

Unaccompanied minors in Switzerland

Information booklet



SWISS FOUNDATION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE



Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Jugendverbände
Conseil Suisse des Activités de Jeunesse
Federazione Svizzera delle Associazioni Giovanili

Welcome!

When you arrive in Switzerland, everything is new and you may have many questions: how does Switzerland work? How does asylum in Switzerland work? How can I find my family?

This booklet is addressed to the **children and teenagers who have come to Switzerland without their families and have applied for asylum**. It has been compiled with the help of young people like you, who came to Switzerland alone.

You will find **explanations** and **advice** on:

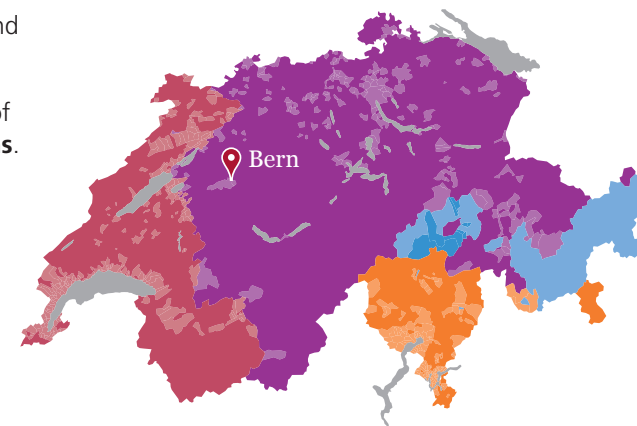
- Life in Switzerland
“Unaccompanied minors” or “MNA”
- The asylum procedure in Switzerland
- Supporting persons
- Authorities in Switzerland
- Your rights
- Your obligations
- The search for your family
- The return to your country of origin
- When you turn 18

Life in Switzerland

When you arrive in Switzerland, you discover a new country, a new culture and a new way of life.

Switzerland is made up of 26 regions called **cantons**. The capital is **Bern**. There are **4 languages** in Switzerland:

- German
- French
- Italian
- Romansh



In Switzerland, you may find many things different from your country of origin, for example: **the time, the food, the weather, the greetings, the different languages, the culture...** There are also **new rules** to learn and respect.



When you arrive, you may feel lost or very lonely. There are people who can **help and inform you on your asylum procedure, your rights and your stay in Switzerland** (see page 12).



“Switzerland is a country where greeting people is important. In Switzerland you must respect certain rules and regulations.”

To be a MNA, what does it mean?

According to Swiss law, an unaccompanied minor is a young migrant who:

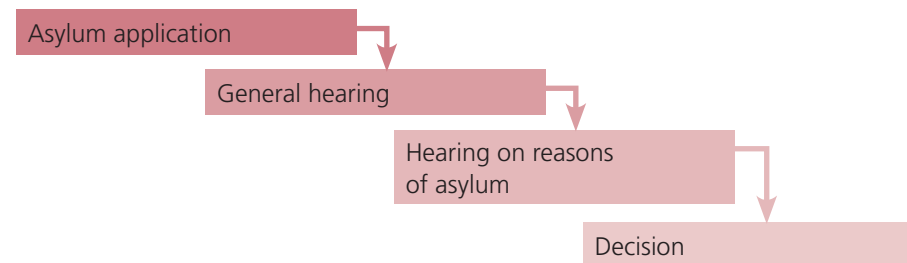
- is less than 18 years' old and
- is not accompanied by an adult who takes care of him according to the law or the tradition.

He is often called **MNA** ("mineur non accompagné" in French) or **RMNA**, which means "unaccompanied minor asylum seeker".

You are an unaccompanied minor (MNA) if you have come to Switzerland with your uncles or aunts or brothers or sisters, as they are not responsible for you according to the law. In this case, you have the right to have a **legal representative** who will help and support you in your asylum procedure (see page 12).

The asylum procedure

Every child or adult who is under threat or persecution in his country of origin can ask for asylum. To decide who can benefit of this protection, the asylum procedure in Switzerland takes **several steps**:



This procedure takes time. You have the right to be accompanied by someone who knows the law, like **your legal representative, your social assistant or a lawyer**.



“When I came to Switzerland, I could not communicate because I could only speak my language and some English. As time went by, I learned to speak German in school.”

Waiting for the decision on your application for asylum...

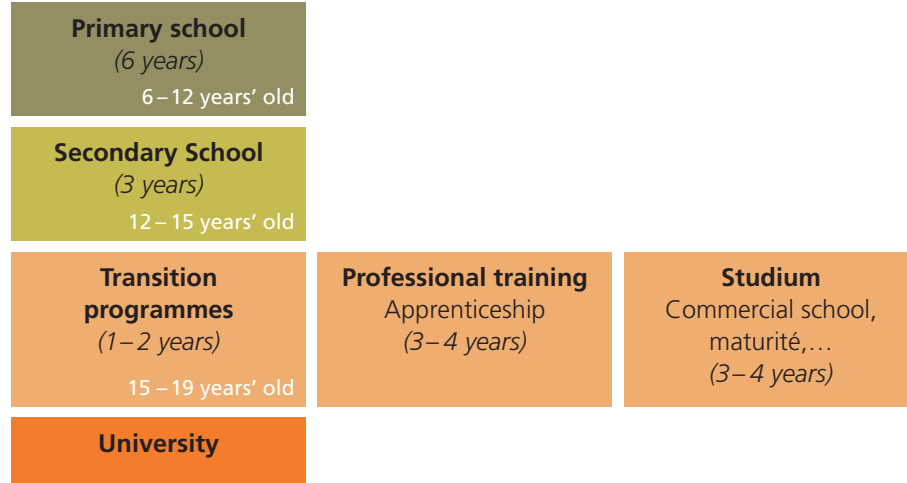
It's important if you can:

- **Learn the language** of the canton where you live
- **Go to school** or **follow training courses**
- **Keep in contact with your family** in your country of origin or in another country
- **Share your living space** with the other people living in your foster home
- Be in contact with **people of your community**
- Be in contact with **Swiss people**

These steps are very important for you to feel good and to prepare for your future.

School and training

The education and training system has different steps:

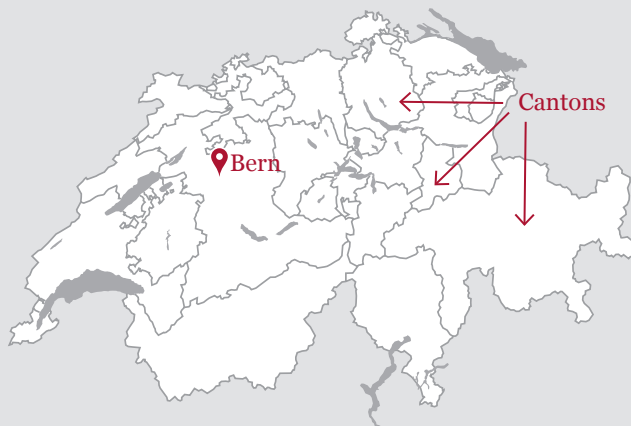


“In the asylum procedure, you have to be patient and brave. During this period, you must learn the language, go to school and find a good training. This will help you for the future.”

The authorities

Federal Office of Migrations (ODM):

Hearing on the reasons of the application, decision on the application



Cantonal Services of Population and Migration:

Follow-up on the individual cases of asylum seekers

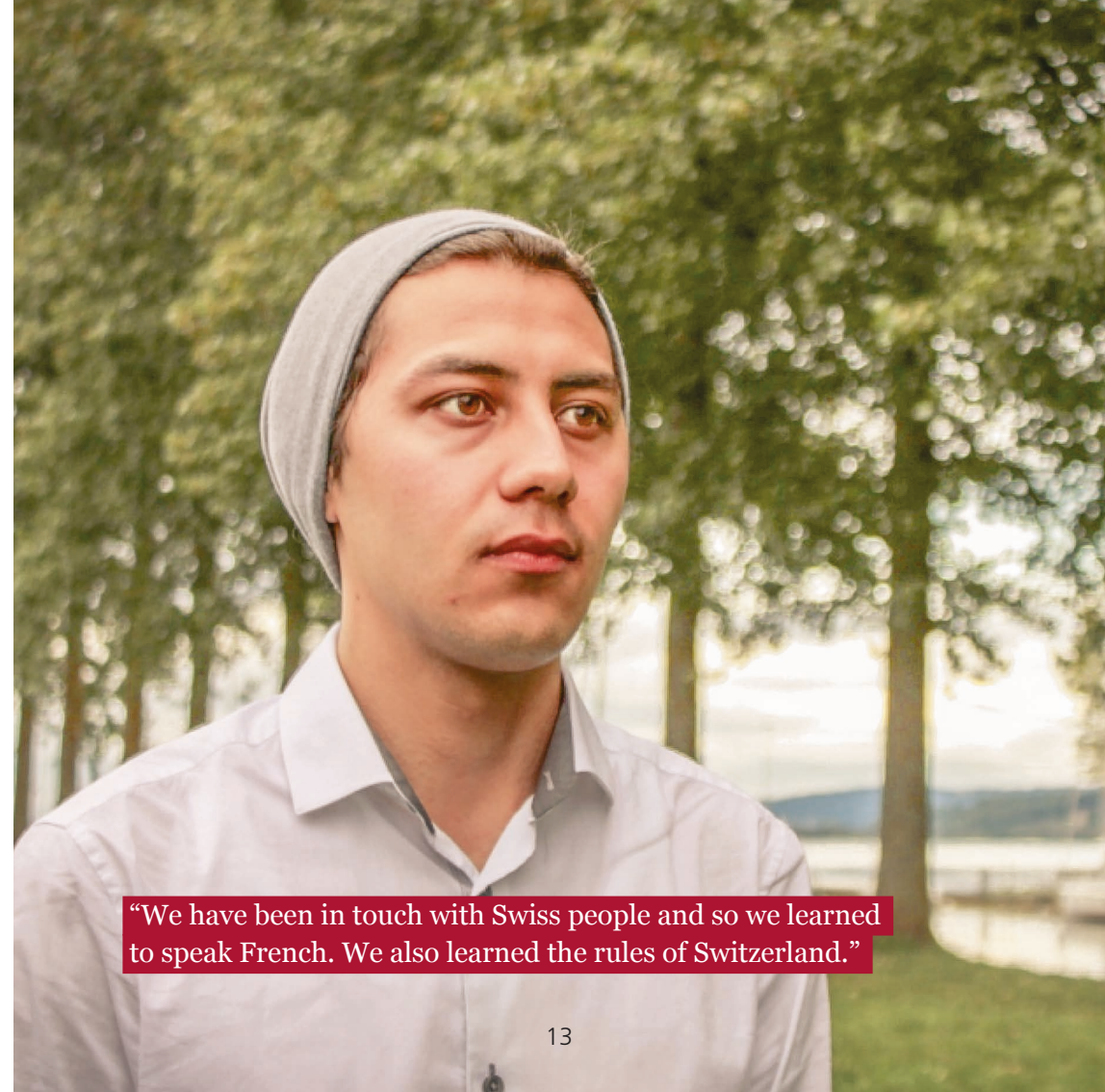
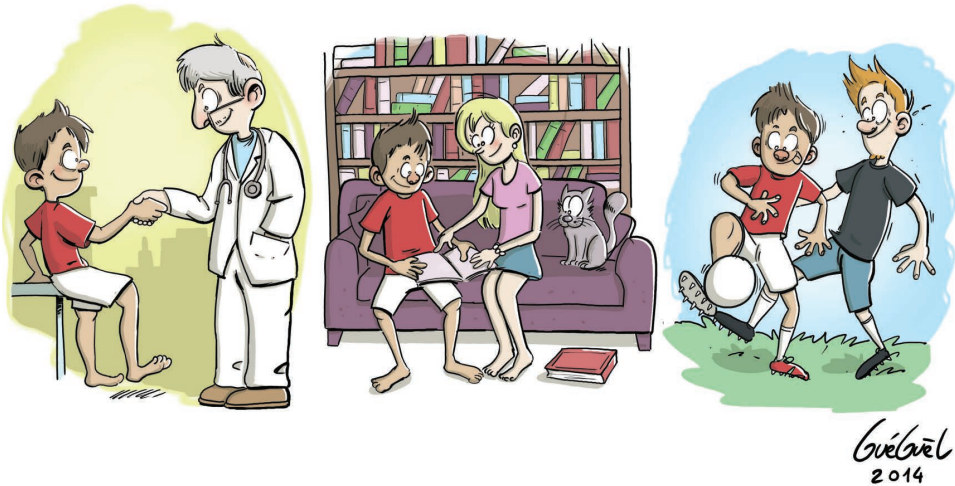
Who can help me?

Many people can help you:

- **Your legal representative:** a person who is appointed to follow up your asylum procedure and your stay in Switzerland. He will be your “Legal parent” until you are 18.
- **Your social worker or your social assistant:** a person who takes care of you in the place where you live and in your daily life.
- **The translators and the cultural mediators:** people who know your language and your culture. They can translate and help you understand the most important informations and rules (for example during the appointments with the authorities, the doctors,...).

“During the hearing for the asylum, the translators help us explain our story.”

- **Doctors and nurses:** in some cantons you will undertake a medical exam to see if you are in good health. If you feel sick or you feel pain, you can **ask for an appointment** with a doctor or a nurse.
- **Psychologists and psychiatrists:** if you are scared, you have nightmares or negative thoughts, you can talk to a psychologue or a psychiatrist who can help you solve your problems. You can also talk about it with your educator or your social assistant to **make an appointment**.



“We have been in touch with Swiss people and so we learned to speak French. We also learned the rules of Switzerland.”

My rights

During your stay in Switzerland, you have rights to guarantee your protection and your development.

If you are a minor and you are separated from your parents, you also have the right to:

- have a **legal representative** who advises and helps you in your procedure and defends your interest
- have a decent **living space**
- go to **school**
- **be taken care of** if you have a health problem
- **be informed** on the procedures concerning you
- **express your opinion** on the decisions concerning you
- find your family
- keep in **touch with your family**
- have **leisure activities**

My obligations

You also have obligations concerning the rules and regulations of Switzerland. For example you have to :

- respect the **rules of the place where you live**
- respect **Swiss law**
- respect the **rules of society**
- **cooperate with the professionals** who work on your case



“Rules and timekeeping in Switzerland are very strict, it is important to follow them. We also have to stay on the right path and avoid bad behaviour. This is the best you can do for yourself and your future.”

Finding my family

Trying to find your family or keeping in contact with them is part of your life and it is your right.

You can ask for help to look for your family in your country of origin or in another country. In Switzerland, some professionals can help you in this search:

- the **International Social Service (SSI)** www.ssiss.ch
- the **Swiss Red Cross** www.redcross.ch

Your legal representative, your educator and your social assistant can give you more information and help you in these procedures.

Return to my country

In your experience as a young migrant, you might have to leave Switzerland if:

- You have received a decision of **dismissal of your application** (Non admission – in French **NEM = non entrée en matière**)
- You have received a **negative answer** to your application and you must leave the country
- You do not have or have lost your **legal status in Switzerland** and you must leave the country

In every Canton there is a service of counselling for the return in the country of origin. They are called **Bureaux de conseil en vue du retour (CVR)** in French and **Rückherberaterung (RKB)** in German. Your legal representative, your educator or your social assistant can inform you and accompany you in this procedure.

And at age 18?

In Switzerland, a person is considered **“adult”** when he/she turns 18 years of age.

Turning 18 can imply important changes in terms of **place of living, dedicated services, training courses** and **outlook for the future**.



To best prepare your future, it is important that you discuss the changes occurring at 18 years with your legal representative.

My future

There are **three long-term solutions** for the unaccompanied minors and the young adults:



It is important to understand and consider these three options with the appropriate services, **according to the result of your asylum application**. For example:

- Negative answer
- Positive answer (permis B)
- Provisional admission (permis F)
- Family found in another country
- Other situations

Our advice to you

According to our experience with **unaccompanied minors in Switzerland**, we would like to give you some final advices:

“First learn the language, then go to school.”

“Accept the cohabitation with other people coming from different cultures.”

“Accept the advice of the educators.”

“Try to have good relations to live well with other people.”

“Say hello before speaking to someone and say thank you.”

“Join the social and cultural activities in the canton.”

“Be patient and always keep on the right track.”



Thanks to...

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Your work and
precious help
made this booklet
possible!

*Participants of the project **Speak-out** 2013

Do you have questions? Notes

Visit the website

www.enfants-migrants.ch

You will find other information on your stay in Switzerland and contacts in every canton.

You can also call us at:

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