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OSA advice

As a Swiss citizen abroad, can I make voluntary contributions to old-age and survivors' insurance and disability insurance?

Voluntary membership of the old-age and survivors' insurance and disability insurance scheme is only possible subject to certain conditions. The following three criteria must be met: you must hold Swiss nationality or that of an EU or EFTA state, not be domiciled in an EU or EFTA state, and have been insured under the old-age and survivors' insurance for five years without a break in the period immediately beforehand. It is not necessary to have paid contributions for five years but you must have been insured. For minors and married persons without gainful employment who are exempted from paying contributions, the years of domicile in Switzerland count as years of insurance. Voluntary membership of the old-age and survivors' insurance/disability insurance scheme is therefore only possible as a continuation of compulsory old-age and survivors' insurance. Each family member wishing to join the voluntary old-age and survivors' insurance has to make an individual membership application. The declaration of membership of the voluntary insurance scheme has to be submitted in writing to the Swiss Central Compensation Office or alternatively to the Swiss representation responsible within a year of leaving the compulsory insurance scheme. Membership of the voluntary insurance scheme is no longer possible beyond this deadline. When deciding whether to join the voluntary old-age and survivors' insurance, it should be noted that in many countries the laws on old-age and disability insurance provide for reductions in benefits if those insured have other sources of income in addition to their pensions, in particular foreign pensions such as old-age and survivors' insurance. The providers of social insurance in the country concerned are the only ones who can confirm whether this is the case and provide information on the extent to which old-age and survivors' insurance is taken into account as a source of income in the calculation of the foreign pension.

Useful links: Swiss Central Compensation Office: www.zas.admin.ch > Topics > Voluntary insurance

Swiss representations abroad: www.eda.admin.ch > Representations

SARAH MASTANTUONI, Head of the Legal Service – The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad's Legal Depart-

ment provides general legal information on Swiss law and specifically in areas that concern the Swiss abroad. It does not provide information on foreign law and does not intervene in disputes between private parties.

CORRECTION AND ADDENDUM

An error was made in January's "OSA advice" concerning the recognition of foreign qualifications. The Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET) – which the article stated was responsible for the recognition of qualifications with regard to professional training and universities of applied sciences – no longer exists. It was incorporated into the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) at the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research in December 2012. www.sbf.admin.ch

The Association promoting Education for Young Swiss Abroad (AJAS), which is closely linked with the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, provides information on the recognition of foreign qualifications.

If you have any questions, please contact:
AJAS, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, SWITZERLAND
Phone +41 (0) 31 356 61 04, fax +41 (0) 31 356 61 01
e-mail: ajas@aso.ch, www.ajas.ch

young people the opportunity to take part in a charitable project and help improve living conditions in the Swiss mountain village of Saas Balen. Besides the project work, there will, of course, also be time for leisure pursuits and relaxation.

Finally, OSA is organising an adventure trip in August aimed at young people who enjoy taking on physical and mental challenges. The participants in this outdoor camp will be involved in planning the journey, which will cross forests, lakes and mountains. The young people will set up their own sleeping and eating quarters during the trip.

Take advantage of the OSA network

The number of young people wishing to enjoy an educational stay in Switzerland has been increasing for years. OSA's Youth Service is therefore offering two-week language courses in Zurich (German), Fribourg and Neuchâtel (French) this summer. These courses are aimed at young people with no or very little knowledge of the respective national language. All classes will take place in the mornings, with OSA organising excursions or leisure activities on three or four afternoons, plus a day trip.

The Youth Service also puts together programmes in Switzerland that are tailored to the individual Swiss abroad. To enable us to plan their stay, young people can let us know which subject areas, professions, educational establishments or training institutes they are particularly interested in. We will provide the participants with personal advice, arrange contact with schools, universities and students, and organise visits to the potential institutions.

We are able to provide these educational programmes at affordable prices thanks to the relationship we enjoy with the many hosts who are willing to provide meals and accommodation to young people free of charge during their stay. Contact with host families often proves an extremely enriching experience for the Swiss abroad.

We are also delighted to be able to offer young people a seminar in August focusing on communication. This will also include participation in the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Davos. This is a unique opportunity not just to discover this famous holiday and conference resort but also to meet interesting participants from the fields of politics and culture.

Information on the offers for young people can be found at www.aso.ch

Spring meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad

The last meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) in its current composition took place on 16 March 2013 at the Rathaus in Berne. The newly elected delegates will take up office in August.

The conduct of the Swiss banks towards the Swiss abroad and the various tax agreements that the Swiss government is currently negotiating with different countries (FATCA with the USA, inheritance tax agreement with France) once again gave rise to heated debate. Nicolas Descoedres, head of the financial affairs section at the FDFA, explained the FATCA agreement to the delegates and subsequently took questions. His answers clearly indicated that the pressure on Switzerland in these negotiations was immense and that adopting a position of non-cooperation, as proposed by some delegates, was not an option.

Delegates showed great interest in the presentation by ambassador Ralf Heckner, head of the federal government's crisis management centre. Heckner said that there was growing insecurity in the world, highlighting 11 September 2001, the Arab Spring and the economic crisis. Crisis management centre personnel are primarily deployed to deal with natural disasters, serious accidents, hostage situations and terror attacks. The taking of hostages, in particular, has increased in recent times. The crisis management centre focuses on preventive measures, including the training of diplomatic and consular personnel. Crisis situation measures, jointly drawn up by the FDFA and the Federal Department of Defence (DDPS), today exist for every Swiss representation abroad. Heckner pointed out that the FDFA's travel advice (in German at www.eda.admin.ch/reisehinweise) was particularly important in terms of prevention. When asked whether and to what extent victims of kidnap would have to contribute to the cost of their repatriation, Heckner replied that this matter would be regulated within the framework of the planned law on the Swiss Abroad. BE

PETER MÜLLER SAYS FAREWELL AFTER 35 YEARS



Peter Müller from South Africa first sat on the Council of the Swiss Abroad in Einsiedeln in 1978. He has since constantly raised important issues concerning the Swiss

abroad on the Council and has made a major contribution to many debates.

"It's now time to go," he declared at the meeting in Berne. His successor on the CSA has already been decided. South Africa will be represented by Marcie Bischof and Hans-Georg Bosch over the next four years. Peter Müller will nevertheless maintain contact with the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and the worldwide community of the Swiss abroad. He has already confirmed that he will be attending the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Davos. He said that his departure from the CSA was more of a "see you later" than a goodbye.

BE

91st Congress of the Swiss Abroad: 16 to 18 August 2013, Davos Congress Centre

Switzerland vs. globalisation will be the main topic of debate at the 91st Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Davos. Among the speakers will be Federal Councillor Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf.

More on this topic and the latest information on the 2013 Congress can be found in German at: www.aso.ch/de/angebote/auslandschweizer-kongress.

Put the Congress dates in your diary today. We look forward to seeing you!

Please send me the registration documents in spring 2013 for the 91st Congress of the Swiss Abroad (16 to 18 August 2013 in Davos).

My address is:

Surname:

first name:

Address:

postcode/city:

Country:

Email:



Please write clearly using block capitals.

The registration documents are available in two languages: German French (Please check the box of the language required.)

Send the completed form to: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad Communications & Marketing, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, SWITZERLAND, Fax: +41 (0)31 356 61 01 or email us at communication@aso.ch



Young Swiss abroad in an igloo

A few brave participants able to endure the cold at the winter camp organised by the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad in Lantsch (Grisons) over the New Year period tested out an igloo they had built themselves. The verdict was that nothing beats a night in an igloo!

Step 1: Prepare the site

Look for a site where there is little wind, enough compacted snow, evening sunshine and, if possible, a nice view. Place a stick in the centre and attach a piece of string to it to mark out the radius (half the diameter) of the igloo.

Step 2: Carve out the blocks of snow

Around 50 blocks of snow are required, measuring 60 x 45 x 15 cm. The blocks should be around the same size. TIP: never hold

blocks of snow at the edges when lifting them.

Step 3: Position the first layer of the igloo

Stamp down hard on the ground to create a firm foundation and prevent the blocks from sinking as the weight of the structure increases. Put the first layer of blocks into position, using the string attached to the stick in the centre to check that a perfect circle has been formed.

Step 4: Prepare the first layer for building on top

Trim the height of the blocks in the first layer so you can continue building in a spiral shape (see photo 1). The best approach is to kneel in the centre and trim from the ground upwards.

Step 5: Build upwards

Now build the spiral structure upwards, block by block. Check the inside radius regularly when positioning the blocks. If the igloo is not round, it will soon collapse.

Step 6: Dig an entrance

Now dig out an entrance under the wall of the igloo. Note that the top of the entrance on the outside should be lower than the sleeping area. This will keep heat inside the igloo and prevent it from escaping through the entrance. The best method is to dig a deep hole from both inside and outside the igloo, meeting in the middle.

Step 7: Plug any holes and jump into your sleeping bag

There will be large or small gaps between the blocks, depending on how the igloo has been built. To keep heat inside the igloo, these holes must be plugged with wedges and compacted snow.

You are now all set for a cool night in the snow house.

Text: Simone Riner, Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad www.sjas.ch; Source for igloo construction: www.iglubauer.ch



Education in Switzerland requires careful planning

More and more young Swiss people abroad are seeking to take educational courses in Switzerland. The number rose particularly sharply last year with the economic problems in many countries clearly having an impact. The Association promoting Education for Young Swiss Abroad (AJAS) received over 800 enquiries in 2012. Fiona Scheidegger, the head of AJAS, nev-

ertheless noted that young people are often inadequately prepared for this new chapter in their lives. She urgently advises young people and their parents to contact AJAS at the earliest possible opportunity because various matters have to be dealt with before commencing a course of study or period of training in Switzerland. These include, for example, admission conditions for the Swiss abroad, university requirements together with the recognition of foreign qualifications, accommodation, language skills and grant opportunities. AJAS can assist in clarifying all these matters and can provide

contact addresses if necessary. Comprehensive information is provided on insurance and military service issues on the website of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. OSA's Legal Department also offers support. www.aso.ch

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