



Regulation of the profession

Hiking guide

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Introduction

Holders of foreign professional qualifications may pursue a professional activity for which they are qualified in their country of origin in Switzerland, provided they meet the legal requirements. This factsheet explains the current regulations governing individual hiking guide activities in Switzerland. In order to carry out such activities, foreign professional qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates, etc.) must be comparable with the Swiss qualifications required by law.

The procedures differ depending on the duration of the professional activity in Switzerland: in the case of establishment in Switzerland, recognition of foreign professional qualifications is required before commencement of the regulated professional activity: www.sbf.admin.ch/becc

Service providers established in an EU/EFTA country, who wish to pursue a regulated professional activity in Switzerland as self-employed persons or on secondment for a maximum of 90 working days per calendar year, are subject to a declaration requirement. The professional qualifications are verified by means of a fast-track procedure: www.sbf.admin.ch/edeclaration

Certain hiking guide activities do not fall under the high-risk category and are therefore considered 'non-regulated' activities. In other words, they may be carried out without the need for recognition of professional qualifications or any obligation to declare the activities to SERI. Employment prospects depend on supply and demand on the Swiss labour market. It is therefore possible to apply directly for employment or to accept jobs in a self-employed capacity.

1. Scope of activity

Hiking guide activities in Switzerland are subject to the provisions of the Federal Act on Mountain Guides and other Organisers of High-Risk Activities¹ and its corresponding Ordinance². If the activities to be carried out in Switzerland fall under the high-risk category set out in the above-mentioned legislation, then holders of professional qualifications obtained outside of Switzerland must have their qualifications recognised or verified in Switzerland **before** beginning to work.

¹ Federal Act on Mountain Guides and Organisers of other High-Risk Activities (SR 935.91)

² Ordinance on Mountain Guides and Organisers of other High-Risk Activities (SR 935.911; hereinafter: High-Risk Activities Ordinance).

2. Scope of federal legislation

At federal level, the Ordinance on High-Risk Activities³ establishes the circumstances where hiking guide activities are deemed to be regulated:

- Below a certain difficulty level, activities are not considered to be high-risk and can therefore be freely practiced by hiking guides, i.e. without the need for recognition or verification of foreign professional qualifications (i.e. unregulated professional activity).
- Above a certain difficulty level, activities can only be practiced by mountain guides and therefore not by hiking guides (i.e. regulated professional activity)

The High-Risk Activities Ordinance applies the following criteria:

- Nature of the activity:

In order to fall under the scope of the Ordinance mentioned above, and therefore be deemed a regulated activity, the hiking guide activity must:

- be primarily carried out on Swiss territory. Exception: there is no need for a preliminary declaration of the activity if a route starts and finishes in another country and passes temporarily through Swiss territory. In such circumstances, the activity is not considered to be regulated;
- generate a primary or secondary income. Exception: income generated exclusively under the supervision and responsibility of non-profit organisations (e.g. Swiss Alpine Club, a sports club, a hiking club, or a school).

- Type of terrain for summer hikes:

Summer hikes at difficulty level T1 to T3 do not require authorisation (i.e. unregulated activity). There is no need for recognition or verification of foreign qualifications.

Only mountain guides can supervise hikes at difficulty level T4 or above. Exception: upon completion of corresponding supplemental training provided or recognised by the professional organisation *Schweizer Wanderleiter* or *Schweizer Bergführerverband* (SBV), hiking guides may lead T4-level Alpine hikes.

In other words, commercial summer hike activities can always be carried out without authorisation as long as the hikes do not cross types of terrain reserved for mountain guides.

³ Art. 8 para 4 of High-Risk Activities Ordinance.

The chart below shows the classification scheme⁴:

- Green: activity not subject to federal legislation, therefore not regulated;
- Orange: regulated activity, reserved for mountain guides; exception: hiking guides who complete corresponding supplemental training;
- Red: activity reserved for mountain guides and therefore may not be carried out by persons who lack the required qualification.

	Level	Trail/markings/terrain	Requirements
	T1 Hike	Well traced-out trail or path. The exposed areas are very safe. Any accident risks can be eliminated with normal behaviour. If marked following FSTP convention: yellow.	None. Can also be completed in trainers. Orientation is not a problem, even possible without a map.
	T2 Mountain hike	Trail or path with continuous marked-out route and regular uphill sections. Some steep terrain. Risk of falling not excluded. If marked following FSTP convention: white-red-white.	Surefootedness. Hiking boots recommended. Basic orientation skills.
	T3 Challenging mountain hike	Paths are not always visible in the terrain, exposed sections may require ropes or chains; use of hands may be necessary for balance. Some exposed sections with risks of falling, scree, pathless craggy ground. If marked following FSTP convention: white-red-white.	Surefootedness. Good hiking boots required. Intermediate orientation skills. Basic mountain experience.
	T4 Alpine hike	Path traces not always present, hikers may sometimes need to use their hands to move forward. Quite exposed terrain, tricky grassy slopes, craggy ground, easy névés and snow-free glacier sections. If marked following FSTP convention: white-blue-white.	Familiarity with exposed terrain; sturdy hiking boots. Ability to evaluate the terrain and good orientation skills. Alpine experience; in bad weather the retreat may be difficult.
	T5 Challenging alpine hike	Often without paths, some easy climbing sections. Difficult exposed terrain, steep craggy ground, glaciers and névés with a risk of slipping. If marked: white-blue-white.	Hiking boots required. Experience in judging the ground and very good orientation skills. Solid alpine experience and basic knowledge of using ice axes and ropes.
	T6 Very challenging alpine hike	Mostly without a path, climbing sections up to II. Often very exposed, tricky steep craggy ground, snow-free glaciers with high risk of slipping. Paths are not normally marked.	Excellent orientation skills. In-depth alpine experience and well acquainted with the use of technical alpine equipment.

- Type of terrain for winter hikes using snow shoes:

Snow shoe tours at difficulty levels WT1 and WT2 are possible without the need for authorisation (non-regulated activity).

Snow shoe tours at level WT3 are regulated and, applying the criteria indicated above, the corresponding foreign qualifications must be recognised (in the case of establishment in Switzerland) or verified (in the case of a temporary provision of services) by SERI⁵.

The route must not cross any glaciers, must not require the use of any technical aids, such as crampons, ice axes or ropes in order to ensure the safety of customers.

Difficulty level of WT4 and above is reserved exclusively for mountain guides. Hiking guides therefore cannot practice these activities on a commercial basis in these categories.

The chart below shows the classification scheme⁶:

⁴ Appendix 2, let 1 of High-Risk Activities Ordinance

⁵ www.sbf.admin.ch/qualification

⁶ Annexe 2, no. 3 of High-Risk Activities Ordinance.

- Green: activity not subject to federal legislation, therefore not regulated;
- Orange: regulated activity;
- Red: activity reserved for mountain guides and therefore may not be carried out by persons who lack the required qualification.

	Level	Terrain	Dangers	Requirements
	WT1 Easy snow shoe tour	< 25°. Overall flat or not very steep. No steep slopes in close proximity.	No risk of avalanche. No risk of slipping or falling.	Knowledge of avalanches not required.
	WT2 Snow shoe tour	< 25°. Overall flat or not very steep. No steep slopes nearby.	Risk of avalanche. No risk of slipping or falling.	Ability to judge the situation with regard to avalanches.
	WT3 Challenging snow shoe tour provided the route does not cross a glacier, no technical aids are required, such as crampons, ice axes or ropes, and an appropriate overall assessment reveals that there is at most a low risk of avalanche in the region concerned.	< 30°. Not very steep to moderately steep overall. Short steep sections.	Risk of avalanche. Low risk of slipping, short slippery areas.	Ability to judge the situation with regard to avalanches.
	WT4 Snow shoe tour	< 30°. Moderately steep. Short steep sections and/or crossing of slopes. Some craggy ground. Glacier without many crevasses.	Avalanche risk. Risk of slipping with risk of injury. Low risk of falling.	Good ability to judge the situation with regard to avalanches. Good walking technique. Basic knowledge of the alpine environment.
	WT5 Alpine snow shoe tour	< 35°. Steep. Short steep sections and/or crossing of slopes and/or rocky ledges. Glacier	Avalanche risk. Risk of falling. Risk of falling in a crevasse. Alpine hazards.	Sound ability to judge the situation with regard to avalanches. Good knowledge of the alpine environment. Surefootedness.
	WT6 Challenging alpine snow shoe tour	< 35°. Very steep. Challenging sections and/or crossing of slopes and/or rocky ledges. Glacier with many crevasses.	Avalanche risk. Risk of falling. Risk of falling in crevasses. Alpine hazards.	Sound ability to judge the situation with regard to avalanches. Excellent knowledge of the alpine environment. Surefootedness on rocks, snow and ice.

- Mandatory insurance coverage

Hiking guides are required to take out professional liability insurance (cover: CHF 5 million)⁷.

⁷ Art. 24 of the Ordinance on High-Risk Activities.

3. Specific details for EU/EFTA citizens who wish to provide services in Switzerland

Basic principle

In accordance with the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons⁸, professionals who are legally established in the EU/EFTA may provide services in Switzerland without permanently establishing themselves in the country. In such cases, the duration of service provision is limited to 90 days per calendar year.

If the profession they wish to pursue is regulated, they can take advantage of a fast-track verification procedure for their professional qualifications, as set out in the EU Directive 2005/36/EC⁹, the Federal Act of 14 December 2012 on the Declaration Requirement and the Verification of Service Provider Qualifications in Regulated Professions (DRPA)¹⁰ and its corresponding Ordinance¹¹. The service provision **must be declared in advance to SERI**¹².

Other obligations

In all cases, persons intending to provide services **must also register with the State Secretariat for Migration** (www.sem.admin.ch > Entry & Residence > Free Movement of Persons Switzerland – EU/EFTA > Notification procedure for short-term work in Switzerland). This obligation also applies to non-regulated professions.

What is a service provider?

A service provider is an economically active person who is established in an EU/EFTA country and wishes to temporarily provide services in Switzerland (either in a self-employed capacity or on secondment) for remuneration. Service providers **have not signed an employment contract** with a Swiss employer and perform the regulated activity in Switzerland for a maximum of 90 working days per calendar year. For further information, a detailed factsheet¹³ on the concept of service provision is available on the SERI website.

Persons who are not service providers within the meaning of the AFMP do not benefit from the fast-track qualification verification procedure. They should instead contact SERI's qualification recognition service¹⁴ to have their qualifications recognised in accordance with Title III of Directive 2005/36/EC.

⁸ Agreement of 21 June 1999 between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Swiss Confederation, of the other, on the free movement of persons (AFMP); SR 0.142.112.681

⁹ Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications, OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22, current version in accordance with the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons and the revised EFTA Convention

¹⁰ Federal Act of 14 December 2012 on the Declaration Requirement and the Verification of Service Provider Qualifications in Regulated Professions (DRPA); SR 935.01

¹¹ Ordinance of 26 June 2013 on the Declaration Requirement and the Verification of Service Provider Qualifications in Regulated Professions (VMD); SR 935.011

¹² www.sbf.admin.ch/edeclaration

¹³ Factsheet "[Definition of Service Provider](#)"

¹⁴ www.sbf.admin.ch/becc