

## APPLYING FOR A STUDENT VISA

Please read all the following information carefully and prepare the required documents well in advance.

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### 1. Differences between a visa and a residence permit

Visa	Residence permit
Required for some nationalities but not all	Required for all non-Swiss nationals
Delivered by Swiss representation overseas (embassy or consulate)	Delivered by cantonal authorities (in Geneva: Office cantonal de la population et des migrations – OCPM)
Valid for 1-3 months	Valid for 12 months
Allows you to enter Switzerland at any entry point (airport, border)	Allows you to enter Switzerland at any entry point (airport, border)
Does not allow you to live in Switzerland	Allows you to live in the canton that delivered it
Cannot be extended	Can and must be extended for the duration of your study programme
Attached to a blank page in your passport	Separate document

## 2. Do I need a student visa?

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Please consult the [Swiss State Secretariat for Migration \(SEM\)](#) website to check whether your nationality requires a student visa.

Nationality	Need student visa	Need residence permit
Non-EU/EFTA, no visa waiver	Yes	Yes, apply after arrival. Prepare now.
Non-EU/EFTA, but qualify for visa waiver	No	Yes, apply after arrival. Prepare now.
EU/EFTA	No	Yes, apply after arrival. Prepare now.

### 2.1 Non-EU/EFTA, no visa waiver

You *do* need a long-term student visa (visa D), as you will see from the SEM table. This also applies if the table says your nationality does not require a visa for stays of up to 90 days but does require one for stays longer than 90 days. The USA and Canada, for example, fall in this category. All visa applicants must collect their visa from a Swiss representation overseas. You will not be able to obtain your residence permit, once in Geneva, without first having obtained your visa overseas.

### 2.2 Non-EU/EFTA, but qualify for visa waiver

You *do not* need a student visa if your nationality qualifies for a visa waiver.

To the best of our knowledge, the qualifying countries are: Andorra, Brunei, Japan, Malaysia, Monaco, New Zealand, San Marino, Singapore or The Vatican City. Kindly consult the SEM table or the OCPM directly to verify if your nationality qualifies. Tip: if you are a Non-EU/EFTA national and the table says your nationality does not require a visa, even for stays longer than 90 days, then you do not need a visa.

Although your application is a residence permit application, the documents you need to submit are all the documents indicated in our [visa checklist](#) (ignore the sentence mentioning documents required by the embassy/consulate, since you will not need to contact any representation). Please prepare all the documents in advance and present them to the Geneva cantonal authorities (Office Cantonal de la Population et des Migrations - OCPM) when you arrive.

Note: Please see the residence permit section further down this page.

### 2.3 EU/EFTA nationals

You *do not* need a visa. You will have to apply for your residence permit within 14 days of your arrival in Geneva. Prepare your documents before you travel to Switzerland (see Residence permit application procedure).

### 3. Applying for a student visa

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It is helpful to understand that the Swiss student visa application process involves both the *federal* and *cantonal* administrative authorities of Switzerland. Some general regulations are set by the federal authorities, which are responsible for embassies and consulates (representations) overseas. Additional regulations are specific to each of the 26 cantons, such as Geneva, and these may or may not be clear to consular staff. This can cause variations in instructions.

All visa applications transit from the representation overseas, to the Swiss federal authorities, to the canton, sometimes back for an additional federal verification, and back to the representation for visa delivery. You need to anticipate a process that is somewhat complex and lengthy: 3-6 months.

The information provided here is based on our close relationship with the Geneva authorities and on our years of experience supporting our students throughout the application procedure. It pertains to the canton of Geneva only; if you plan to live elsewhere, please consult the relevant immigration authorities.

Print our [visa checklist](#) and instructions

Any missing document will delay processing.

Include in your file all the listed documents right from the start, even if they are not requested by the representation. If the representation refuses to include certain documents in your file, please keep these documents and bring them directly to the Geneva cantonal authorities (OCPM) when you arrive in Geneva.

- Obtaining an appointment with a representation might take longer than expected.
- Once submitted, your file will take between 3-7 weeks to reach Switzerland, depending on the country where you submit your application. Apply early!
- Visa applications cannot be submitted directly by you to the OCPM. The application process must begin at the Swiss representation overseas. Only missing documents can be sent later directly to the OCPM.
- If you need to send something directly to OCPM, always indicate your full name, date of birth and nationality.
- Make sure to sign and date the documents everywhere requested, and keep copies/ scans of everything.
- Note: Although it may seem confusing to you and/or the representation to have to submit Form E (which is, per se, student residency in the Geneva canton), the OCPM does need to receive these, and all other documents indicated in our visa checklist, as part of your visa application. All documents will contribute to the advance creation of your residence permit application file for when you arrive in Geneva, and your visa will absolutely not be granted without them.

#### 4. Important tips

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- Visa applications take 3-6 months to be processed. Be sure to submit your application no later than May.
- Try to book a flight with flexible departure dates to accommodate possible delays in the arrival of your visa.
- Make sure your funds are documented and come from reliable sources, such as foreign banks recognised in Switzerland or other internationally-reputed banks, and/or scholarship-granting bodies. It is also preferable to have funds available in an account in your own name, rather than in a guarantor's name (if your guarantor is overseas), whenever possible.
- If you are still waiting to hear about a loan or scholarship application, include in your visa file copies of the application(s).
- Double-check our visa checklist. Any missing document will delay the processing of your application.
- Files that are complete and well-organised are generally treated more efficiently. Make sure no information is missing, including signatures and dates. Present the documents in a logical order and ensure your statements are clear and concise.
- All forms can be filled out in English.
- It is generally easier to apply for and collect your visa from the same representation. However, if you plan to travel or move during the summer, do not delay your visa application: apply as planned at your nearest representation and, after you move, ask the nearest representation at your new location to continue processing your visa application.
- Some representations ask for proof of payment of tuition fees. Our invoice for the first semester will only be available mid-August. If you are in this situation, please contact the Admission Office ([admission@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:admission@graduateinstitute.ch)).
- Your 2020-2021 programme curriculum will be available in June (we do not have a set date yet). Therefore, include the 2019-2020 curriculum in your application, mentioning that the 2020-2021 version will be very similar.
- Housing offers are not sufficient proof of housing. You need to include the confirmation. Confirmation of temporary accommodation, to cover your first few weeks in Geneva, will be sufficient at this stage.
- Follow up regularly with the OCPM and the representation, as they might require additional information.

## 5. Residence permit application procedure

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### 5.1 [Students with a visa](#)

Within 14 days of your arrival in Switzerland, you will need to apply for your student residence permit at the OCPM.

The following will be required:

- E Form, completed and signed
  - Your valid passport, stamped with your student visa (original and copy)
  - Sufficient money in cash: approximately CHF 237 (based on our latest information)
  - Your Graduate Institute certificate of registration
  - Confirmation of housing in Geneva, once again
- For student residences: copy of the confirmation
  - For direct rentals: copy of the lease
  - For sublets: written confirmation by the tenant/lease holder + copy of his/her ID + copy of the flat lease + [Form EL](#) (*click here for an unofficial translation and helpful tips*)

Several weeks later, you will receive your residence permit through the post at the address indicated in your file (make sure it is accurate).

In the meantime, if you need an official confirmation of your residence in Geneva (to open a bank account, etc.), you can ask the OCPM for a temporary document which costs approx. CHF 30.

### 5.2 [Students with a visa waiver](#)

Certain nationals qualify for a visa waiver. To the best of our knowledge, these could be from *Andorra, Brunei, Japan, Malaysia, Monaco, New Zealand, San Marino, Singapore or The Vatican City* - please check further up this page.

Once in Geneva, within 14 days you will be required to bring the following to the OCPM:

- [E Form](#), completed and signed
- Your valid passport (original and copy)
- Approximately CHF 142 (based on our latest information)
- Your Graduate Institute certificate of registration
- Confirmation of housing in Geneva, once again :
  - For student residences: copy of the confirmation
  - For direct rentals: copy of the lease
  - For sublets: written confirmation by the tenant/lease holder + copy of his/her ID + copy of the flat lease + [Form EL](#) (*click here for an unofficial translation and helpful tips*)

### 5.3 [Students without a visa \(EU/EFTA nationals\)](#)

EU/EFTA nationals do not need a visa.

Within 14 days of your arrival in Switzerland, you will need to apply for your student

residence permit by post: [Office cantonal de la population et des migrations, Service étrangers, Case postale 2652, 1211 Genève 2](#)

Make sure to send **2** copies of the following:

- [E Form](#), completed and signed
- Proof of housing in Geneva
- For student residences: copy of the confirmation
- For direct rentals: copy of the lease
- For sublets: written confirmation by the tenant/lease holder + copy of his/her ID + copy of the flat lease + Form EL (*click here for an unofficial translation and helpful tips*)
  - Your valid passport (original and copy)
  - [Passport-format](#) photographs with your full name written on the back
  - Approximately CHF 65 in cash (based on our latest information)
  - Your Graduate Institute certificate of registration

Additional documents that may be required:

- Curriculum vitae or resume
- Your Graduate Institute admission letter, available on your online follow-up
- Your Graduate Institute admission attestation, available on your online follow-up after receipt of your pre-registration fee
- Motivation letter indicating the start and end dates of your study programme, the intended future impact of your Graduate Institute programme on your career, your plans following the end of your study programme and your commitment to leave Switzerland at the end of your studies
- Course description (print-out).
- Proof of financial means: ideally, approx. CHF 2,000 per month. For example:
  - Bank statements
  - Scholarship letter, if any
  - Proof of any loans and available savings
  - Letter from a guarantor, stating that s/he will assist you financially during your studies
  - Any paid employment plans

Several weeks later, you will receive your residence permit through the post at the address indicated in your file (make sure it is accurate).

In the meantime, if you need an official confirmation of your residence in Geneva (to open a bank account, etc.), you can ask the OCPM for a temporary document which costs approx. CHF 30.