

Having your foreign qualifications recognised in Switzerland

Careers



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Introduction

Finding a job or studying in Switzerland if you don't have Swiss qualifications can be a headache for many job candidates and prospective students. Many of them likely don't know the process for getting their qualifications recognised.

What is having qualifications recognised? What role does it play? Is recognition necessary in every case? What flexibility do employers have? What is the difference between a regulated and a non-regulated profession? Which authorities oversee recognition? This booklet gives you all the answers you need, and guides you every step of the way.

It also features the personal stories of three people who have had their foreign qualifications recognised, along with an interview with an expert in the field.

What does recognition mean?

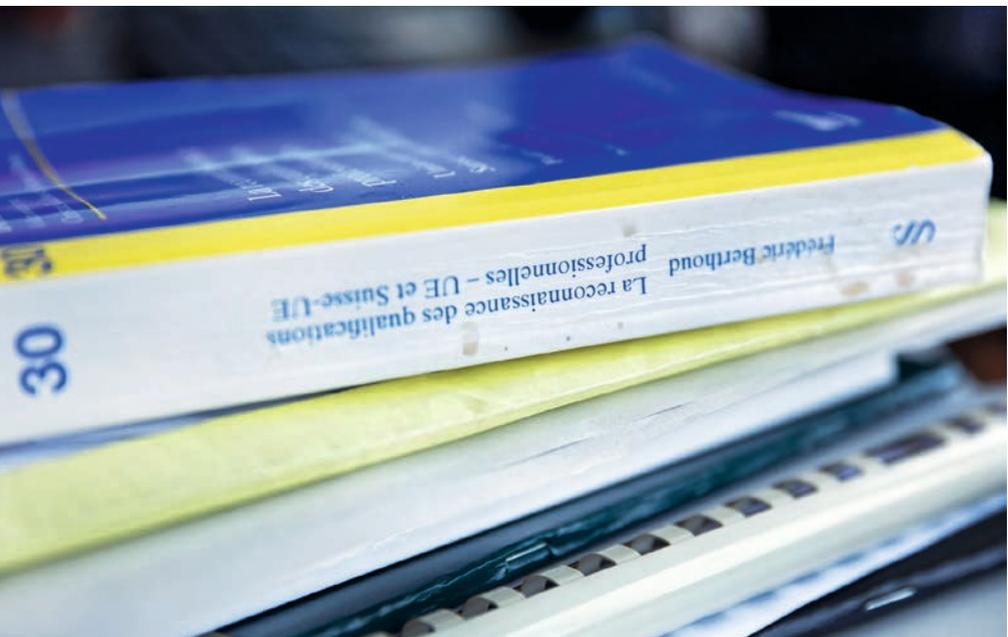
In Switzerland, a distinction is made between a professional and an academic recognition.

Professional recognition is useful or essential to the pursuit of a given professional activity. It is aimed solely at those wishing to join the labour market. The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) offers a national point of contact for all general questions concerning the recognition of foreign professional qualifications.

➤ www.recognition.swiss

Academic recognition is required before a person can be admitted to a course of study. It is aimed at individuals who wish to embark upon or continue studies at higher education, continuing education or postgraduate level. The higher education institution itself decides whether or not to admit the individual concerned.

➤ www.recognition.swiss
> **Studying in Switzerland**



Professional recognition

If you are aiming to pursue a professional activity in Switzerland, and get your foreign qualifications recognised, make sure you are well informed before taking the necessary steps. In many cases, a recognition procedure is not necessary (see section “Regulated and non-regulated professions”). Although recognition of your diploma can add value to an application, fluency of the language used in the workplace or professional experience is just as important to employers.

Recognition isn't the only factor that counts

Securing a certificate of equivalence doesn't mean that you will immediately find work, because several other factors must be considered when looking for a job. Three recommendations are given below. These are the golden rules:

➤ Learn the language of the place where you live

This is the key to every professional integration process. Even if your qualifications have been recognised, it will be difficult for you to find work if you don't know how to write, read or express yourself well in the company's language.

➤ Explore the job market

Are there any opportunities in your field in Switzerland? Are there employers that might be interested in the training and education that you have completed abroad? Would you have a better chance of finding work if you had a recognised title? It will be of no great use to you to have your qualifications recognised in a saturated labour market, or if the skills that you have acquired during your training differ too much from those required in Switzerland.

➤ Familiarise yourself with the culture of your sector

Sometimes it is better to do an internship in a company first or to accept a less qualified or even an unqualified position before you can climb the career ladder. This will be particularly useful in allowing you to gain experience in Switzerland and get to know the country's way of working and its rules and regulations. You will also be able to meet others in your field, build a personal network and gain the trust of an employer. At the same time, you can take steps to get your qualifications recognised so that you can then advance to better-qualified posts.



Regulated and non-regulated professions

In the professional recognition context, a distinction must be made between regulated and non-regulated professions. Put simply, this is about knowing whether your diplomas, certificates, etc. will have to be officially recognised before you can pursue your chosen professional activity in Switzerland.

If your **profession is not regulated**, you do not need to have your qualifications recognised to work in your field. Whether or not you can pursue your professional activity therefore depends on the labour market and the employer's requirements.

Examples of non-regulated professions are cook, car mechanic, hairdresser, computer scientist, retail store manager and biologist.

You need specific qualifications to practice a **regulated profession**. If your profession is regulated in Switzerland, you must have your foreign qualifications or certificates recognised by a Swiss authority or institution before you are allowed to work.

Examples of regulated professions are doctor, optician, nurse, electrician and teacher.

You can find out whether your profession is regulated at:

➤ www.recognition.swiss

Good to know

Alternatives to recognition

Ask yourself if recognising your diploma is really the right way to go. Depending on your background and situation, other routes may be more suitable. Whether it is taking the final examination, validating educational achievements or completing a basic vocational training programme in Switzerland. You can obtain a Swiss professional qualification in all three ways. Seek advice from a specialist:

➤ www.berufsberatung.ch/eingangsportale

From commerce to construction

Most professional activities associated with the industrial, retail, business, hotel and catering and construction sectors are non-regulated.

No recognition required

Except for regulated professions, the recognition of a foreign diploma is not required to work in Switzerland. However, it is possible to apply for a level certificate. This is intended to inform future employers where your title fits into the hierarchy of the Swiss education system. It will also make your job search easier.

A chart showing the Swiss education system can be found at:

➤ www.berufsberatung.ch/bildungsschema

SERI supplies level certifications for VET qualifications for non-regulated professions.

➤ www.sbf.admin.ch/diploma
> English (top right)

Managed by the Swiss Conference of Rectors of Higher Education Institutions (swissuniversities), the Swiss ENIC information centre issues **statements of comparability/evaluations** for those who hold degrees from foreign higher education institutions. These recommendations provide a way into non-regulated professions.

➤ www.enic.ch > English (top right)

Recognition criteria

Several criteria must be fulfilled at the same time for foreign qualifications to be recognised:

- The qualification must have been officially awarded or recognised by the individual's country of origin.
- There must be a corresponding course of study or training in Switzerland.
- The level and duration of the study or training must be the same as the equivalent programme in Switzerland.
- Concerning regulated professions, the two courses must have comparable content (theoretical and/or practical).
- The course of study/training must have been completed. Courses that have not been finished are not recognised.

Good to know

Can I get my high school diploma or certificate of further education recognised?

It is not possible to have a secondary school leaving certificate or a high school diploma recognised independently of a specific admission procedure to a school. Neither can certificates of continuing education, i.e. postgraduate qualifications such as the Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS), certificates from private courses or certificates of employment be submitted for recognition. Nevertheless, including them in your application portfolio can provide valuable additional information for the recognition process of another qualification.



**Danijela
Antanaskovic**
45, care and
community health
assistant, works in
a retirement home

Hard work pays off

Having gained her general baccalaureate in her home country of Serbia around 20 years ago, Danijela Antanaskovic settled in the Ticino, where her parents and ex-husband live. “At the beginning I did a bit of everything: telephone operator, sales assistant, croupier in a casino ...,” she explains.

As time went on, Danijela increasingly reflected on her pro-

fessional future. She decided to take positive action: “I felt like I still hadn’t found my direction. A friend suggested a three-day orientation course at a retirement home. It was a turning point in my life!”

At ease among the residents, Danijela finally felt useful. “All of my doubts vanished. I did a caregiver’s course, and then worked

as a carer for several years.” She realised that she would like to work in the medico-social sector and complete her training. She also felt a desire to go back to live in the country of her birth. All of these factors led her to make a brave decision. “I enrolled in a private college in Serbia to become a nurse. I graduated after two years.”

Recognition procedure

Ultimately, family ties led her to return to Switzerland, which then raised the question of recognition for her foreign degree. “I returned to work as a care assistant in Ticino while starting the recognition process with the Swiss Red Cross (SRC). After gathering all the necessary documents (certificate copy, study programmes, etc.), translating them and having them certified, I learned that my nursing degree only corresponded to a care and community health assistant qualification – which is the entry level in Switzerland.”

Fulltime internship

The SRC also told Danijela that compensation measures would be necessary before she could gain this recognition. “They asked me to take a course to fill in the gaps when it came to medico-technical procedures, and to complete a six-month, full-time adjustment period,

which I did in the home where I still work today. I never had to have my language skills certified. Having worked in Ticino all these years, my Italian was good enough.”

Financially difficult times

The recognition process took more than a year but is now over. “It wasn’t an easy time for me personally. The hardest thing was the financial side. During the adjustment period I had to live on a tiny salary and count on my parents’ support. Don’t forget the fees, either. I had to spend several thousand francs on the recognition process and additional training, in addition to all the translations and authentications required for the documents that had to be submitted.”

Despite all these sacrifices, Danijela’s hard work has paid off. “I’ve been able to grow in my work,” she remarks. “I’ve always needed to be stimulated, and my new accredited status allows me to take on new responsibilities.”

Recognition authorities

In Switzerland there is not one, but several authorities which have the power to recognise foreign qualifications. Each is responsible for one professional sector, or for specific professions. The first step is therefore to identify the authority which can recognise your qualifications and then contact it to set the process in motion.

You can find out which office is responsible for your professional qualification at:

➤ www.recognition.swiss

The following are the main authorities competent to recognise foreign qualifications in Switzerland:

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)

For foreign VET qualifications giving access to regulated professions: Federal VET Diploma, Federal Diploma of Higher Education, Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education, professional education institution (PEI) diploma. Examples of regulated professions overseen by SERI: dental assistant, early childhood educator, animal keeper, driving instructor.

SERI is also authorised to recognise foreign qualifications in certain regulated professions requiring a university-level degree, such as social worker, civil engineer and architect (although the latter two are only regulated in seven cantons).

➤ www.sbfi.admin.ch
> English (top right)

Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH)

For foreign qualifications in medical professions requiring a university degree, including: doctor, dentist, pharmacist, psychologist, psychotherapist, vet, chiropractor, etc. Please note that, as a general rule, Switzerland does not recognise qualifications in medicine (human medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine), in pharmacology or in chiropractic medicine gained outside of the European Union (EU). There are exceptions. See:

➤ www.bag.admin.ch > English (top right)

Cantonal authorities

For certain professions, authority for recognising foreign qualifications reverts to cantonal authorities. Licence to practice law is one example here.

Swiss Red Cross (SRC)

Responsible for foreign diplomas in non-medical and healthcare professions: nurse, physiotherapist, care and community health assistant, lab technician, radiologist, dietician, midwife, paramedic, ergotherapist, naturopath, etc.

➤ www.redcross.ch > English (top right)

Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK)

For foreign qualifications in teaching and special needs education: teacher (nursery, primary, lower and upper secondary), speech therapist, special needs teacher, psychomotor therapist, etc.

➤ www.edk.ch > English (top right)

What you need to do

On their websites, the various authorities with powers of recognition describe the process in detail and the steps that must be taken (forms to fill in, documents to collect and send, fees to pay, etc.). What, specifically, needs to be remembered?

Duration

From the point at which the documents have been sent and the dossier is deemed to be complete

by the competent authority, the recognition process can last up to several months. It may be longer if compensation measures (theoretical and/or practical) must be completed. The approximate duration of the procedure per profession can be found at:

➤ www.recognition.swiss

Fees

Handling a request for recognition can cost several thousand francs. The amounts involved differ greatly from one authority to the next. By contrast, Swiss ENIC will produce a statement of comparability/evaluation of qualifications for non-regulated professions requiring a university-level degree free of charge. For an estimate of the processing fees per profession see:

➤ www.recognition.swiss

Certified true copies

Diplomas, certificates and other important elements of a person's application dossier must be submitted as "certified true copies," in other words along with confirmation of their authenticity. You can get certified true copies from the local authority of the municipality where you live (subject to some exceptions) or from a notary. This will incur costs.

Translation

If your diploma is not in English, French, German or Italian, you will need a translation. The diploma and any important annexes must be translated by a professional translator, for which there will be a fee.

To find a translator, you can get in touch with ASTTI, the Swiss association of translators, terminologists and interpreters, at:

➤ www.astti.ch

Language skills

It's impossible to work in any job if you aren't fluent enough in the language spoken at your workplace. As part of their recognition process, many organisations require candidates to have a certain level of language skills necessary for them to pursue their

chosen professional activity, in the healthcare sector, for example. These skills generally must correspond to at least level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Requirements are much higher (level C2 or above) in the teaching sector. Depending on the circumstances, you may be asked to produce a language certificate.

If you would like to test your language skills by taking a test online or at a school, or if you'd like to, or are required to take a language course, you'll find a variety of options at:

➤ www.berufsberatung.ch/austauschprogramme

Compensation measures

As part of the recognition process, the authority concerned will assess whether the education and training completed abroad are equivalent to a Swiss programme in the same field. Specifically, this involves comparing the two curricula and the resulting qualifications. If there are substantial differences between the duration and content of the training received abroad and that given in Switzerland, you will have to complete compensation meas-

ures to make up the difference. These may take the form of additional training, an internship, or an aptitude test. Please note that certain measures may require a great deal of commitment. You must also factor in the fees, which may be high and which participants must pay themselves.

Who can you contact for help?

In each canton, professional careers guidance officers are available to provide information and answer your questions.

➤ www.berufsberatung.ch/biz

The HEKS/EPER MosaiQ service from HEKS Swiss Church Aid offers advice and aftercare to qualified migrants from outside the EU, so that they can make the most of their professional potential in Switzerland. It also guides these individuals through the process of getting their qualifications recognised.

➤ www.heks.ch/mosaiq
> English (top right)

Good to know

Recognition = Swiss qualification?

Having your foreign diploma recognised does not mean that you are eligible for the equivalent Swiss diploma. Individuals whose professional titles are recognised by the competent authorities receive only a recognition certificate (e.g. “xxx diploma is equivalent to the Federal VET Diploma as a care and community health assistant”). Moreover, they are not allowed to use the legally protected Swiss title (Registered Paramedic, Advanced Federal Diploma of Higher Education, for example). However, they are permitted to use the Swiss professional designation “paramedic,” or the professional title they gained in their country of origin (stating that country).



Gloria Taborda
43, electrical project
engineer

Finding work: qualifications aren't everything

After completing a university course in electrical engineering and a post as a project engineer, Gloria Taborda left Colombia in 2008 to settle in Geneva with her Swiss husband. The early days were difficult. "I didn't know anyone, and I only knew a few words of French," she explains. "I tried to find work in my field, but without

success. My lack of knowledge about the Swiss electrical system and the absence of a professional network also complicated matters."

Gloria therefore decided to abandon her job search to concentrate on learning French. She took a two-year course leading to a level B2 language certificate.

Statement of comparability/evaluation

In parallel, she decided to get the statement of comparability/evaluation of her degree by Swiss ENIC. “Although recognition wasn’t mandatory to practice my profession, a statement of comparability/evaluation was strongly recommended. Because of the electricity codes that are specific to Switzerland, I also took the relevant courses. Thanks to them, I was able to meet fellow professionals, which made it easier for me to enter the job market.” Gloria gathered the necessary documents, including a copy of her degree certificate and academic transcript. She had these documents authenticated and translated into English during a language stay in England after graduation, and then sent them to the Swiss ENIC. She soon received the statement of comparability/evaluation.

Job as an electrical draughtsperson

After two short-term jobs, she went on to secure a position as an electrical draughtsperson with a Geneva-based company. “I told myself that it might be better to start at a slightly lower level and to work my way up from there. What’s more, that type of work was a better match for my French skills.” The recommendation of recognition was a factor in her getting the job: “My Colombian

university degree was recognised as equivalent to a bachelor’s in electrical engineering from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, ETH. That has a certain value from the employer’s perspective, as they know what they’re dealing with!” Gloria found further satisfaction in the recognition process: “It’s wrong to think that there aren’t any good universities in South America. This certificate of equivalence proves that. It’s also reassuring to know that all the years of study and all the money I invested weren’t wasted.”

Gloria went on to work as a manager at an engineering consulting firm, and then as a project engineer. Her role consisted of designing electrical installations, calculating costs and preparing request for proposals. “These positions were much closer to my university training,” she says. At present, Gloria is taking a career break to take care of her family.

Recognition is not everything

“Learning French and making professional contacts are just as – if not more – important as having the statement of comparability/evaluation. Many migrants wrongly believe that if they have a certificate of equivalence, they’ll immediately get a job, but you must do language courses and take time to get to know the professional environment in your host country,” she emphasises.

Ask the expert



Veronica Bustamante Valdés, consultant for diploma recognition and project manager at the *découvrir* association. The association supports qualified people with a migrant background, especially women, in the professional integration of French-speaking Switzerland

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How many people turn to the *découvrir* association when it comes to the recognition of qualifications?

In our three branches in Geneva, Neuchâtel and Vaud, we helped

a total of 262 people in 2023. The numbers are rising slightly from year to year.

What profiles do these people have?

They originate from almost 70 countries. About 40% come from the American continent, mainly from South America, 27% from Europe, 18% from Africa and 15% from Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The influx of applications is often closely linked to a country's geopolitical context. Most of the people we accompany are women aged between 30 and 45. They all have a university degree, around a third in the fields of health, finance or law, followed by economics and social sciences and education with around 13%. Engineering, architecture and construction account for about 10%.

As a rule, they contact us without having previously informed themselves about the procedure for the recognition of qualifications. However, some people seeking advice have already started the recognition process themselves but struggle to understand the agencies' responses because of the complex legal language used.

What are the most common hurdles?

Many people do not have a sufficient command of the language to understand the procedure. The fact that there are several agencies involved also complicates matters.

The differences between the education system in Switzerland and that of the country of origin often lead to incomprehension and frustration when, for example, a person learns that their academic title does not correspond to the same level of education in Switzerland, or that only their bachelor's degree is recognised even though they also obtained a master's degree in their country of origin. This is because some courses abroad last four years for the bachelor's degree and one year for the master's degree, which differs from the Swiss system. We try to make it clear to those seeking advice that their degree must be classified in the Swiss education system for recognition to be possible at all. For non-regulated professions, we recommend that you have an equivalent level certificate issued. This creates clarity not only for those affected, but also for employers and RAV advisors and rep-

resents a form of acknowledgment and respect.

Another obstacle is the long duration of the procedure, especially in the case of professions in the education sector, where proof of language level C2 must be provided. This can be daunting.

The fact that those seeking advice do not immediately find a job can also be frustrating. In most cases, there is a lack of a professional network.

What advice do you give to people who would like to have their diploma recognised?

The recognition of diplomas is not everything! It is only one step among many that helps with the integration process. It is equally important to master the regional language, be clear about your career plans and build a network in your field of activity. It is crucial that you learn how your own profession is practiced in Switzerland through an internship or volunteer work. At the *découvrir* association, we raise awareness of the various aspects of the labour market.

Academic recognition

Have you obtained a foreign upper secondary school leaving certificate or a bachelor's or master's degree outside Switzerland? Would you like to continue your studies at a Swiss higher education institution (HEI)? If so, contact the matriculation (registra-

tion) office at the institution of your choice directly, and then send them your application for admission. Unlike other countries, Switzerland does not have a central commission that assesses foreign academic qualifications. Each HEI sets its own terms and



conditions for admission, and it alone has the authority to accept or reject the diplomas submitted to it. In other words, the higher education institution where you aim to study will make a completely independent decision on whether to admit you.

Since you hold a foreign qualification, you may have to go through an additional admission process, take supplementary exams, or attend additional classes before being allowed to start your course.

Good to know

School-leaving certificates

It is not possible to have foreign upper secondary school-leaving certificates recognised. Those wishing to embark on higher education can find information on the equivalence of their academic title at [Swissuniversities / Swiss Enic](#). They can also check whether they satisfy the general conditions for admission to Swiss higher education institutions at:

- www.swissuniversities.ch > Themen > Zulassung



Capper Howard Andersen

23, master's student
in Classical Music
Performance

Experiences of a student from the USA

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Capper Howard Andersen grew up in Canton near Atlanta, Georgia in the USA. In middle school he began playing the euphonium. In 2017, he met one of his future Professors at the Hochschule der Künste (HKB). “From then on, I knew I wanted to study euphonium under this professor.”

After high school, he inquired about the possibility of study in Switzerland, but his knowledge of German was an obstacle. So, he graduated with a Bachelor in euphonium performance and minored in German at Indiana University in 2022.

Diploma recognition

“After my bachelor’s degree, I considered the Hochschule der Künste in Bern or Lucerne, as this Professor teaches at both.” In the end, Capper chose Bern because it only required an A2 level in German. His bachelor’s degree from the University of Indiana was recognised as equivalent by the HKB. He had to pass an entrance exam, which involved performing music pieces.

Obtaining a student visa for Switzerland was certainly the most challenging part. “On the one hand, I had to prove that I was financially secure and on the other, I had to be able to show proof of residence.” As he could not afford to study in Switzerland, he applied for the so-called “Fulbright grant,” an international scholarship, which he eventually received. This enables him to finance his master’s degree and life in Switzerland.

Finding a place to live was also difficult. “Luckily, through an old teacher of mine, I was able to get to know two families in Bern. One of them accommodated me until I found a flat with a fellow student.”

Everyday life in Switzerland

“As an American it is almost impossible to get a work visa.” This did not stop Capper from playing concerts and performing with orchestras and bands. He also took part in musical projects. But the

lack of a work visa made it difficult to remunerate him. Those who paid him had to overcome a few administrative hurdles first.

Still, he thinks life in Switzerland is fantastic. “You have such a good quality of life here and Switzerland is very international. It wasn’t easy at the beginning, though.” It is helpful to take part in community activities. It is also advisable to have some savings to cover unexpected costs.

Capper plans to leave Switzerland after completing his master’s degree. Both his scholarship and his visa expire after two years. He would like to find inspiration and make music in another country. “In the longer term, I would like to teach music.”

Visual recap

You have qualifications gained abroad and you wish to:

... find work in Switzerland

... study at a Swiss higher education institution (university, federal institute of technology, university of applied sciences or university of teacher education)

You have qualifications:

... that give you access to regulated professions via VET programmes (dental assistant, driving instructor, etc.)

... as a social worker, civil engineer or architect

... as a VET college lecturer

... as a doctor, dentist, pharmacist, psychologist, psychotherapist, vet or chiropractor

... that give you access to non-medical and healthcare professions (nurse, physiotherapist, midwife, nutritionist, paramedic, optometrist, etc.)

... as a teacher (nursery, primary, lower and upper secondary school), speech therapist, special needs teacher or psychomotor therapist

... as a lawyer or notary

... as a forester, taxi-driver, security officer or complementary therapist

... that give you access to non-regulated professions via VET programmes (cook, car mechanic, hairdresser, computer scientist, hospitality specialist, etc.)

... from a higher education institution that gives you access to a non-regulated profession (biologist, software engineer, economist, etc.)

Contact the institution concerned directly, and send your application form to the matriculation (registration) office.

Submit your application for recognition to:

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)

➤ www.sbf.admin.ch/diploma > English (top right)

Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH)

➤ www.bag.admin.ch > English (top right)

Swiss Red Cross (SRC)

➤ www.redcross.ch > English (top right)

Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK)

➤ www.edk.ch > English (top right)

Competent cantonal authority

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)

➤ www.sbf.admin.ch/diploma > English (top right)

In this case you can get a “level certificate”.

Swiss ENIC

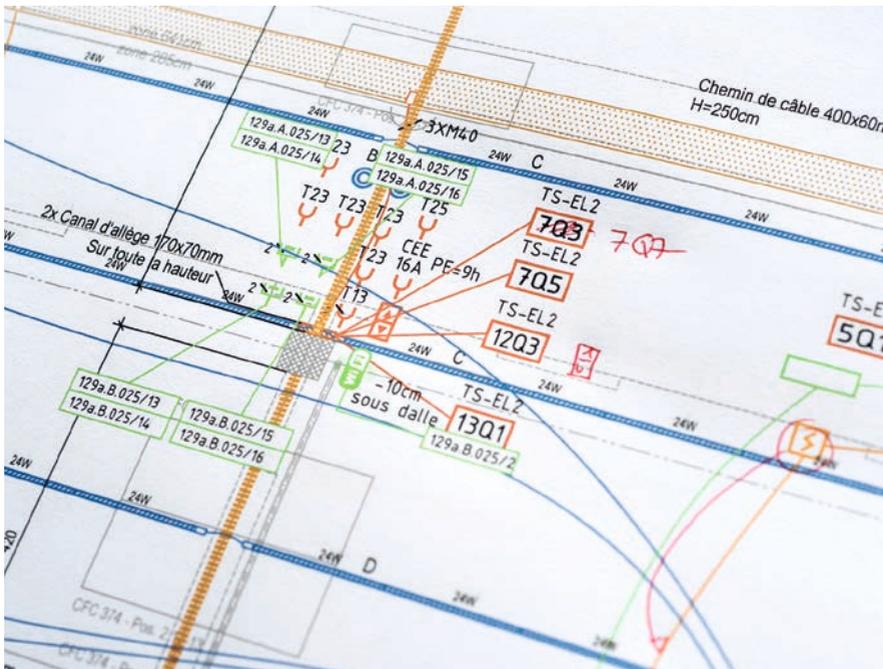
➤ www.enic.ch > English (top right)

In this case you can get a “level certificate”.

This recap only mentions the main authorities that have the power to recognise foreign qualifications in Switzerland. There are others. To find out more, please visit www.recognition.swiss.

Additional resources

- www.berufsberatung.ch, for all questions about apprenticeships, career paths and training
- www.berufsberatung.ch/biz, address of careers advice offices
- www.sem.admin.ch > **English (top right)**, website of the State Secretariat for Migration, with information on entry, training and working in Switzerland
- www.studyinswitzerland.plus, English-language information portal on higher education institutions, studying and life in Switzerland
- www.perspektiven-studium.ch/en, Information on access to higher education in Switzerland for refugees
- www.shop.sdbb.ch, SDBB publications covering the professional activities and types of education/training available in Switzerland



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 Die kantonalen
Berufs-, Studien-
und Laufbahnberatungen


Engaged for Impact
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Are you planning to settle in Switzerland to work or study? Do you know what steps are required to have your foreign qualifications recognised?

This booklet explains the qualification recognition process and the situations in which it is necessary. It also includes real-life examples through personal stories, as well as an interview with an expert in the field.