# Reception - Switzerland

## Reception System

### Overview

Content updated on: 4/07/2025

### Relevant EU legislation

Switzerland is not bound by the recast Reception Conditions Directive. A similar national legal framework applies: Asylum Act | Loi sur l'asile, 26/08/1998

### National legislation

26/08/1998: Asylum Act | Loi sur l'asile

### Competent authority and stakeholders

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| **Authority responsible for reception** | Following the entry into force of the Asylum reform since 1 March 2019, Switzerland organises the asylum procedure into six asylum regions. Each of these regions has a federal asylum centre that conduct the asylum procedure and up to four centres that do not. The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) remains the responsible authority for asylum procedure and reception, including coordination of the Federal Asylum Centres.<br><br>The Conference of Regional Managers (CRM) is the body responsible for the exchange of information and supra-regional coordination of business between the six asylum regions and the SEM's central office in Wabern, Bern in relation to accommodation and other arrangements for asylum seekers. |
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| **Other actors involved** | Not applicable |

## Organisational aspects

Reception in Switzerland is managed at regional level, in a very decentralized Federal Asylum centres and at cantonal level. Each canton has its own reception facility.

The running of the Federal Asylum centres and security matters are entrusted to private companies. The SEM delegates the task of managing the operation of reception and processing centres to third parties under Article 24b (1) AsylA. Thus, the ORS Service AG (asylum regions Western Switzerland, French speaking Switzerland and Berne) and AOZ Asyl Organisation Zürich (asylum regions Eastern Switzerland, Ticino and Central Switzerland, Zurich) are responsible for running the centres.

Security services at the lodges are provided by the companies Securitas AG (asylum regions French speaking Switzerland, Eastern Switzerland, Zurich, Ticino and Central Switzerland) and Protectas SA (asylum regions Western Switzerland and Zurich).

## Allocation of applicants to geographical areas within the territory

Information is currently not available.

## Staff and training

Information is currently not available.

## Reception phases

The provision of reception conditions is triggered upon lodging an application for international protection. Subsequent applicants, and persons whose application has been dismissed, or rejected within the 48-hour procedure, or having received a final decision rejecting the application and waiting to leave the country, have access to Emergency Aid including accommodation.

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## Contingency planning

Switzerland currently has a contingency plan in place, which was initially developed in 2012 and later adapted in 2016 and 2017 in response to the refugee crisis in 2015 and the extremely high number of asylum applications.

The contingency plan is activated when there is an influx of asylum seekers beyond the regular capacity, such as during an extraordinary surge in applications. The plan was notably adjusted in 2015 when Switzerland received 39,000 asylum applications, requiring rapid expansion of housing capacity and flexible solutions to manage the unprecedented demand. The contingency plan includes various scenarios based on the number of asylum applications.

It also specifies the responsibilities of different authorities at the state, federal, and cantonal levels, covering aspects like registration, interviews, accommodation, care, and medical checks.

Switzerland maintains a regular capacity of 5,000 places in the reception system, but only half of this is used for permanent accommodation. The remaining capacity serves as buffer space for contingency situations.

The specialised Department of Occupancy Management monitors the occupancy rate, asylum inflows, outflows, and processing times at the first instance. If the occupancy rate approaches the threshold of 85%, this triggers early warnings and actions to manage the accommodation of asylum seekers and avoid overcapacity.

Cantons are required to have their own emergency planning in place. In an emergency, cantonal authorities are responsible for accommodating and providing for the welfare of asylum seekers assigned to them. They are also tasked with conducting evictions if necessary. At the national level, the Special Asylum Staff (SONAS) can be deployed to provide political and strategic leadership in an emergency, coordinating the response at a broader level.

When regular housing capacity reaches its limit, Switzerland relies on buffer capacity rather than building new infrastructure. In certain cases, temporary accommodations may be used, and the system may also activate simpler procurement processes to meet urgent needs.

In response to increased demand, additional staff may be recruited or activated from rosters to handle the surge in asylum applications. Reduced reception

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conditions may also be implemented temporarily to manage the crisis, depending on the severity of the situation.

# Facilities

### Overview of different types of reception facilities according to national classification

Switzerland provides different types of reception facilities for asylum seekers. These facilities are organised as follows:

- **Federal Asylum Centres with Processing Facilities:** These centres handle asylum application lodging and processing, house accommodation for asylum seekers, and include offices for interviewers, interpreters, document examiners, and lawyers. Transfers to cantonal centres are exceptional and occur only if additional information is required or if an extended procedure is needed.
- **Federal Asylum Centres without Processing Facilities:** These centres are for applicants awaiting Dublin transfers or rejected applicants pending removal. Transfers to cantonal asylum centres occur if applicants cannot be removed within the set 140-day period.
- **Special Centres:** These centres cater to uncooperative asylum applicants who significantly endanger public safety and order or disrupt the normal operation of federal asylum centres. Such applicants are temporarily housed in special centres.

Reception centres are evenly distributed across the federal and cantonal levels, taking into account factors such as country of origin, unaccompanied minors (UAMs), families, persons with health problems, and the centre’s capacity. Each canton has its own reception centre, with a total of 26 centres nationwide.

**Capacity:**

- The total capacity of the Swiss reception system is 5,000 places.
- Federal reception centres have a capacity of 4,942 places (EUAA, December 2020).

### Premises at the border

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| **Name of the reception facility** | Airport accommodation/centres transit zones. |
| **Access description** | Semi-closed |
| **Management** | SEM |
| **Type of applicants accommodated** | Information is currently not available. |
| **Number of centres** | 2 |
| **Capacity** | 90 places |
| **Location of the centres within the country** | Zurich Airport, Geneva Airport |

### Initial reception centres

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| **Name of the reception facility** | • Federal Asylum Centres with processing facilities<br>• Federal Asylum Centres without processing facilities |
| **Regime** | Semi-closed (leave and return is limited) |
| **Management** | SEM |
| **Type of applicants accommodated** | • Applicants awaiting a final decision<br>• Applicants to be returned or Dublin transfer |
| **Number of centres** | 6 + 10 |
| **Capacity** | Information is currently not available. |

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| **Location of the centres within the country** | The centres with processing facilities are the following:<br>• Altstätten (Canton of St. Gallen); Basel (Canton of Basel);<br>• Boudry (Canton of Neuchâtel);<br>• Zurich (Canton of Zurich);<br>• Chiasso (Canton of Ticino);<br>• Berne (Canton of Berne). |

## Collective accommodation centres

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| **Name of the reception facility** | • Federal Asylum centres run by the Confederation<br>• Cantons reception centres |
| **Regime** | Semi-closed |
| **Management** | • Confederation<br>• Cantonal Authorities and Municipalities |
| **Type of applicants accommodated** | • Confederation in Federal Asylum Centres with/without processing facilities: applicants awaiting a final decision; persons whose application has been dismissed, Persons to be returned, awaiting a Dublin transfer<br>• Cantons: applicants awaiting a final decision for more than 140 days and persons having received a final decision granting protection (depending on the canton) |
| **Number of centres** | • Confederation: 6 + 10<br>• Cantons: 26 |
| **Capacity** | same as initial reception centres |

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| **Location of the centres within the country** | same as initial reception centres |

### Individual accommodation centres (such as private houses, flats, hotels)

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| **Name of the reception facility** | Information is currently not available. |
| **Regime** | Information is currently not available. |
| **Management** | Information is currently not available. |
| **Type of applicants accommodated** | Information is currently not available. |
| **Number of centres** | Information is currently not available. |
| **Capacity** | Information is currently not available. |
| **Location of the centres within the country** | Information is currently not available. |

### Temporary solutions when housing capacities is temporarily exhausted

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| **Name of the reception facility** | Remote locations centres |
| **Regime** | Semi-closed |
| **Management** | SEM |
| **Type of applicants accommodated** | • Applicants awaiting a final decision<br>• Applicants to be returned |
| **Number of centres** | 3 located in former military shelters and 4 in vacant state-owned buildings. Civil defense and emergency shelters located in the vicinity of the Reception Centers (only for night stay) are not included. |
| **Capacity** | 4.800 |

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| **Location of the centres within the country** | Military shelters:<br>• Thun (BE),<br>• Brugg (AG), (reopens as of 30 November 2020, for a period of 3 years)<br>• Burre (JU)<br><br>State Buildings:<br>• Chiasso,<br>• Schaffhausen,<br>• Steckborn (TG),<br>• Altstätten |

### Reception facilities for applicants with special needs

Switzerland's national legislation does provide for reception facilities catering to persons with special needs. Unaccompanied minors (UAMs), single women and single women with children are generally accommodated with specific house arrangements in reception centres. These facilities operate under the cantonal and federal asylum systems, with each canton responsible for managing their own accommodation and support structures.

Accommodation in reception centres is provided with consideration for the differences and needs of men and women, families, pregnant women, and minors. Mixed rooms are not permitted.

The Swiss Accommodation Operating Plan (PLEX) provides guidelines on how to approach applicants and identify signs of sexual violence or exploitation in order to offer adequate support. Personnel in the Federal reception centres are required to provide information and support to all applicants accommodated.

Assistance for traumatised applicants is offered by NGOs and CSOs, particularly for victims of torture and war.

In all federal and cantonal centres, caretakers are available to support individuals with daily affairs and provide information on daily life necessities.

**Unaccompanied Minors:** Specific reception centers for UAMs are located in Vaud, Bern, Zurich, Basel, Losone, Argovia, Kriens, and Schwyz. Other specialized

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reception centres are to be established in all cantons (as per SEM's request).

**Women:** Women are housed together with other single women or single women with children.

The special needs of children, families, and individuals are taken into consideration.

Switzerland offers a wide variety of accommodation options, and adequate accommodation is always available, including for persons with physical disabilities. Special support and services (e.g. for a wheelchair) can be organised quickly. (Source: EUAA, Persons with disabilities in asylum and reception systems , January 2024)

# Material reception conditions provided in kind and cash

### Definition of material reception conditions

Material reception conditions are defined by the Asylum Act, Chapter 5, "Social Assistance and Emergency Aid". Social assistance and emergency aid are the primary material reception conditions for asylum applicants and persons in need of protection.

The cantons are responsible for assessing and granting social welfare and emergency aid to individuals in need of support. Under the law, federal authorities are required to subsidize these payments, reimbursing the cantons for these expenditures.

### Material reception conditions provided in kind

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| **Type and purpose** | Food: in kind in Federal Centres and in kind or voucher in the cantonal centres; clothing in kind at cantonal level, in collaboration with NGOs. |
| **Duration and recurrence** | During the entire asylum procedure. |

### Financial allowances and vouchers

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| **Type and purpose** | At the cantonal level, if accommodation, food, clothing, or healthcare cannot be provided in kind, a financial allowance is applied.<br><br>A child allowance is provided for children living abroad.<br><br>An additional financial allowance is given in the case of non-cash benefits. |
| **Duration and recurrence** | The allowance is provided for the entire duration of the asylum procedure.<br><br>Child allowance is withheld and paid only once the applicant is granted refugee status or temporarily admitted. |
| **Calculation and amount** | The amount varies significantly from one canton to another. |
| **Applicants granted allowance** | Entitlement to financial allowance depends on the income. |
| **Modalities of provision** | Information is currently not available. |

### Material reception conditions for vulnerable persons

Information is not currently available.

## Rights and obligations during reception

### Provision of information and counselling

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| **Modalities of information provision on benefits and obligations related to reception conditions** | All asylum seekers receive an 8-page document containing information on the asylum procedure, rights and obligations, accommodation (available in several languages) |
| **Provision of legal assistance on the reception conditions available** | According to art. 14 of the Ordinance of the FDJP on the on the management of federal reception centres in the field of asylum and accommodation at airports : People accommodated in Confederation centers and accommodation in airports have free access to information on the providers referred to in art. 102 f , al. 2, LAsi and other documents, in particular lists of legal advisers and representatives, with their contact details. |
| **House rules** | Information is currently not available. |

## Freedom of movement within the territory

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| **Assignment of a particular area of residence to applicants** | As provided in art. 17 of the Ordinance of the FDJP on the on the management of federal reception centres in the field of asylum and accommodation at airports<br>• In the Federal Centres and in remote locations: restricted at night (prior authorisation, except at weekends)<br>• Upon adoption of restriction or exclusion order by the cantonal authorities in the cantonal accommodation centres<br>• In transit zones asylum seekers are not allowed to go out of the transit zone |
| **Reporting obligations** | Information is currently not available. |

## Employment and vocational training

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| **Time limit to access the labour market** | Applicants are no longer allowed to be involved in gainful activities while residing in Federal Asylum centres - art. 83 par. 1 Asylum Act following revision which entered into force since 1 March 2019. The ban is for approximately 3 months from lodging the application, as the procedure should last approximately 140 days.<br><br>However, asylum seekers may be involved in public utility activities. Exception: art. 83 par. 3 - the ban is not applicable to those who are entitled to pursue gainful employment in accordance with the immigration provisions (who are mainly persons already living in Switzerland with a residence permit and who submit a subsequent asylum application). |
| **Criteria to access the labour market** | Asylum seekers (*Ausweis N*) may access the job market if:<br><br>• The general economic and employment situation allows it.<br>• An employer must request to employ an asylum seeker.<br>• The salary and employment conditions customary for the location, profession and sector are fulfilled; and<br>• It must be established that no other Swiss or EU/EFTA resident or foreign national with a residence permit with the required profile can be found for the job. This means that Swiss or EU/EFTA residents and foreign persons with a residence permit have priority on the job market. |
| **Employment support for applicants** | Information is currently not available. |

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| **Adults' access to vocational training** | Asylum Seekers have in principle access to higher education and apprenticeship. An integration programme, *"Stabilisation and activation of resources for people with special needs"* (available in French, German and Italian), helps Swiss cantons to implement ad hoc measures for people who cannot achieve their integration potential, so they receive vocational training or training in employment skills when they arrive in Switzerland. (Source: EUAA, Applicants with disabilities in asylum and reception, January 2024) |
| **Access to tertiary education** | • Applicants are excluded from the public scholarship programme<br>• Employers' reluctance to employ or offer apprenticeship pending asylum seekers application and status |

### Healthcare

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| **Medical screening** | Information is currently not available. |
| **Level of healthcare** | • Basic and emergency care in the Federal Centres<br>• Medical examination and treatment in the Cantonal Reception Centres<br>• Health insurance for all asylum seekers during the procedure, including those under emergency aid |
| **Access to healthcare** | Information is currently not available. |

### Education for minors

Education is compulsory for all children under the age of 16. For children between the ages of 16 and 18, non-compulsory measures are adopted by cantonal and communal authorities, and no vocational training is available at the

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federal level. Education practices vary across cantons, with some offering special language training before or during access to the school system.

Currently, children accommodated in federal asylum centres (during the first phase of the asylum procedure, RPC) do not have access to formal education due to the short duration of their stay in these centres, following the implementation of the new asylum procedure in March 2019. However, special arrangements are in place to offer appropriate activities and lessons for children of school age.

### Socio-cultural orientation and language learning

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| **Access to socio-cultural orientation** | Information is currently not available. |
| **Language classes** | Information is currently not available. |

### Sufficient means

### Arrangement of private accommodation

Applicants can live outside of the reception structures and arrange accommodation at cantonal level.

### Contribution to reception and healthcare costs

According to Article 85, Paragraph 1 of the Asylum Law, applicants are required to reimburse social assistance, departure and enforcement costs, as well as the costs of the appeal procedure, if they have the necessary means at a later point in time. This contribution is required only once the individual’s financial situation allows for reimbursement.

### Sufficient means test

Switzerland do not apply means test.

## Sanction regimes, reduction or withdrawal of material reception conditions

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### Circumstances for reducing or withdrawing material reception conditions

Social benefits may be reduced or withdrawn when the asylum seeker (art. 83 par. 1 Asylum Act):

- Has obtained reception benefits or attempted to obtain them by providing untrue or incomplete information;
- Refuses to provide information about his/her financial circumstances, or fails to authorise the office to obtain this information;
- Does not report important changes in his or her circumstances;
- Neglects to improve his or her situation, in particular by refusing to accept reasonable work or accommodation;
- Without consulting the competent office, terminates an employment contract or lease or is responsible for its termination, thereby exacerbating his or her situation;
- Uses social benefits improperly;
- Fails to comply with the instructions of the competent office despite the threat of withdrawing of social benefits;
- Endangers public security or order;
- Has been prosecuted or convicted of a crime;
- Seriously and culpably fails to cooperate, in particular by refusing to disclose his or her identity; or
- Fails to comply with the instructions from staff responsible for the proceedings or from the accommodation facilities, thereby endangering order and security.

Emergency Aid is unconditional for all persons present on the Swiss territory and cannot be withdrawn.

Disciplinary measures can be applied by a reception facility against asylum applicants and persons in need of protection for the following:

- if they violate the obligations set up for being accommodated in a reception centre -noncompliance with the centre's internal regulations, no participation at domestic work or absence to appointments related to the asylum procedure or other (art. 21- 23 of the Ordinance of the FDJP on the on the management of federal reception centres in the field of asylum and accommodation at airports)
- if they threaten public safety and order.

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- The decision is limited in time.

### Possible sanctions and procedure

Article 83(1) Asylum Act provides for partial or total withdrawal of material reception conditions. It applies for the social benefits received in respect of art. 82 par. 3 of the Asylum Act.

Article 25 of the Ordinance of the FDJP on the on the management of federal reception centres in the field of asylum and accommodation at airports provides that the disciplinary authority (housing management) may take the following disciplinary measures against asylum seekers and persons in need of protection:

- ban on entering certain premises normally open to all asylum seekers and persons in need of protection;
- refusal of exit;
- refusal of a ticket for public transport;
- refusal of pocket money;
- exclusion from accommodation for a maximum of 24 hours;
- assignment to a specific centre within the meaning of art. 24a Asylum Law.

Federal and Cantonal Authorities can take the decision to reduce or withdraw material reception conditions, depending on the relevant reception facilities under their responsibility.

Before any reduction or withdrawal is ordered, an assessment of proportionality is made and the subsistence minimum has to be considered. The basic need is defined as “enforcement legal subsistence minimum” (*betreibungsrechtliches Existenzminimum*) and differs in each canton.

Disciplinary measures applied by reception centre management are communicated orally, except for the exclusion from accommodation for more than 8 hours and assignment to a special centre, which are in written (art. 26 of the Ordinance of the FDJP on the on the management of federal reception centres in the field of asylum and accommodation at airports).

### Review of the sanction decision

Disciplinary measures taken by accommodation management may be appealed as follows (art. 28 of the Ordinance of the FDJP on the on the management of

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federal reception centres in the field of asylum and accommodation at airports):

- disciplinary measures pronounced orally - before the direction of the SEM Asylum Staff,
- disciplinary measures concerning exclusion from a centre for more than 8 hours, assignment to a special centre and refusal to leave for more than 24 hours - before the Federal Administrative Court.

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