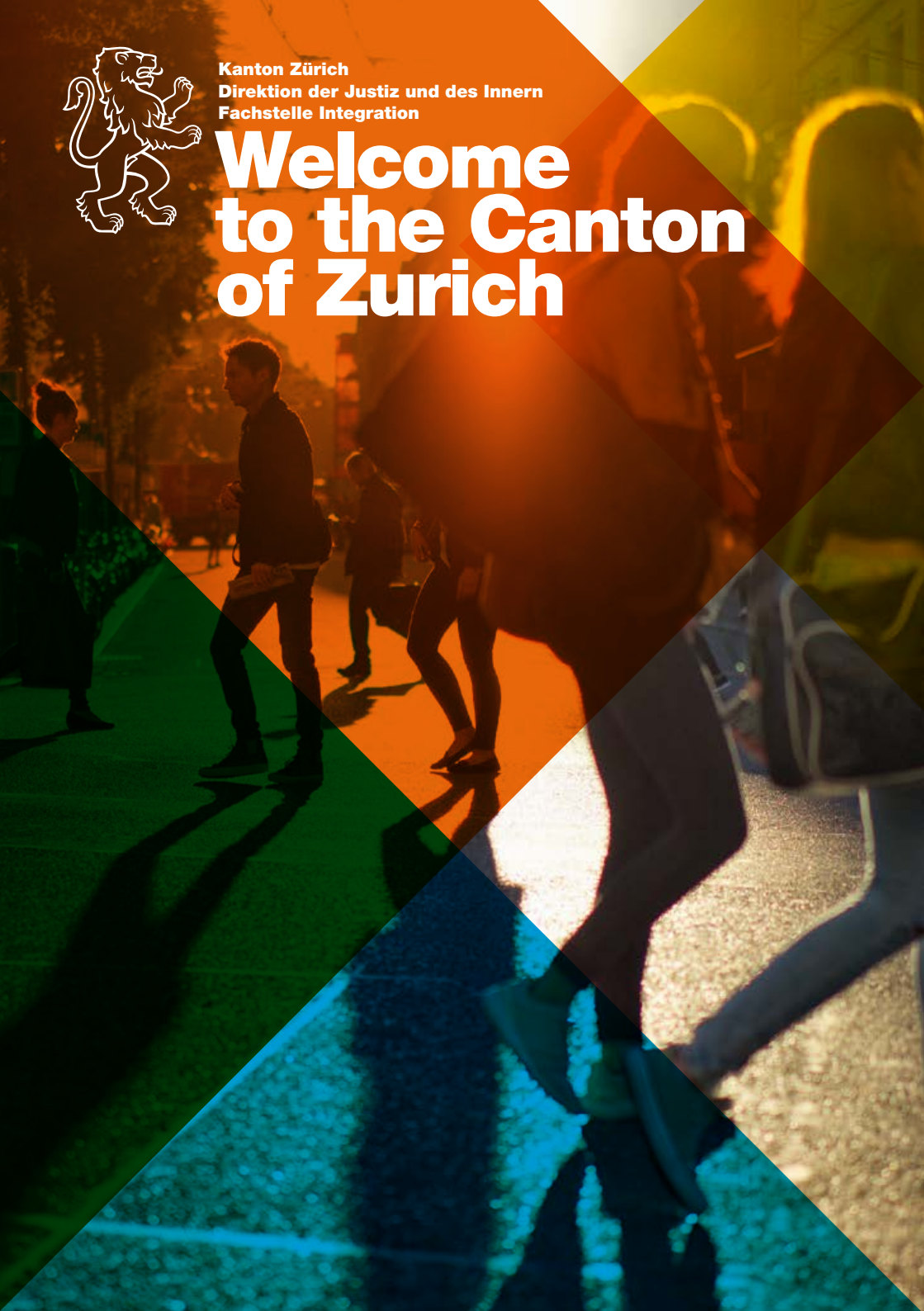




Kanton Zürich  
Direktion der Justiz und des Innern  
Fachstelle Integration

# Welcome to the Canton of Zurich



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# Preface

## Welcome to the Canton of Zurich

Dear Reader

«Grüezi» and welcome to the Canton of Zurich.

You have moved to an attractive canton, which, thanks to its good living and working conditions, international feel and active integration policy, creates a welcoming and pleasant environment.

People from around 190 nations live here and contribute to the diversity of Zurich's population. Many of them have found a second home in their new community.

From registering in your new place of residence to information on public services and leisure activities – we have put it all together for you in this welcome brochure. We hope that this information is helpful and will make moving into your new home easier.

Many local authorities have integration officers who organise welcome presentations or events for newcomers. They can advise you on language courses and integration services and will be happy to answer any questions you may have about everyday life in this area of Switzerland.

I hope you will enjoy living here and getting to know the Canton of Zurich.



**Nina Gilgen**

Delegate for Integration, Canton of Zurich



# Arriving in the Canton of Zurich

## When you arrive

Once you have arrived in the Canton of Zurich, you will have to organise your new life. You need to address the following issues within the first few days or weeks after your arrival:

- Registering at your new place of residence: If you move to a municipality in the Canton of Zurich, you must register there within 14 days of arriving at your new home. Within these 14 days, you must also apply for a residence permit («Aufenthaltsbewilligung») if you have not already done so. Various documents are required for registration. Your registration office («Einwohnermeldeamt») will tell you about all the necessary documents and the related registration fees.
- Buying compulsory health insurance: To register at your new place of residence, you must provide proof that you are insured with a health insurance company. If you cannot provide proof of health insurance («Krankenversicherung») at the time of registration, you must present a copy of your policy within three months.
- Enrolling your children at school: In Switzerland, all children between the ages of 4 and 15 are required to attend school. To enrol your children in kindergarten or school, please contact the local authority or the head of the local school in your place of residence.

## Information and advice

Municipalities in the Canton of Zurich often welcome their new residents at special events. You will be contacted if your new place of residence is organising such a social event for newcomers.

If you need further information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your local authority. In many communities, special integration officers («Integrationsbeauftragte») will be happy to help new residents with problems or questions. There are also various information centres that specialise in particular issues. Some of these information centres offer services in various languages. On the final pages of this brochure, you will find a list of important contacts and information centres in the Canton of Zurich.

## Opening hours

Public offices are usually open Monday to Friday, from 8 a.m. – 12 noon and from 1.30 p.m. – 5 p.m. Please check the exact opening hours before you visit any office in person and note that some offices will ask you to make an appointment in advance. Appointments may be subject to waiting times.

The majority of shops are open from Monday to Saturday during the day and are closed on Sundays. On Sundays, most shops are closed. The Canton of Zurich also has several public holidays («gesetzliche Feiertage») when most shops are closed.

## Mobile phone communication

In Switzerland, there are three major mobile communication providers, each with their own network: Salt, Sunrise and Swisscom. However, there are other mobile operators and costs vary greatly. It is always a good idea to compare services and costs before signing a contract.

# Residence & Family Reunification

## Residence

If you wish to work in Switzerland or live here for more than three months, you must apply for a residence permit («Aufenthalts-genehmigung»). These are issued by the Canton of Zurich Migration Office («Migrationsamt»). Permits are divided into short-term residence permits (up to one year), residence permits (temporary) and settlement permits (permanent). Depending on your nationality and the reason for your stay, you must meet different requirements to get a permit. EU/EFTA nationals may register directly at their place of residence, but third-country nationals (non-EU/EFTA) must have a work permit. You may apply for a work permit to the Office for Economy and Labour («Amt für Wirtschaft und Arbeit»).

## Integration criteria and language skills

Switzerland has compiled a set of integration criteria, which take the following factors into account: respect for public safety, law and order, respect for the values of the Federal Constitution, participation in working life or efforts to acquire an education, and sufficient language skills.

If you wish to apply for or extend your residence or settlement permit, you must be able to prove a certain level of ability in the German language. You can do this by submitting an officially recognised language certificate to the Canton of Zurich Migration Office. Please contact the Migration Office in plenty of time to discuss any further details or check the Migration Office website.

## Family reunification

It is generally possible for family members of persons already living here to move to Switzerland. This is called family reunification («Familiennachzug»). The family members for which an application can be made depends on the nationality and residential status of the applicant. The Migration Office decides if the application is approved and provides information about the documents required and the exact procedure.

Family members of EU/EFTA nationals may, as a rule, join the person living in Switzerland irrespective of his/her type of permit. Non-EU/EFTA nationals (third-country nationals) who hold a permit as a foreign national may apply for family reunification to the Canton of Zurich Migration Office, provided all legal requirements are satisfied.



# Language

## Standard German and Swiss German

The official language of the Canton of Zurich is German. However, there is a noticeable difference between standard (or high) German and Swiss German (the local dialect). Standard German is used in written communication throughout the German-speaking part of Switzerland, while in everyday life, people usually speak Swiss German. But don't be afraid to use standard German in conversation and to ask the other person to reply in that language. In the Canton of Zurich, German language skills are not only important to communicate; understanding and speaking the local language is also a requirement if you wish to extend your residence permit or apply for a settlement permit.

## German language courses

Depending on your level and your needs, you may choose from a wide range of German language courses – there are even classes offering childcare. Before you sign up for a German language course, you may want to find out more about the different types of courses and how much they cost. Some institutions offer inexpensive or even free courses.

We also recommend that you contact your local authority to find out about any state-subsidised language courses. With the Caritas Culture Pass – the KulturLegi – some German language courses are available at reduced prices. Caritas Zurich offers its Culture Pass to people living on a restricted income.

## Translation

Besides conventional translation/interpretation services, there are also (intercultural) interpreters who can help you in person or by telephone to translate from and into various languages. They can assist with conversations regarding health, education, or social matters. Some information centres also offer their services in several languages.

# Living in the Canton of Zurich

## Finding a house or apartment

Available houses or apartments can usually be found online, in (local) newspapers or via housing agencies. In addition to the regular housing market, you will also find non-profit housing organisations offering affordable rents. Various organisations provide affordable housing to young people in training and to students. There are also special online platforms where rooms for rent are advertised.

If you are interested in renting an apartment, you will usually have to submit an application form and various documents such as a letter of application, a current extract from the debt enforcement register («Betreibungsregisterauszug»), references or salary statements. After moving in, you must register with your new local authority within 14 days.

## Household insurance and personal liability insurance

Although it is not a legal requirement in Switzerland, we strongly recommend you have household insurance and personal liability insurance («Hausrat- und Haftpflichtversicherung») coverage. Household insurance will cover costs related to damage caused to your possessions due to fire, water, theft or glass breakage. Personal liability insurance will cover the costs related to damage to property or persons caused by the person insured.

## TV, internet and telephone

There are various service providers offering telephone, internet, and cable TV services. However, your choice may be limited depending on where you live and sometimes even on the services provided in a particular building. It is worthwhile comparing different internet providers as their services and prices can vary significantly.

If you have a device in your home that has access to electronic media (such as a smartphone, TV, computer, etc.), you must pay a fee («Radio- und Fernsehgebühren»). Serafe is the agency responsible for collecting the fees for this service.

## Waste management

Waste is regularly collected from the residential areas. For household waste, you must use the official rubbish sacks or sacks with special rubbish collection stickers, which are available, for example, at your local supermarket. The type of sack or sticker required depends on your place of residence. There are special collection points or special collection schedules for certain types of waste (e.g. paper, batteries, glass, cardboard, organic waste, aluminium, metal, textiles, oil, etc.). At almost all food stores, you can deposit plastic bottles (PET bottles) and other plastic packaging free of charge. Special or hazardous waste (e.g. electrical goods, medicines, etc.) can usually be returned to where the original item was purchased.

Each commune or town has its own waste disposal schedule or waste collection calendar («Abfallkalender»), which you will receive when you register at your local authority. These schedules tell you where and when you can dispose of your waste.

# Work

## Access to the labour market

Before you may take up employment, your residential status must be clarified by the local authority of your place of residence. The requirements for your residence and your work permit depend on your nationality and the reason for your stay. This also applies to anyone who has recently arrived in Switzerland to reunite with their family («Familiennachzug») or because they are in a partnership with a resident.

The free movement of persons generally applies to all EU/EFTA nationals. However, access to the labour market may still be restricted depending on your nationality. For example, special transitional provisions still apply to Croatian nationals due to Croatia's recent accession to the EU. Non-EU/EFTA nationals (third-country nationals) may only start a job if they have a work permit. We recommend that you contact your local authority or the Zurich Office for Economy and Labour («Amt für Wirtschaft und Arbeit») as soon as you plan to look for work.

## Finding a job

Job offers can be found online or in newspapers, and there are also private employment agencies. If you wish to apply for a job, you will have to submit various documents such as your CV, a motivation letter and, if available, copies of your degree certificates, diplomas and job references.

## Recognition of diplomas

We recommend that you enquire about the recognition of your non-Swiss diplomas and certificates as soon as possible. Depending on the industry, the recognition procedures are complex and may require a long validation time. Not all non-Swiss diplomas and certificates are automatically recognised in Switzerland.

# Social Security System

Social insurance («Sozialversicherungen») helps protect the residents of Switzerland from risks and safeguards their economic well-being. This insurance cover is required by law and – with the exception of health insurance – is deducted directly from your salary. Employers, self-employed persons as well as people without employment are also obliged to pay contributions toward social insurance. Although it is not compulsory, we strongly recommend you have a household and a personal liability insurance cover («Hausrat- und Privathaftpflichtversicherung») as well.

The Swiss social security system is divided into five different insurance schemes:

- Old-Age and Survivor's Insurance (AHV) and Disability Insurance (IV)
- Health and Accident Insurance (KV/UV)
- Income Compensation Allowances in cases of military service, maternity or paternity (EO/MSV/VSE)
- Unemployment Insurance (ALV)
- Family Allowances (FZ)



# School & Education

In general, Switzerland distinguishes between three educational levels that build on each other: (1) compulsory education, (2) vocational education and training or upper secondary education («Mittelschule») and (3) higher vocational education, university of applied sciences or university.

## Compulsory education

In the Canton of Zurich, all children go to school for at least eleven years. The schools are mixed-gender, multi-ethnic and denominationally neutral. Children attend kindergarten from the age of four (for 2 years), followed by primary school (for 6 years) and lower secondary school («Sekundarstufe I») (for 3 years). Compulsory state schooling is free of charge. Parents are free to choose a private (fee-paying) school for their children at their own expense.

To register your child for school or kindergarten, you can either contact your local authority or the school directly. If you have any questions about the Swiss educational system, the Career and Academic Studies Counselling Service («biz/Berufsinformationszentrum») can assist you.

## Vocational education and training and upper secondary education

Vocational education and training (VET) schools prepare young people for a specific occupation in a two- to four-year apprenticeship, which is a combination of learning the practical skills in a company and attending classes at college.

Upper secondary schools («Mittelschulen») prepare young people for academic studies at a university or university of applied sciences. Some of these schools offer a Baccalaureate («gymnasiale Maturität»), and others a Specialised Baccalaureate («Fachmaturität») or a Vocational Baccalaureate («Berufsmaturität»).

## Higher vocational education, universities and universities of applied sciences

Higher vocational education allows professionals to specialise and expand their skills and normally follows a vocational education and training (VET) school (apprenticeship). A Baccalaureate is not required.

In Switzerland, a distinction is made between universities (the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology (ETH) included) and universities of applied sciences («Fachhochschulen»). Universities of applied sciences teach practice-oriented skills while universities teach theory-oriented skills. A Baccalaureate is required for admission. For university admission in Switzerland with a foreign Baccalaureate diploma, please contact the university directly. The respective university will inform you about admission terms and recognition of foreign diplomas.

## Career choices for young people

Career counsellors assist young people in choosing a career or degree programme. The Career and Academic Studies Counselling Service («biz/Berufsinformationszentrum») provides individual advice and information.

## Scholarships

Scholarships and student loans help support students on a low income. Cantonal education grants («Ausbildungsbeiträge») can be applied for by submitting a request. A number of requirements must be met in order to be entitled to cantonal education grants.



# Partnership, Family & Children

## **Child care**

The Canton of Zurich offers a wide range of childcare options away from the family home. Day nurseries, day-care families or play-groups look after babies and toddlers by the hour or by the day. After-school care centres look after children during kindergarten and school holidays. Schools often provide childcare outside school hours. You will have to pay for many of these services and the demand for day nursery places is high. It is therefore worthwhile to enquire about your options and to register as soon as possible.

## **Registering life events**

At any stage of life, there are family or private events that must be registered and certified by the local civil registry office. This includes births and the acknowledgment of paternity as well as marriages and legal partnerships. The local funeral office will provide the necessary services related to the burial or cremation of a person who has died.

## **Family services and places to meet**

If you wish to meet with other parents or participate in activities with your children, you will find various offers for mothers and fathers in most municipalities in the Canton of Zurich. There are playgroups for babies and toddlers all over the Canton of Zurich. A wide range of events are organised by family, neighbourhood and community centres as well as by public libraries. Please check the respective websites to find out about current events.

## **Questions related to child education and family life**

If you have any questions about raising your children or about everyday family life, do not hesitate to contact an advice centre. You will find family counselling centres in every region of the Canton of Zurich. These centres assist parents with matters related to the care and development of children of up to 5 years old. Regional Child and Youth Support Centres («Kinder- und Jugendhilfezentren») offer counselling services to parents with babies and children up to 18 years of age with regard to parenting questions. These services are free-of-charge and confidential.

# Health

## Health care system

The Swiss health care system is primarily based on a network of general doctors. Even in urgent cases, general doctors are important contact points and will refer you to a specialist if necessary. Most doctors' practices have medical staff who can speak more than one language. Pharmacies often have multilingual staff and offer information on basic medical care. For serious or life-threatening emergencies, it is strongly recommended that you go directly to a hospital. There are specialised paediatricians («Kinderärzte») for the medical care of children.

## Health insurance

All residents of Switzerland must have basic health insurance («Krankenversicherung»). If you move to Switzerland from abroad, you must buy a health insurance policy within three months of arrival. Numerous private insurance companies offer basic compulsory insurance schemes («Grundversicherung»). It is worth comparing the services and premiums, as they may vary significantly depending on the health insurance company and the insurance scheme chosen. As the benefits of basic compulsory insurance are stipulated by law, they are the same irrespective of the insurance company.

In addition to basic compulsory insurance, you may also upgrade your policy to include supplementary insurance («Zusatzversicherungen») offering services and benefits that are not, or only partly, covered by basic insurance.

## Premium reduction

Persons with a low income may apply to the Canton of Zurich Social Insurance Agency («Sozialversicherungsanstalt/SVA») for a reduction of the basic compulsory insurance premium. The Social Insurance Agency provides further information and processes applications for premium reduction («Prämienerbilligung»).

## Accident insurance

If you are employed, you are insured by your employer against accidents occurring during work and leisure time if you work more than 8 hours per week. If you work less than 8 hours per week, you are not insured against accidents occurring during your leisure time and must, therefore, take out your own accident insurance («Unfallversicherung»). As part of their compulsory health insurance, self-employed persons as well as people without employment are also required by law to be covered for accidents.

# Finances & Taxes

## Accounts

Banks, as well as the Swiss Post offer various types of accounts. As a rule, you must be a resident of Switzerland to open an account and provide proof of your identity. Opening an account is usually free of charge, however, various fees will then apply. Since fees, interest rates and services may vary significantly, we recommend that you compare products and services before opening an account.

## Tax system

The Swiss tax system is divided into the direct national tax, cantonal and community taxes. Every person domiciled, living and/or working in Switzerland must pay tax here. You are required by law to declare all your earnings (e.g. your salary) as well as your total assets in your tax declaration («Steuererklärung»). As a rule, your tax liability starts once you rent an apartment in Switzerland.

Your taxes will be deducted directly from your salary on a pay-as-you-earn basis («Quellensteuer») if you are a foreign national, you do not yet have a permanent residence permit and you are not married to or in a registered partnership with a Swiss citizen or a permanent residence permit holder.

## Family allowances

Family allowances (child and/or education allowances) help compensate parents for the cost of raising and educating their children. Employees must apply via their employer. Self-employed persons or persons without a paid employment should contact the Canton of Zurich Family Compensation Office («Familienausgleichskasse»). Depending on your situation, you may also be entitled to child allowances if your children live outside Switzerland.



# Leisure Time

## Leisure activities

Family, neighbourhood and community centres as well as public libraries offer a wide range of leisure activities. Many of these are organised by associations («Vereine»). There are associations for all interests such as sports, culture, politics, or environmental protection. There are also many immigrant and religious associations operating in the Canton of Zurich. Because the different municipalities in the Canton of Zurich organise their own events, we recommend that you ask your local authority or check online to see what is happening in your area.

## KulturLegi (Caritas Culture Pass)

With the KulturLegi, people on a tight budget can get discounts for sports, cultural and educational events. You may apply for the KulturLegi directly with Caritas Zürich.



# Mobility

## Public transport

Almost everywhere in the Canton of Zurich can be reached by train or bus. The city of Zurich also has an extensive tram network. If you use public transport on a regular basis, we recommend that you enquire about travelcards, multi-journey tickets or discounted tickets («Sparbillete»). Many municipalities also offer day passes at reduced prices. Please check the Zurich Transport Network (ZVV) or the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) websites for more information on tickets, discounts and travelcards.

## Motor vehicles (cars/motorbikes)

If you have a non-Swiss driving licence, you have 12 months to convert it into a Swiss driving licence. Please submit your application to the Canton of Zurich Road Traffic Office («Strassenverkehrsamt»).

If you import your car or motorbike into Switzerland and wish to register it here, you must declare your vehicle at customs on arrival. Once you have completed the necessary formalities at customs control, you must contact the Road Traffic Office to apply for registration («Zulassung») for your car or motorbike. Please note that you may only drive your motor vehicle in Switzerland if you have motor vehicle insurance («Auto-/Motorradversicherung»).

The use of roads in Switzerland is free of charge, except for motorways. To use the motorway, you are required by law to purchase an annual motorway tax sticker («Vignette»). You can purchase these at border control posts, petrol stations, post offices, or from the Canton of Zurich Road Traffic Office («Strassenverkehrsamt»).

## Bicycles

No permit or test is required to ride a bicycle in Switzerland. It is not a legal requirement to wear a protective helmet, but we recommend that you do. We also recommend that you take out personal liability insurance («Privathaftpflichtversicherung») as you will be personally liable if you cause damage to people or objects.

# Information & Advice Centres

Here is a list of important migration-related information and advice centres for foreign nationals in the Canton of Zurich, with contact details, as well as details on the issues they cover and the languages in which they offer advice.

## Infodona – Advice Centre for Migrants

**Langstrasse 21**  
**8004 Zurich**  
**Phone +41 44 412 84 00**

Infodona offers advisory services free of charge concerning the following topics: living in Zurich, marriage and family life, legal issues, finances, work, and health. The Advice Centre for Migrants domiciled in the City of Zurich provides information in the following 16 languages: Albanian, Arabic, Croatian, English, French, German, Italian, Kurdish (Sorani), Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Slovak, Tamil, Turkish and Turkmen (Iraq).

## Information for Migrants in Winterthur and the Surrounding Area

**Fachstelle Integrationsförderung**  
**Pionierstrasse 11**  
**8403 Winterthur**  
**Phone +41 52 267 36 91**

Talk to native speakers of your language and get information on topics related to migration and integration. The advisory services are free of charge for residents of Winterthur and the surrounding area and are offered in the following languages: Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, English, Italian, Kurdish, Macedonian, Portuguese, Serbian, Spanish, Tigrinya, and Turkish.

## Welcome Desk – City of Zurich Integration Office

**Stadthaus (4th floor, Room 401a)**  
**Stadthausquai 17**  
**8001 Zurich**  
**Phone +41 44 412 37 37**

The City of Zurich Integration Office provides advisory services free of charge on topics related to migration and integration in the following languages: English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. This service is offered to residents of the city of Zurich.

## MIRSAH – Advice Centre for Migration and Integration Law

**Wilhelmstrasse 10**  
**8005 Zurich**  
**Phone +41 44 291 00 15**

This counselling centre provides legal advice related to migration and integration issues (e.g. right of residence, family reunification, work permits, visas, naturalization, etc.). Specially trained lawyers offer professional and inexpensive legal advice about issues related to immigration. Legal advice is offered in the following languages: English, French, German, Kurdish, Spanish, and Turkish.

## ZüRAS – Zurich Drop-In Centre for Issues Related to Racism

**Albisriederstrasse 164**  
**8003 Zürich**  
**Phone +41 44 415 62 26**

The Zurich Drop-In Centre for Issues Related to Racism, ZüRAS, offers support to individuals experiencing discrimination or racism at work, in their neighbourhood or in their free time because of their origin, skin colour or religion. Its services are free of charge for people living in the Canton of Zurich and are offered in the following nine languages: English, French, German, Italian, Hungarian, Persian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish and Swedish (and other languages if necessary).

# Emergencies

General emergency number

**112**

Police

**117**

Fire service

**118**

Ambulance

**144**

Counselling helpline  
(Helping Hand)

(CHF 0.20 to 0.70 per call)

**143**

Toxicological information  
centre: Tox Info (in case  
of suspected poisoning)

**145**

or +41 44 251 51 51

Helpline for children  
and young people  
(Pro Juventute)

**147**

Medical helpline «Ärztefon»  
**0800 33 66 55**

# Further information

For further details  
please visit our website at

**[www.zh.ch/welcome](http://www.zh.ch/welcome)**



Scan the QR code to access the  
links to further services.

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