer possibilities to foreign architects. Since these possibilities are not derived from laws in the strict sense, they are not listed here but are addressed later on in this document.

b. Rules on recognition

There are different typical cases:

- Architects that satisfy the conditions of Directive 2005/36/EC: architects that satisfy conditions for automatic recognition under this directive may contact SERI. They will receive a letter from SERI confirming that the qualification must be automatically recognised and that they must be automatically inscribed in the registers of cantons that regulate this activity (MPQ register in the Canton of Geneva, CAMAC in the Canton of Vaud, OTIA in the Canton of Ticino, etc.). This letter may also be presented when submitting bids for public procurement contracts. It is usually mailed out within 1-2 weeks if the application file is complete. Once automatic recognition has been confirmed in this letter, the architect must be granted unrestricted access to his/her profession, including the right to sign building permit applications without having to satisfy another further requirement such as demonstrating experience or registering with the REG.
- Architects from EU/EFTA countries who are fully qualified in their country of origin, but whose qualification does not appear in Annex 5.7.1 or VI of Directive 2005/36/EC: in this case, the procedure involves comparing training content with that required for Swiss qualifications in the cantons that regulate the profession (art. 11-14 of Directive 2005/36/EC). If the qualification is not known, this comparison may take three or four months. The amount of time required for possible compensatory measures will increase this duration.
- Architects from third countries who are fully qualified to work in this profession in their country of origin: In this case, the procedure is similar to the one described directly above but may last a little longer. Moreover, possible compensatory measures may be less supple than those set forth in Directive 2005/36/EC. In particular, applicants are not generally allowed to choose from among the various compensatory measures.

4. Legal bases applying to public procurement contracts

Switzerland signed two main agreements in reference to public procurement contracts:

- Agreement of 15 April 1994 on Government Procurement (AGP)⁴: signed within the framework of the World Trade Organization, this agreement is intended to establish 'an effective multilateral framework of rights and obligations with respect to laws, regulations, procedures and practices regarding government procurement with a view to achieving greater liberalization and expansion of world trade' (Recitals). In Switzerland, this agreement applies to acquisitions made by the Confederation and the cantons when the total value of a given contract reaches an established threshold.
- Agreement of 21 June 1999 between the Swiss Confederation and the European Community on Certain Aspects Concerning Government Procurement⁵: part of the first batch of bilateral agreements reached by Switzerland and the EU, this agreement concerns bilateral extension of the scope of the AFMP to include public authorities and bodies at the level of Swiss districts and communes. Moreover, acquisitions made by companies active in railway and telecommunications, as well as natural gas and water utilities as well as acquisitions by private companies active in the provision of water, electricity and transport must be liberalised. The stated objective, set forth in Art. 3, ch. 1 of this bilateral agreement, is to ensure transparency and the absence of any form of discrimination, mutual access to markets in railway, telecommunications and the supply of energy, markets that were not included in the original AFMP.

In particular, Article VIII of the AFMP stipulates that the conditions for participation in tendering procedures shall be limited to the strict minimum needed to ensure that a company is able to carry out the contract in question. Conditions for participation imposed on suppliers, including verification of qualifications, must be the same for all suppliers, regardless of whether they are based in Switzerland or outside the country. Likewise, there must not be any discrimination against suppliers on the same basis.

These agreements do not have the effect of abolishing national or cantonal regulations concerning the practice of the architectural profession. Moreover, they do not include any mechanism to ensure recognition of foreign professional qualifications. Any entity organising a call for tenders may require professional qualifications as long as such requirements are in line with the above-mentioned agreements, and in particular are non-discriminatory. This rule applies regardless of the canton for which the contract is awarded. Consequently, it is up to each bidder to take all of the steps needed to obtain recognition of professional qualifications.

5. Who to contact specifically?

The tables below provide a non-exhaustive overview of the various possibilities. They are intended as suggestions and in no way should be construed as binding in nature. Moreover, they do not substitute legislation nor the rules explained above.

⁴ SR 0.632.231.422.

⁵ SR 0.172.052.68.

a. In the case of **domiciliation** in Switzerland

| Situation | Authority likely to provide the most efficient level of assistance | Aim ⁶ | Duration |
|--|---|--|--|
| Architect from EU/EFTA country whose qualification appears in Annex 5.7.1 or VI of Directive 2005/36/CE | SEFRI www.sbf.admin.ch/diploma Web portal www.sbf.admin.ch/becc | Letter enabling automatic listing in the registers of the cantons that regulate the activity. This document may also be produced for public procurement contracts. | 1-2 weeks on average. |
| Architect from EU who is fully qualified in his/her country of origin but whose qualification does not appear in the aforementioned annexes Architect from a third country who is fully qualified to work in this profession in his/her country of origin | SERI www.sbf.admin.ch/diploma Web portal www.sbf.admin.ch/becc | Recognition procedure with comparison to training programmes | 3-4 months, excluding possible compensatory measures |
| Architect (from any country) in a canton that does not regulate the profession | swissuniversities www.swissuniversities.ch > Services > Reconnaissance / Swiss ENIC | swissuniversities issues labour market recommendations mainly for the purpose of facilitating contacts with employers (only for cantons that do not regulate the activity) | 2-3 weeks |
| Architect (from any country) regardless of the canton where the profession will be pursued | REG www.reg.ch > Registres > Inscription | Depending on the specific situation of the applicant, REG offers procedures involving an examination procedure ⁷ . This procedure is possible regardless of whether the canton concerned regulates the profession. | Several months depending on the file. |

⁶ The information in this column is given for information purposes only and is not binding on the authorities mentioned.

⁷ The REG denies and grants requests on the basis of its own internal rules.

b. In the case of temporary provision of services by architects from EU/EFTA member states

When architect wishes to provide services in a canton that regulates the activity, he/she **must always** submit a declaration to SERI ([Service Providers \(admin.ch\)](#)). This declaration procedure entails creation of an online form that must be filled out and sent to SERI by post. Once the complete declaration has been received, SERI will automatically forward it to the competent cantonal authority.

This fast-track procedure is provided for under Title II of Directive 2005/36/EC and by relevant federal legislation⁸. It is only open to individuals who are entitled to invoke this directive.

Architects from third countries who wish to provide services in Switzerland should refer to the table in section a. above for information regarding recognition of their professional qualifications.

c. In the case of public procurement contracts

When an architect is asked to prove his/her professional qualifications, two of the most pragmatic solutions include the following:

| Situation | Authority likely to provide the most efficient level of assistance | Aim ⁹ | Duration |
|---|--|--|----------------------|
| Architect from EU/EFTA country whose qualification appears in Annex 5.7.1 or VI of Directive 2005/36/CE | SERI www.sbf.admin.ch/diploma Web portal www.sbf.admin.ch/becc | Letter enabling automatic listing in the registers of the cantons that regulate the activity. | 1-2 weeks on average |
| Architect (other cases) | REG http://reg.ch/fr/attestation-2/ | Attestation to take part in SIA call for tenders | Around 2 weeks |

6. Role of the various authorities

a. SERI

The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) is the authority responsible for recognition of the following foreign qualifications: upper-secondary level vocational qualifications, tertiary-level professional qualifications and qualifications awarded by institutions comparable to Swiss universities of applied sciences (UAS). In application of Directive 2005/36/EC and HEdO (SR 414.201), SERI issues equivalence certificates for Bachelor's and Master's degrees in architecture.

b. swissuniversities

Swiss ENIC issues recognition recommendations for Swiss employers. These recommendations allows one to determine the level of the foreign qualification when a comparable study programme exists at a Swiss university.

⁸ Federal Act of 14 December 2012 on the Declaration Requirement and the Verification of Service Provider Qualifications in Regulated Professions (DRPA, SR 935.01) and its implementing ordinance (DRPO, SR 935.011).

⁹ The information in this column is indicative and not binding on the authorities mentioned.

These recommendations are intended for the purposes of facilitating labour market integration and may not be used to gain access to a regulated profession. For this reason, the Swiss ENIC does not issue any recommendations when it appears that the architect is active in a canton that regulates the architectural profession.

c. REG

The REG exists for the purpose of maintaining a list of professionals in the fields of engineering, architecture and the environment. It therefore regularly updates a table containing the names of individuals who work in one of these recognised professions, in keeping with REG requirements; this table is accessible to the public.

The REG is recognised by the Confederation as an institution that encourages upper-secondary level vocational education and training (VET) and tertiary-level professional education. It does not recognise foreign qualifications as such but provides the public with examination procedures enabling one to be listed in one of three registers: Register A (Master's degree level), Register B (Bachelor's degree relating to a given profession) and C¹⁰ (qualification awarded by a tertiary-level professional education institution or university of applied sciences). Listing requires at least three years of work experience in the given profession for REG A et le REG B, at least two years for REG C and it is very widely accepted in Switzerland as proof of professional qualifications.

For all of the professional fields covered by the REG, there are examination procedures based on the REG's own internal rules. Such procedures enable individuals who do not have an REG-compliant qualification to nevertheless have their names included in the REG after several years of proven work experience. This is an interesting alternative if there are no other recognition procedures.

The REG certifies that at the time of listing, the applicant has provided proof that he/she is indeed a holder of the asserted qualification.

The REG has signed a contract with the Confederation, represented by SERI. This contract covers the following:

- Recognising and promoting qualification procedures aimed at certifying the professional development of workers in the fields of engineering, architecture and the environment as well as helping to fill labour force shortages;
- Establishing conditions for cooperation to ensure the free movement of professionals in Switzerland and in third states;
- Systematically exchanging information and ideas in the fields concerned so as to ensure coordination and mutual access to useful data.

¹⁰ For the Canton of Ticino, a REG C listing is not enough to obtain authorisation to work as an architect.

Annex: Competent cantonal authorities

Fribourg:

Service des constructions et de l'aménagement
Rue des Chanoines 17
Case postale
1701 Fribourg
Tel. 026 305 36 13
E-mail: seca@fr.ch
Web: [Service des constructions et de l'aménagement \(SeCA\) | État de Fribourg](#)

Geneva:

Chambre des architectes et des ingénieurs
p.a. DALE - Secrétariat général
rue de l'Hôtel-de-Ville 14
Case postale 3880
1211 Genève 3
Tel. 022 327 94 14
Web: [Je prépare ma demande MPQ | ge.ch](#)

Neuchâtel:

Service des bâtiments
Rue de Tivoli 5
2003 Neuchâtel
Tel. 032 889 64 80
E-mail: service.batiments@ne.ch
Web: [Service des bâtiments - République et canton de Neuchâtel](#)

Lucerne:

Bau-, Umwelt- und Wirtschaftsdepartement des Kantons Luzern
Bahnhofstrasse 15
6002 Luzern
Tel: 041 228 51 55
E-mail: buwd@lu.ch

Ticino:

OTIA
Via Lugano 23
6500 Bellinzona
Tel. 091 825 55 56
E-mail: autorizzazioni@otia.ch
Web: [Home | OTIA Ordine Ingegneri e Architetti del Canton Ticino](#)

Valais:

Département de la mobilité, du territoire et de l'environnement
Rue des Creusets 5
Case postale 670
1950 Sion
Tel. 027 606 33 00
Web: [Accueil \(vs.ch\)](#)

Vaud:

Centrale des autorisations de construire CAMAC
Place de la Riponne 10
1014 Lausanne
Tel. 021 316 70 21
E-mail: info.camac@vd.ch
Web: www.vd.ch/camac