

International Payments Made Easy: Paying AELO Swiss Academy Fees from Abroad

I have watched more tuition payments go sideways for boring reasons than for dramatic ones. A few years ago, a father in Jakarta sent a reservation deposit to hold his daughter's place at a Swiss boarding school. The money left his account on a Tuesday. Ten days later, the school's ledger still showed nothing. The transfer itself was perfectly fine. The reference field on the payment was empty, the finance office could not match an anonymous incoming wire to his daughter's file, and reconciliation took three weeks and a stack of emails. His daughter's seat was never actually at risk, but he did not know that at the time, and neither did anyone else.

That story repeats itself every term at schools across Switzerland, and it is almost always avoidable. Paying AELO Swiss Academy fees from abroad is not complicated once you understand what the money has to pass through on its way to a Swiss bank account. The complications come from small, unglamorous details: the wrong currency, a missing reference number, a payer name that does not match the student file. This piece walks through the whole journey, from the invoice to the receipt, including the costs nobody quotes you up front and the edge cases that catch even experienced families out.

Start with the invoice, not the bank

Most payment problems begin before anyone touches a banking app. The single most useful thing you can do is request a formal invoice or payment instruction from the finance office at AELO Swiss Academy, and check that it contains everything a foreign bank will ask you for. If any element is missing, ask for it in writing. Do not rely on details forwarded through an agent or typed from memory.

A Swiss payment instruction should include the beneficiary name exactly as the school's bank account is registered, an IBAN, a BIC or SWIFT code, the amount, the currency, and a payment reference. Swiss IBANs are 21 characters long and begin with the letters CH. If the string you have is shorter, or starts with something else, stop and ask. BIC codes are 8 or 11 characters. The beneficiary name matters more than people expect: banks screen payments against the account name, and a wire addressed to a nickname, a trading name, or an old company name can be delayed or returned.

Many Swiss institutions have moved to QR-coded invoices, which bundle the IBAN and reference into a single code. That is convenient if you bank in Switzerland, because the code can be scanned directly. From abroad, treat the QR invoice as a source of details to transcribe manually into your transfer form. The information is the same either way.

Two questions worth asking the finance office at the same time. First, which charges arrangement they recommend, meaning who pays which fees along the way. Second, whether they accept payments from an account that is not the parent's, which matters if a grandparent, employer, or sponsor intends to pay. Both questions take one email and can save you a week.

What the transfer actually costs

The headline fee your bank quotes you is rarely the whole cost. A cross-border payment typically passes through three or four hands, and each one can take a slice.



Consider a term invoice of 12,000 francs, which is in the plausible range for private schooling in Switzerland, though every school structures fees differently. Your sending bank might charge 15 to 40 in fees for an international wire. If the payment is routed in US dollars or another currency that needs correspondent banks, an intermediary in the chain may deduct its own fee, often 10 to 30, sometimes without telling anyone. Your bank will probably convert your home currency into francs at a rate with a markup of 1 to 3 percent over the mid-market rate you see on currency websites. On 12,000 francs, a 2 percent markup alone is 240. Finally, the receiving Swiss bank may charge the school a small incoming fee, often in the 5 to 20 franc range.

Add that up carelessly and a 12,000 franc invoice can cost you 300 to 500 extra. Handled deliberately, the same payment can land for under 100. The difference comes down to two decisions.

The first decision is currency. Send Swiss francs, not your home currency. A CHF payment to a Swiss bank generally settles domestically without passing through correspondent chains, which removes the intermediary deductions entirely. If you let your bank convert euros or dollars into francs inside the transfer, the conversion happens at their rate, on their terms, and you have no visibility. If you must send euros, note that Switzerland sits within the SEPA area, so a euro transfer from a European account will usually arrive without drama, but the school invoices in francs, which means a conversion happens somewhere, almost always at a worse rate than the one you could arrange yourself.

The second decision is who converts. Holding francs yourself, even briefly, puts you in control of the rate. The mechanisms for that are the subject of the next section.

Three routes, three trade-offs

There are three realistic ways to move tuition money to Switzerland, each with a distinct personality.

A traditional bank wire is the heavyweight option. It produces the best paperwork, including a SWIFT confirmation that schools and consulates recognise without question, and it handles large amounts without blinking. The trade-offs are the fee layers described above, slower processing, and forms that vary wildly between banks. For a one-off deposit backed by a visa deadline, the documentation alone can justify it.

Online transfer services such as Wise, Revolut, or OFX work differently. They hold pools of currency in each country, so your money often travels as a local payment on both ends rather than as a full international wire. The result is usually a rate at or very near the mid-market rate and a single transparent fee, often 0.4 to 1 percent all-in, with arrival in one to two business days for francs and sometimes same day. The caveats are real, though. Accounts need verification before large first transfers, so set the account up well before your deadline. Some

services have limits or extra checks on very large amounts. And some schools want the payer's name on the payment to match the parent on file, so check whether the service sends the transfer under your name or under a wallet or business name.

Card payments or school portals are the lightweight option. Some schools accept cards for smaller charges such as application fees, excursions, or pocket money top-ups. Card processing typically costs 2 to 3 percent, and limits make full tuition impractical, so treat this as a convenience for small amounts rather than a strategy.

| Route | Typical all-in cost | Typical speed | Best suited for |

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| Bank wire in CHF | Flat fee of 15 to 40 if you already hold francs, more with conversion | 1 to 3 business days | Large amounts, maximum documentation |

| Online transfer service | 0.4 to 1 percent, near mid-market rate | Same day to 2 business days | Regular term payments, good rates |

| Card or school portal | 2 to 3 percent | Instant | Small charges, not full tuition |

The sensible pattern for many families is a hybrid. Move the big deposit by bank wire for the paper trail, then shift recurring term fees through an online service once you know the amounts and dates. Compare the total landed cost for your specific amount rather than comparing headline fees, because a 3 percent markup on a large invoice dwarfs any flat fee.

The reference number is not optional

Here is the detail that caused the Jakarta delay I mentioned earlier, and it causes hundreds of others every September and January. When term begins, a school's finance office receives dozens or hundreds of incoming wires in a short window. The only reliable way to attach an incoming payment to the right student is the payment reference on the wire. Amounts are unreliable, because families often pay similar figures. Payer names are unreliable, because accounts are held by parents, companies, or sponsors whose names appear nowhere in the student file.

The reference is usually printed on the invoice, sometimes as a long string of numbers. Copy it character for character into the reference field of your transfer. If the field in your banking app has a length limit, put as much of it as fits and email the finance office with the full reference, the exact amount, the sending date, and the name on the sending account.

Then, once the transfer is sent, save the SWIFT confirmation, often called an MT103. This document lists every leg of the payment and is the single most useful artefact if anything goes wrong. Email a copy to the finance office proactively. It turns their reconciliation from a search into a confirmation, and it gives you documented proof of payment for visa files or immigration appointments, where a bank slip from your home country is sometimes not enough.

Timing: cut-offs, weekends and the franc

Money moves on banking hours, and banking hours do not include weekends. A transfer submitted on a Friday afternoon typically starts moving on Monday and lands on Tuesday or Wednesday. International wires between major banks are usually same-day or next-day for value if submitted before the sending bank's cut-off, which often falls in the early to mid afternoon local time. Miss the cut-off and you lose a day.

Build a buffer of at least five business days between the moment you initiate payment and any hard deadline. That covers cut-offs, weekends, one round of compliance questions, and the ordinary friction of a first payment to a new beneficiary, which banks sometimes hold for additional checks.

The franc itself adds a timing question. Exchange rates move daily, and over the weeks between invoice and deadline the rate can drift a percent or two in either direction, which on tuition-scale amounts is real money. You cannot predict it, so pick a policy instead of agonising per payment. Some families convert and pay the day the invoice arrives, accepting the rate as the cost of certainty. Others hold their home currency and watch the rate for a week, converting on a favourable day. Both are defensible. What is not defensible is converting the night before the deadline while also hoping the transfer arrives instantly.

If the payment relates to enrolment, sequence matters. Visa appointments at Swiss consulates frequently require proof that fees have been paid, so the deposit must land before the appointment, which means before the appointment is even booked in some cases. Work backwards from the visa date, not from the school's nominal deadline.

Edge cases that catch families out

A few situations deserve special care because they break the normal flow.

Payments from third parties are the most common. Grandparents, employers, and corporate sponsors frequently pay Swiss school fees, and schools are used to it, but both the school and the Swiss banking system apply source-of-funds checks on money arriving from accounts unrelated to the student. Expect requests for documentation explaining the relationship and the purpose. The fix is disclosure: tell the finance office in advance who will pay, from which country, and make sure the payer's name appears correctly on the wire. A payment that arrives from a name nobody recognises, with no reference, is the worst-case combination.

Currency controls are the [redit post](#) second. Some countries restrict outbound transfers or require documentation or central-bank approval for education payments abroad. If you are paying from such a country, allow weeks rather than days for approval, and ask whether the school will accept the fee split across two transfers, since smaller amounts sometimes clear more easily.

Routing is the third. International wires pass through correspondent networks, and payments routed through certain jurisdictions can attract additional sanctions screening and holds. If your payment is stuck with no explanation, ask your bank which route it is taking and whether an alternative routing is possible. This is a question worth asking before you send, if your corridor is known to be slow.

Finally, if the student is a minor, the payment should come from a parent or legal guardian's account. Banks ask questions about money moving to children, and a mismatch here creates delays precisely when you can least afford them.

When something goes wrong