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## IMPORTANT INFORMATION concerning the visa process for Switzerland (received 12 August 2016)

Switzerland is an Associate Member of the Schengen Agreement and is therefore part of the Schengen area. In October 2011, the signatories to the Agreement introduced the Visa Information System (VIS), which stores biometric data (fingerprints and image of the face) of Schengen visa applicants. All the Swiss diplomatic and consular missions abroad are now connected to the VIS system.

Visa applicants are required to make an appointment with the Swiss diplomatic or consular mission that serves the area where they live (and in certain cases, with an external service provider) at which they will submit their visa application and register their biometric data in person. This data remains valid in the VIS system for five years.

The Swiss diplomatic or consular missions that serve the areas where applicants live can be found at: [www.eda.admin.ch/eda/fr/home/laender-reise-information.html](http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/fr/home/laender-reise-information.html)

We recommend that applicants contact the relevant mission without delay to obtain a list of the documents that must be included when they submit their visa application. In general, the following documents are required:

- An application form for a type C Schengen visa (short stay), correctly filled in and signed by the applicant. The form, as well as useful additional information about visas is available at [www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/themen/einreise.html](http://www.sem.admin.ch/sem/fr/home/themen/einreise.html).
- Valid travel document and a copy of it. The document should be valid for at least three months after the applicant's return date, and should have been issued within the last 10 years.
- Two recent passport-sized photos.
- A letter of invitation from the entity in Switzerland sponsoring the visit, or a *note verbale* from the sending State, which includes the applicant's first and last names (as they appear in their passport), the reason for and length of their visit. If the entity in Switzerland sponsoring the visit is also paying for the applicant's travel and living expenses, that should be clearly indicated.
- Proof of an insurance policy, which is valid throughout the Schengen area and covers any potential medical expenses up to a value of EUR 30,000 (only applies to holders of ordinary passports). See the Visa Code: [www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/rechtsgrundlagen/weisungen/visa/bfm/vhb1-version-bfm-f.pdf](http://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/rechtsgrundlagen/weisungen/visa/bfm/vhb1-version-bfm-f.pdf).
- Any additional documentation that the relevant Swiss diplomatic or consular mission requests.

The time needed to obtain a visa depends greatly on local circumstances. In addition, Switzerland has signed agreements with certain countries where it is not represented by a diplomatic or consular mission. Under certain circumstances, those agreements allow for visas to be issued by a Schengen State in a country where Switzerland is not represented. It is therefore highly recommended that applicants enquire directly with the Swiss diplomatic or consular mission that serves the area where they live or consult the appropriate website. Appointments for submitting and registering biometric data must therefore be made well in advance, according to information from the Swiss authorities. It should be noted that, depending on the local situation, it may be several weeks before an appointment becomes available. Following Switzerland's entry into the Schengen area, visas are no longer issued upon arrival at Geneva International Airport.

