

Q&A Students At Risk

1. Nomination and application requirements

People from which countries can apply?

People from countries of origin or third countries where certain groups are excluded from the right to education due to political repression or where general violence severely restricts access to education are eligible to apply.

Students who already live in a country where their right to education is guaranteed are generally not eligible for scholarships. However, if their residence permit expires, they can apply for a StAR scholarship if they can prove that they must at the latest by September of the following year return to a country where their right to education is restricted. Such applications are examined on a case-by-case basis, whereby the actual risk situation is evaluated with regard to the threat to their right to education.

Do I need to be accepted by a university at the time of application?

No. The admission deadline for students requiring a visa is February 28 of the current year at most universities. Some universities have a later deadline, but this must be checked directly with the respective university. Since the application deadline for a StAR scholarship is before the university admission deadline, proof of university admission does not need to be provided in the StAR application. However, this does not preclude a person from already making efforts towards university admission, which should be mentioned in the application and may have a positive effect on the selection process.

Which fields of study can I apply for?

In general, StAR applicants can apply for all fields of study, with the exception of medicine and courses such as sports and movement sciences, which require practical aptitude tests for admission¹. However, since sufficient proficiency in the teaching language is required, in most cases only courses offered in English and thus at the master's level are eligible.

I am a postdoctoral researcher. Can I apply for a StAR scholarship?

No. Only students (bachelor's or master's) or doctoral candidates can apply for a StAR scholarship. We recommend that postdoctoral researchers consult the [Scholars At Risk Program](#) or the [Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships](#).

¹ More information on admission restrictions for medical studies: <https://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/service/anmeldung-zum-medizinstudium> (website not available in English); and on admission to sports and exercise science: <https://www.berufsberatung.ch/dyn/show/4420> (website not available in English)

I haven't finished my studies yet. Can I still apply?

Yes. The required degree for the desired course of study (e.g., bachelor's degree for a master's program) must be presented by the university admission deadline at the latest (at most universities, this is February 28 of the current year).

I obtained my last degree several years ago. I am not currently studying, but would like to resume my studies. Can I apply?

Yes, the StAR program does not impose a temporal limit from the date of the last degree obtained. However, in the context of the individual case assessment, the urgency of the situation and the coherence of the study plan with regard to professional objectives may be taken into account, which may influence the selection of scholarship recipients.

2. Selection process

How is the selection made by the selection committee?

The selection of scholarship recipients is made by a selection committee. Experts from the fields of migration, human rights, and higher education discuss the applications and prioritize them based on the level of risk (70%) and the assessment of their chances of obtaining a visa and university admission (30%). A priority list is drawn up when selecting scholarship recipients. The number of scholarships will then be awarded to the first students on this list. However, final receipt of the scholarship ultimately depends on whether these students are admitted to the university and obtains a visa to enter the country.

When will I know if I have been nominated for the scholarship?

All applicants will be informed within two weeks after the meeting of the selection committee, which usually takes place at the end of January, whether they have been nominated for a scholarship. Those who are not prioritized by the committee will be informed that the VSS-UNES will keep their contact details in case the scholarships cannot be awarded to the selected candidates due to problems with university admission or visas.

How long does it take after the meeting of the selection committee until the start of studies?

The courses can be started in September of the same year at the earliest.

3. Visa

Which visa do I need, and/or will I be granted?

Entering Switzerland for study purposes is regulated by a national visa (type D) for long-term stays of more than 90 days. The visa form can be downloaded [here](#) in various languages. According to Art. 27 [FNIA](#), obtaining a student visa is subject to the following four conditions: University admission, suitable accommodation, sufficient financial resources, and fulfillment of the personal and educational requirements for the intended course of study. The student visa is a prerequisite for obtaining a residence permit, which is linked to the duration of the course of study. According to the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (FNIA), this is a temporary stay (Art. 23 para. 3 VZAE). Therefore, the entry requirement of Art. 5 para. 2 FNIA in conjunction with Art. 23 para. 2 VZAE must be met, which states that a guaranteed return must be assured.

Where do I need to submit my visa application?

Applications for a D visa must be submitted in writing using the application form or directly to the Swiss diplomatic mission responsible for the student's place of residence. You can find out which diplomatic mission is responsible [here](#). The Swiss representation forwards the application to the cantonal migration authority at the place of study. This authority assesses the visa application and forwards it to the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) for approval. If the visa is approved, the SEM authorizes the Swiss representation to issue a visa.

When do I need to submit my visa application?

In order to start your studies on time, you must submit your visa application by the beginning of May of the current year at the latest, as processing can take several months. The visa application is therefore only submitted after a positive decision by the selection committee and after receipt of the confirmation of university admission to the program.

Is there an age limit?

No. According to the FNIA guidelines on education and training visas, a residence permit for study purposes may not be refused due to a person's age in accordance with the prohibition of discrimination (Art. 8 para. 2 of the Federal Constitution). However, when reviewing the application, particularly with regard to return status, the person's age may be taken into account in addition to other personal circumstances (FNIA guidelines, chapters 5.1.1. and 5.1.1.1., as of September 15, 2025).

Do I need to have valid identity documents?

Yes, valid identity documents are required for departure and entry. For more detailed information, please consult the [FAQ on entry](#).

For the visa, you must provide details of suitable accommodation. Do I need to already have accommodation in Switzerland at the time of applying for the visa?

No. It is sufficient to provide the university address or place of residence of a person living in Switzerland who agrees to do so. Before the start of their studies, StAR scholarship

recipients must find their own accommodation in Switzerland. The StAR project manager and university departments can offer advice on this matter.

Can a double degree be funded?

No. The StAR scholarship is not intended for individuals who are pursuing a second bachelor's, master's, or PhD degree.

Can I bring my family?

Students may bring family members (e.g., children) with them if they have the necessary financial resources and, in the case of minors, if childcare is guaranteed (Art. 27 para. 2 FNIA). However, as the StAR scholarship is only intended for one person, students must be able to provide additional financial resources for their family members. The family situation is reviewed on a case-by-case basis when selecting scholarship recipients and is included in the overall evaluation.

Can I work part-time while studying?

Yes. StAR students who wish to supplement their scholarship or CV with part-time work must fulfill the requirements of Art. 30 para. 1 lit. g FNIA in conjunction with Art. 38 VZAE. According to these requirements, employment may be approved at the earliest after a stay of six months and may not exceed 15 hours per week outside of vacation periods. It is important that education remains the main purpose of the stay and that the employment does not delay the completion of the educational path. In addition, according to Art. 18(b) FNIA, a request must be submitted by an employer, and according to Art. 22 FNIA, the local and industry-standard wage and working conditions must be respected.

Do I have to leave Switzerland immediately after completing my studies?

No. After completing their studies, third-country nationals may, under the conditions set out in Art. 21 FNIA para. 3, spend six months looking for work on the Swiss labor market in order to obtain a work permit. In order to obtain a work permit and the associated residence permit, the future employer must submit an application to the competent cantonal labor market or migration authority, comply with the local and industry-standard wage and working conditions, ensure that no Swiss or EU/EFTA nationals are available (national priority), and demonstrate that the employment is of high scientific or economic interest (Art. 21 para. 3 FNIA). For more [information](#).

When will I know whether my visa application has been approved or rejected?

The visa processing time is at least one [month](#), but usually takes several months. If no visa decision has been made by the start of the studies, the student may begin the studies in the following semester after consultation with the StAR project management. If the visa is denied, the right to receive the scholarship is withdrawn.

What happens if my visa is denied?

If rejected, the scholarship will be given conditionally to the next applicant on the selection committee's priority list. In the event of a negative preliminary decision, the VSS-UNES will set a deadline within which it can advise StAR scholarship recipients on their right to a fair hearing regarding the preliminary decision. After this deadline has expired, the VSS-UNES cannot take any further steps in a legal dispute with the SEM and the scholarship will be awarded to the next person.

4. Leaving the country

How do I organize my departure after I have been nominated for the StAR scholarship and the SEM of the Swiss representation has issued the visa authorization?

It is important to contact the relevant Swiss representative office as soon as possible to ensure that the visa is issued and that the departure is organized in consultation with the VSS-UNES. The VSS-UNES must be informed, for instance, regarding potential security measures.

5. Scholarship

Duration and amount of funding

The StAR scholarship amounts of CHF 1,750 per month or CHF 21,000 per year and is granted for the standard period of study for the specific degree (maximum of 3.5 years). The scholarship is paid monthly from the start of the course. In exceptional cases, for example if the person has to leave his or her country of origin/residence before the start of studies for security reasons, the scholarship can be paid out before the start of their studies upon arrival in Switzerland.

What must StAR scholarship recipients do?

In order for the scholarship to be paid to StAR students on an ongoing basis, scholarship recipients must submit a report on their studies and life in Switzerland, along with a transcript of grades and confirmation of enrollment, before the start of each semester. The StAR project management provides a template for the semester report. Doctoral students must also submit a report on the current status of their PhD project, written by their supervisor, at the end of each academic year.

What costs does the scholarship cover?

The StAR scholarship is intended to cover students' general living expenses. In addition, the VSS-UNES provides CHF 1,200 per year per person, which is made available to StAR students in emergencies, for psychological services, or for advice on migration law.

Does StAR provide additional financial support to scholarship recipients for tuition fees, flight costs, or insurance costs?

No. The scholarship does not provide any additional funding for upcoming costs related to departure and arrival. Students must cover these costs themselves or cover them with their monthly scholarship.

What happens if the StAR scholarship is lower than the cantonal requirements for obtaining a student visa?

Cantonal guidelines on proving the necessary financial resources to obtain a visa for education can be found on the website of the cantonal migration office. If the StAR scholarship is lower than the cantonal guidelines, the student should make efforts to obtain additional funding at an early stage in consultation with and with the support of the Students At Risk-project manager, e.g., university bridging scholarships or low-percentage positions for PhD students. Proof of a guarantee from a solvent guarantor can also be provided.

Can the scholarship be extended?

In exceptional cases, e.g., as a result of illness or if a longer period of study or research is necessary, a justified application for an extension can be submitted to the StAR-project manager. The application must be submitted at least 6 months before the end of the scholarship period.

What happens in the event of an interruption of studies?

If studies are interrupted, the scholarship may continue to be paid in justified exceptional cases. If it is not possible to resume studies within a set period, the VSS-UNES reserves the right to stop paying the scholarship.

What happens if an asylum request is submitted?

The StAR scholarship may be withdrawn if the residence status is no longer linked to the course of study.

6. Duration of studies

Does the StAR program provide support services for scholarship recipients during their studies?

Yes. The StAR-project manager stays in contact with StAR students and supports them as needed. The project manager meets with scholarship recipients shortly after their arrival to clarify questions regarding residence permit, opening a bank account, health insurance, psychological support, and other matters. During the study period, the VSS-UNES regularly organizes opportunities to share experiences. To help scholarship recipients settle in Switzerland and at the university, they are put in touch with a mentor

upon request. Ideally, the mentor studies at the same faculty and meets with the student regularly. The mentor is introduced to their mentoring role by the VSS-UNES in order to clarify mutual expectations and acknowledges the mentoring *charta* formulated by the VSS-UNES as a binding basis. Before the end of their studies, students receive coaching on request to help them better understand their situation and their rights.

7. Reapplication

Can I apply again next year?

Yes, individuals may apply for a StAR scholarship multiple times. Upon request, a brief assessment of the applicant's chances can be obtained from the VSS-UNES before reapplying.

