



## **Welcome to our region, welcome to your home !**

Even though the canton of Valais boasts the most magnificent landscapes, our canton's beauty doesn't stop at its charming landscapes. The human wealth of the local population is indeed as significant as our highest peaks. It is a privilege to live in Valais!

Modernity and tradition are not at odds in Valais. Our canton has enhanced its worldly renowned industry, trading and tourism, by expanding other favourable sectors such as research or the development of business start-ups. On the other hand, it has also cultivated values close to the land and its devotion to traditions such as the typical cow fights ('combats de reines') or the valorisation of its vineyards.

The canton of Valais is a welcoming land, but it expects each and every one of its 'guests' to integrate according to the regulations, whilst allowing them to maintain their own beliefs. It is a privilege for a canton which is striving for prosperity, to benefit from a blend of different cultures. For these reasons, it is important that a spirit of mutual respect prevails amongst the inhabitants of Valais. Switzerland is a constitution and our canton is recognised for its good sense in cultivating relationships.

So, get involved in local life, love the Valais and it will love you back! All the information you need to ensure that you integrate into the local community successfully can be found on the following pages, on our website and from the people working for the municipal and cantonal authorities.

Welcome to the Canton of Valais!

**Frédéric Favre**  
**State Councillor**

Head of the Department for Security,  
Institutions and Sports



## INTEGRATION

### Language

Switzerland has four national languages – German, French, Italian and Romansch), but the Swiss are far from being quadrilingual! The Valais itself is a bilingual canton, where French and German are spoken. The inhabitants of the upper Valais (the border is Sierre) speak a German dialect called ‘Walliseritsch’ and formally communicate in German. Residents of the lower part of Valais speak French.

It is important that you maintain your native language while learning the language of the region where you live.

To maintain your native language and meet compatriots, you can go to meeting centres run by community associations. There are language and cultural origins classes for children organized by the consulate (or parents’ associations). There are also intercultural libraries in Monthey and Sion where you are almost certain to find books in your native language.

To learn your local language, be it French or German, you can of course chat with your neighbours and your colleagues, or even buy a language-learning method to study at home. The most effective and easiest way is to go on a recognised language course. You can get a list of courses that are endorsed by the canton from your local authorities.

Should you need an interpreter, primarily for medical or school situations, you can call the AVIC (Valaisan Association of Community Interpreters) for Lower Valais, and the FMO for Upper Valais. The interpreters in these two institutions are trained as cultural mediators, which means that they know both cultures and languages and they are able to translate as well as explain in context.

### Adresses

#### AVIC - Community interpreters

Avenue de la Gare 5  
1950 Sion

Telephone: 027 322 19 30  
Mobile: 079 794 69 21 (service)  
E-Mail : [info@interpretavic.ch](mailto:info@interpretavic.ch)  
Website: [www.interpretavic.ch](http://www.interpretavic.ch)

#### FMO - Forum Migration Oberwallis

Spittelgasse 2  
3930 Visp

Telephone: 027 946 82 85  
Mobile: 079 852 05 11 (Interpreting service)  
E-Mail : [info@forum-migration.ch](mailto:info@forum-migration.ch)  
Website: [www.forum-migration.ch](http://www.forum-migration.ch)

### Integration

The aim of the Swiss policy for the integration of foreigners is to strengthen social cohesion, to enable Swiss citizens and foreigners to live together in a spirit of mutual respect and tolerance and to create equal opportunities by giving foreigners the opportunity to participate in the social and cultural life of Switzerland.

Integration is a reciprocal process, which means that we live harmoniously side by side thanks to mutual adaptation between the host society, which is open to migrants’ specificities, and migrants, who adapt to local customs.

Integration is a difficult and ambitious strategy. It implies both keeping the culture of origin and being open to accept a foreign culture. It requires the acknowledgement of multiple identities, as well as building bridges and dialogue. It also implies committing to the host society’s core values, such as equality between men and women or non-violent conflict resolution, including within the family.



### **The Cantonal Integration Office**

The Cantonal Integration Office is part of the population and migration service. Its main tasks include the implementation of integration, support and information on a cantonal level and also advising communes and other state agencies on integration matters. It also tackles discrimination, tracks projects supported financially by the canton and assists organisations with projects for migrants and institutions.

#### **Adress**

#### **SPM - Service de la population et des migrations**

Avenue de la Gare 39  
Case Postale 478  
1951 Sion

Telephone: 027 606 55 84  
E-mail: [SPM-integration@admin.vs.ch](mailto:SPM-integration@admin.vs.ch),  
[DBM-integration@admin.vs.ch](mailto:DBM-integration@admin.vs.ch)  
Website: [www.vs.ch/integration](http://www.vs.ch/integration)

Most cities and some communes have committees for the integration of migrants and delegates for integration, who can also help you. Check with the secretary of your commune.

### **Other addresses**

There are a lot of institutions and associations that can help you integrate. Some of these organisations can be found at:  
[www.vs.ch/integration](http://www.vs.ch/integration).

### **Becoming Swiss**

As a foreigner domiciled in Switzerland for 12 years or married to a Swiss citizen for 3 years, you may, under certain conditions, acquire Swiss nationality. You should send your request to the regional civil registration office. The registrars will inform you of the necessary requirements and the procedure to follow.

For further information: [www.vs.ch/spm](http://www.vs.ch/spm)



## HEALTH

### **Health insurance, accident insurance, complementary insurance**

Everyone (adults and children) residing in Switzerland must take out a health insurance policy with a Swiss health insurance company within 3 months of their arrival. The benefits of mandatory health insurance are identical between insurance companies.

The cost of premiums is published in autumn each year for the year to follow. You are then free to change insurance companies without any restrictions or penalties.

The health insurance system in Switzerland is based on competition between health insurance companies. The insured is free to choose their insurer, the excess amount and the type of insurance cover. This system gives the insured the opportunity to pay less by changing health insurance company and choosing a high excess amount, or an alternative cover such as 'Telmed' or 'family doctor'.

Everyone has to pay a monthly premium, which can be subsidized by the state if you have a low income.

You can also take out non-mandatory health insurance, called complementary insurance, in order to cover other health costs, such as dental care, optical care, alternative medicine, transportation and certain medications.

People who work for more than 8 hours a week automatically receive full accident insurance from their employer. Children and unemployed people must have private accident insurance coverage with their health insurance company.

### **Doctors, hospitals, home care**

It is strongly advised that you choose a general practitioner and a family pediatrician for children on your arrival in Switzerland, and that you always see them before consulting a specialist.

It is your doctor who will refer you to hospital if necessary and help you with the administrative procedures.

Do not use hospital emergency rooms or casualty as an alternative to a family doctor. They are there only to handle emergencies.

In case of medical necessity, your doctor may also offer you care at home, a home help, meal delivery etc. The medical-social centers (centres médico-sociaux (CMS)) are responsible for these services.

### **Need an interpreter?**

Medical terminology can be very complicated. Treatment and care in Switzerland may vary from what you are used to in your home country. So feel free to seek help from an interpreter. It is very important to have clear dialogue when it comes to establishing your diagnosis and treatment!

### **24-hour emergency medical service**

In the case of an emergency when your doctor is not available, a hotline will put you in touch with a doctor, dentist or chemist/pharmacy. The hotline is answered by advisory doctors between 19:00 and 07:00 on weekdays and 24 hours a day at the weekends and holidays.



**0900 144 033** medical hotline  
**0900 558 143** dental hotline  
for French-speaking Valais  
**027 924 15 88** dental hotline  
for German-speaking Valais  
**0900 558 143** emergency pharmacies  
**144** emergency / ambulance

Only dial 144 in a real emergency or when someone's life is genuinely at risk. Do not go to the casualty department of your nearest hospital. Take time to phone beforehand in order to be directed to the correct hospital and to receive appropriate care on arrival.

**Other useful numbers:**

**143** The Samaritans  
(help and moral support by phone)  
**145** Poisoning  
**147** Helpline for young people



## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

### Associations

Do you enjoy singing? Playing sport? Meeting people?

Switzerland has a tradition of associations, and people willingly volunteer to run sports clubs, choirs, marching bands and other groups.

You can find associations for different kinds of sport, cultural and social activities, as well as those connected to your community of origin, religion or political party. Municipalities (or 'communes') have an up to date list of organisations operating in their area. The Internet also provides information on what you can find in your area.

### Religious Life

The Federal Constitution and that of your county (canton) guarantee freedom of belief. Given that the majority of the Valaisan population is catholic, each person has the right to believe or not and to practice the religion of their choice. There is a place for all religions and exchange between religions is encouraged.

There are Catholic churches in all towns and villages. Other places of worship (protestant churches, mosques / places for Muslim prayer, etc.) are more likely to be found in cities.

### Culture

Theatre, dance, music, painting, literature...

The Valais has a lot to offer when it comes to culture.

The easiest way to find out what there is on offer in your area is to go to the Tourist Information Office or your community's Cultural Service.

The Canton of Valais Department of Culture (Service de la culture) supports professional creation by awarding scholarships and prizes. It also manages the cantonal museums, libraries and archives.

There are three Cantonal Museums: the Art Museum of Valais, the History Museum and the Museum of Nature.

All three museums are located in the centre of Sion. Visiting museums is generally free of charge on the first Sunday of every month.

The four cantonal multimedia libraries can be found in Brig, Sion, Martigny and St. Maurice. In addition to these, nearly all the municipalities (communes) have multimedia libraries, libraries or reading points.

Apart from being able to borrow books from these libraries, you can also read newspapers and magazines, borrow films and music and use computers.

For speakers of foreign languages, it is also possible to find books in your native language. There are two intercultural libraries in Valais: «L'Ardoise» in Sion and «A TOUS LIVRES» in Monthey, where you'll find books in over 60 languages.

### Cohabitation

People usually greet each other when they meet in the street in villages. This is a rarer occurrence in towns or cities. Getting to know the neighbours in your building or street will lead to good communication and thus good neighbourly relationships.

The Swiss have a reputation for being discreet and careful. You should therefore respect public areas and adapt to your neighbourhood. We try not to make noise at night, on Sundays and on public holidays, and we sort and recycle our rubbish!



### **Political Life**

The Swiss vote on average about four times a year. Political rights are extensive, and in addition to voting rights and eligibility, the Swiss have initiative and referendum rights.

Initiative rights : Citizens collect signatures for a referendum in order to propose a constitutional amendment.

Referendum rights : Citizens collect signatures to oppose a law of Parliament.

Several cantons grant political rights to foreigners, but this is not the case in Valais.



## Miscellaneous Administrative Formalities

### Moving House

Any change of address, even within the same municipality or commune, must be reported to the population control office (contrôle des habitants) within 14 days.

### Change of Civil Status

Births, marriages, deaths... any major change in your civil status must be registered at the registry or public records office. There are six of these offices in Valais:

Brig, Visp, Sierre, Sion, Martigny and Monthey. Remember also to register any changes with your consulate or embassy. This advice also applies to people with dual nationality.

### Opening a bank account

There aren't any special conditions required to open a bank account. Simply go to a bank with valid ID.

The Post Office also provides certain banking services.

### Sending money abroad

For international money transfers, the following possibilities are available:

- Banks
- Post Office
- Fund transfer companies
- Online payment systems

### Paying taxes

With Switzerland being a confederation, taxes are paid at three levels: the local council (commune), the county (canton) and the confederation.

Tax is deducted automatically from the wages of foreign workers who are not in possession of a resident's permit. They must, however, fill in their tax return form every year.

If you hold a resident's permit (permis C), you must complete your tax return form each year.

### Exchanging your driving license

You have **12 months** following your arrival in Switzerland to exchange your driving license for a Swiss driving license. The road traffic service can inform you about the procedure.

### Importing a vehicle

If you wish to import a car you have owned for over 6 months before moving to Switzerland, you can import it as part of your belongings without customs fees. If it is less than 6 months old, you must pay import tax.

### Public transport

The Swiss public transport system is very efficient. The network is dense and well organized. Numerous special offers make public transport in Switzerland cheaper and a good option. You will find further information at your nearest bus or railway station.

### Emergency phone numbers

Police	<b>117</b>
Fire Brigade	<b>118</b>
The Samaritans (help and moral support by phone)	<b>143</b>
Casualty	<b>144</b>
Poisoning	<b>145</b>
Helpline for young people	<b>147</b>



## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL

### Before school

Before compulsory school, you can place your child in a crèche or day nursery. Host families who work on a daily basis are also available to look after your children. You can get a list of host families' addresses in your area from your local council.

Even if you do not work, you can place your child in daycare for a few hours a week. This makes it easier when they start school, as they get used to being with other children and it helps them to learn French (if you speak another language at home).

### Compulsory education

Compulsory schooling begins at the age of 6 in '1H' and lasts for 11 years.

Registration is not automatic. You must contact the school director's secretary (or answer their request for confirmation of your child's registration) or contact your local council's secretary.

Compulsory schooling consists of 8 years of primary school (1H-8H) and 3 years of secondary school (Cycle d'orientation) (9CO-11CO).

If you arrive in Valais with school-age children, they will be integrated into the class that corresponds to their age and level. If your child doesn't speak French all that well, or if their level of French is lower than their classmates', special support will be offered to them for 2 or 3 years between 3H and 11CO during school time.

If you need childcare outside school hours, there are canteens for meals or **day care centres** (UAPE) that take care of children for meals, homework and leisure activities while you are at work.

Schools do not expect parents to do homework for their children, but it relies on them to provide a suitable working environment at home and show a

keen interest in the school and training system. Teachers and school management are available to answer any questions you may have. Do not hesitate to ask!

### Language and culture of origin courses

Language and culture of origin (LCO) courses are sometimes organised by embassies or associations. They enable children to consolidate their native language and learn about various cultural aspects related to their country of origin. These classes generally take place outside school hours. For further information, please contact your embassies or associations.

### After compulsory school

At 15 years of age, children finish their curriculum of compulsory education, but no one enters the labour market without further training!

Depending on your child's chosen career, their academic interests and their marks obtained at the end of the 'cycle d'orientation', they can either start an apprenticeship or pursue further studies.

An **apprenticeship** is a dual training system: the young person learns their trade with an employer and attends classes one or two days a week. Depending on their chosen career, this training lasts for two to four years.

It is also possible for children to pursue their studies in **secondary schools II**, either in colleges, trade schools or pre-vocational schools.

As a rule, the equivalent of an A-Level or High School diploma is required in order to be accepted into a Swiss University, a College of Technology or a specialised High School.