

Export to Switzerland



Table des matières

Table des matières	2
1. General information	3
Political landscape	3
Economics	3
2. Additional indicators	5
Economic indicators	5
Social and environmental indicators	5
Free trade agreements	5
3. On-site: a step-by-step guide	6
First contacts	6
Exporting	7
Interesting markets for a first export	8
4. Business culture	9
Communication	9
Attire	9
How to prepare a visit	9
Negotiating	9
What are the public holidays?	9
5. What can we do for you?	10
Local contact points	10
Important addresses	10
Useful website to delve into	10



1. General information

Political landscape

- Switzerland is governed by a federal system involving the Confederation, cantons, and communes. Direct democracy enables the population to participate directly in decision-making at all political levels. The 26 cantons have a strong identity of their own, and a high degree of autonomy (e.g. tax: average corporate tax: 14.87%), creating a degree of competition between cantons (e.g. economically). Politically, Switzerland enjoys a high degree of political stability, with the French-speaking part of the country tending to vote left-wing, while the German-speaking part of the country is more open to right-wing parties. The right-wing SVP, to the right of the liberal party, is Switzerland's leading political party in terms of votes.
- Relations (e.g. economic and trade) between Switzerland and the European Union are currently governed by bilateral framework agreements, with different expiry dates depending on the sector. In May 2021, negotiations on a comprehensive trade agreement broke down at the last minute, after Switzerland withdrew from the negotiations. This withdrawal, and the EU's refusal to allow Switzerland to drive the agenda, caused considerable nervousness in Swiss business circles (most of whom were pro-European), due to the trade barriers that threatened to re-emerge between Switzerland and the EU when the current bilateral agreements expired (e.g. Switzerland's withdrawal from Erasmus exchanges, Switzerland's inability to participate in European scientific programs). Other sectors were also under threat until Switzerland and the EU announced the resumption of negotiations on March 18, 2024.

Economics

- Over 70% of Swiss GDP is generated by the service sector. The industrial sector remains a crucial pillar of the economy, accounting for over 25% of GDP. In 2023, Switzerland's GDP grew moderately (0.7% in 2023).
- Manufacturing (-0.1%), chemicals and pharmaceuticals (-2.3%) ended the year in decline. The other industrial branches returned to growth after two negative quarters. The energy, tourism and service sectors in general saw an increase in value added, particularly in the transport and communications sector (+0.4%), which also benefited from increased travel. Growth rates were also above average in business services (+0.3%), health and social services (+1.4%) and public administration (+0.7%).
- The Swiss economy, made up mainly of SMEs, proved resilient in 2023, and its outlook for 2024 is moderately better than that of its Western European neighbours. Key difference: private consumption remains robust in Switzerland. Reliance on nuclear power and renewable energies (especially hydroelectricity) have limited pressure on energy prices. With a strong Swiss franc, imported inflation has remained low. As a result, Swiss inflation fell below the Swiss National Bank's (SNB) 2% target in June 2023.
- In 2023, after two years of strong growth, Swiss foreign trade declined in both directions. Exports fell by 1.2%, with a volatile quarterly trend. Imports, down 3.8% over the year, recovered in the final quarter. Prices weakened in both traffic directions, having a positive impact on actual results. The balance of trade surplus amounted to CHF 48.5 billion.
- In 2022, exports of goods from Brussels to Switzerland rose by 46.3% to 304.7 million euros. Imports have been falling since 2021, reaching 154.2 million EUR in 2022. As a result, the Brussels trade balance was in surplus by 150.5 million EUR in 2022. At Belgian



level, exports to Switzerland have been on the rise since 2021 (+36.4% in two years), following a fall in 2020 (-15.5%), and reached 5.3 billion EUR in 2022. Brussels' share of this total was 5.7%, ranking Switzerland 7th among the Region's customers, and 16th in terms of imports. The main categories of Brussels goods exported to Switzerland in 2022 were: fine pearls and precious stones, precious metals/fancy jewelry (+22.3%, or 1.2billion), transport equipment (18.6%, or 56.6 million EUR, up 18%) and chemical industry products (16.3%, or 49.8 million EUR, down 29%). Imports were mainly instruments and appliances (57.8%, or 89.1 million EUR) and chemical products (23.1%, or 35.6 million EUR, down 43%).



2. Additional indicators

Economic indicators

Find the main socio-economic indicators for this country, as well as its trade with Brussels and Belgium, in the publication "[Brussels and the world – Country statistics](#)" on analytics.brussels, hub.brussels' online data library.

The "[Brussels and the world - General statistics](#)" publication also provides data on trade between the Brussels-Capital Region and the rest of the world, by continent and by major world region. The same type of data is also available for the various regions of Belgium, as well as for Belgium as a whole.

Social and environmental indicators

If you'd like to know where your country stands in terms of social, environmental and economic issues, access a series of [composite indicators from the European Commission](#), structured according to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals¹ and the European Commission's 6 priority policy areas².

Free trade agreements

European agreements have a major impact on market accessibility and trade with certain countries. The links below, published by the European Commission, will provide you with all the information you need on free trade agreements and trade barriers. Existing agreements, those that have not yet been ratified and those that are expected to be ratified, can be consulted here:

- [Free trade agreements](#)
- [Trade barriers](#)

¹No poverty, Zero hunger, Good health and well-being, Quality education, Gender equality, Clean water and sanitation, Clean and affordable energy, Decent work and economic growth, Industry, innovation and infrastructure, Reduced inequalities, Sustainable cities and communities, Sustainable consumption and production, Measures to combat climate change, Water life, Land life, Peace, justice and effective institutions, Partnerships to achieve the goals.

² A green pact for Europe, An economy serving people, A Europe fit for the digital age, A stronger Europe on the world stage, Promoting our European way of life, A new impetus for European democracy.



-

3. On-site: a step-by-step guide

Switzerland is recognized as a mature market, benefiting from a stable economic and political environment. As a world leader in a wide range of sectors, from the most innovative to the most standard, it generates fierce competition between well-established national and international companies. To succeed in this market, companies need to be innovative and competitive. It's important to note that the Swiss market is marked by the presence of companies with quasi-monopoly positions in various sectors, including distribution (the 2 main players, Migros and Coop, have 75% of the total market share) and utilities.

Switzerland embodies a model of excellence and constant pursuit of quality. Quality goes above price. This quest for quality transcends all aspects of Swiss life, from world-renowned watchmaking to artisanal chocolate production to innovation in the latest technologies. However, Switzerland is a small market. Purchasing of goods for distribution in the country are sometimes made from abroad. Distributors tend to get better prices from their suppliers by including purchases for the Swiss markets into purchases for Germany or France.

First contacts

Prospecting

- Switzerland has established itself as a prime export destination thanks to several undeniable advantages. The country benefits from a flexible legal framework for labor, a predominantly highly qualified workforce, first-rate infrastructures, an advantageous tax environment, remarkable political stability, world-renowned research centers and an exceptional quality of life.
- Any foreign company intending to set up business in Switzerland is required to have a representative resident in Switzerland. This representative may be either a Swiss citizen or a foreigner with a valid residence permit.
- Switzerland is a mature and highly competitive market, where exporters need to offer innovative and price-competitive products. It is crucial to recognize that this market is not homogeneous, with preferences and consumer habits varying from region to region. The cantonal identity plays a paramount role. Your offer needs to be adapted to cantonal preferences. Before being Swiss, consumers think of themselves as Zurichers, Vauders, Genevans, and so on. It's essential to recognize that Switzerland is made up of three distinct markets. This means adjusting your communication strategy, marketing, and sales approach to the country's three language regions.
- In Switzerland, there are major tax disparities, particularly in terms of tax rates between cantons and municipalities. Tax rates vary considerably from one canton to another. For example, a company will not be subject to the same taxes if its head office is in Geneva, Vaud or Valais. Nidwalden still tops the league table for business taxes, closely followed by Zug and Appenzell Innerrhoden (as at 27.06.2023). Please refer to your HUB office for further details.
- The size of the German-speaking Swiss market should not be underestimated. Concentrating Switzerland's GDP and covering 65% of its territory, it plays a major role in the country's economy. Cantons such as Basel and Zurich stand out for their economic strength, being recognized as innovation hubs. Speaking German (or at least English) is a must prior to deploying activities.
- Give priority to SMEs rather than large groups in Switzerland. SMEs offer significant opportunities for business partnerships, collaborations and sales of products and services.



Exporting

- Switzerland is not part of the European Union, which means that the applicable regulatory framework varies from sector to sector. As a result, specific rules on language, labelling and sector-specific standards may be required prior to entering Switzerland. Each sector is currently governed by bilateral agreements that define import and export conditions between Switzerland and the EU. It is essential to understand this regulatory framework before undertaking any activity in Switzerland.
- Agricultural products and foodstuffs benefit from import protection, notably through the application of specific customs duties. Since January 1, 2024, customs duties on industrial products have been abolished. However, the obligation to declare imports and pay other import taxes and duties, including VAT, remains in force.
- There are three main approaches to penetrating the Swiss market. 1/ Direct sales: can be carried out via a website or through direct contact with a Swiss company. However, companies with worldwide annual sales more than CHF 100,000 are required to register for a VAT number. 2/ Use of intermediaries such as a a) sales agent: they promote products, services and find new customers. b) distributors but can be complex due to the maturity of the market and the necessary regional adaptation. 3/ Alternatively, the company may choose to set up directly in Switzerland (see underneath).
- As an exporter, it is essential to have an ATA Carnet. The ATA Carnet is an international customs document used in Switzerland to facilitate the temporary entry of goods such as professional equipment, commercial samples or goods destined for exhibitions or trade fairs. It avoids customs duties and taxes, simplifying import and export procedures for these temporary goods.

Payments

- Invoices with QR codes are mandatory. Twint has become a popular payment method.

Company types

- The three most common structures for SMEs in Switzerland are: the sole proprietorship, the limited company (SA) (*minimum capital: CHF 100,000, of which at least CHF 50,000 must be paid up*) and the limited liability company (SARL) (*minimum capital: CHF 20,000*)
- In Switzerland, the most important and most common form of company is the public limited company (SA). This legal form is also often chosen by foreign companies that set up a subsidiary here. If you need further information, please contact Hub Brussels Switzerland

Support and subsidies

- <https://economie-emploi.brussels/prime-export-foire-physique>
- <https://economie-emploi.brussels/prime-export-inviter-prospects>
- <https://economie-emploi.brussels/prime-export-voyage-prospection>

Trade shows

Fairs and tradeshows are mostly local venues (sometimes limited to regional dynamics). Fairs and trade shows with an international dimension include: the Geneva Motorshow, Swiss Biotech days, Vitafood. Please have a look at: <https://palexpo.ch/en/home/> (Geneva); <https://www.messe-basel.com/en/> (Basel); <https://www.messe-zurich.com/en/> (Zürich) ; <https://www.bernexpo.ch/en/home.aspx> (Bern)



Interesting markets for a first export

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The ICT-sector (including AI and Blockchain) is a major pillar of the Swiss economy, accounting for around 8% of GDP employing almost 240,000 people. The country is home to prestigious private research (google, Disney, Meta,). The 'Crypto Valley' in Zug, positions Switzerland as a global player in blockchain, opening new opportunities in data management and financial services. Gaming, App development and AI are other fields of innovation.

Chemical and pharmaceutical industry

Major economic sector, accounting for 7% of GDP with over a thousand active companies. When it comes to R&D, no other Swiss sector rivals it. The Swiss Innovation Foundation, established in 2016, receives funding from private sources and government support. It facilitates collaboration between companies and academic institutions, promoting research advancement for both national and international firms.

Medtech & Biotech

The sector makes a significant contribution to Switzerland's economy: 1,400 medtechs and 284 biotech companies representing almost 90.000 people. The need for innovation (2.7 billion CHF were invested in Biotech in 2022) and the competition between large companies and start-ups (20% of European companies have chosen to locate here) are stimulating the sector. The Confederation, in conjunction with top notch academic institutions (EPFL and EPFZ) support the sector through an attractive legal framework.

Cleantech

The cleantech sector now accounts for almost 5% of Swiss GDP, with a 25% increase in the number of jobs over the last five years. Over a ten-year period, 207 cleantech start-ups were created and are still active today. 10% of Swiss start-ups are in the cleantech sector. These figures testify to the significant growth and vitality of this sector in Switzerland. What's more, the fact that the public is increasingly willing to pay more for non-fossil fuel and less polluting solutions is also stimulating the development of this market.

Financial services

The financial sector plays a crucial role in the Swiss economy, accounting for around 10% of the GDP. The sector employs 234,600 people, representing around 5.4% of total employment in Switzerland, and generates gross added value of around 70.9 billion Swiss francs, representing around 9.3% of GDP. Switzerland is a world leader in cross-border asset management, with around a quarter of the world's assets managed within its borders.

Sustainable construction (+ interior design)

With an annual investment of around 60 billion Swiss francs, the Swiss construction sector has considerable potential to act sustainably. However, lack of workforce and a need for new solutions offer a real potential for Brussels based companies in the domain. The interior design sector is dominated by large players, making the low and mid-range segment rather saturated. On the other hand, there is an opportunity to be seized in the high-end segment.

International Organizations

Switzerland - and especially the Lake Geneva region - has been home to numerous international organizations. 40 institutions (including UN, CERN, the red Cross movement) employing over 25,000 people offer opportunities in submissions for public tenders.



4. Business culture

Communication

- Many Swiss companies still use the formal form of address, although there is a growing tendency to use the informal form of address.
- The Swiss are generally discrete about their private lives, preferring everyday conversations to focus on general topics rather than personal issues.
- It is crucial for the Swiss that people make the effort to speak one of the country's three main languages: German, French or Italian. It is imperative to consider the cultural differences between the Swiss cantons and between the Swiss mentality and your Belgian/Brussels originated mentality. Be careful as well to consider your francophone Swiss counterpart as being identical in mentality to you (if you are a francophone Brussels based businessperson). Swiss Germans are closer and more reluctant to enter into business with unknown counterparts. Mentalities in big cities and country side are completely different.

Attire

- Conservatism also applies to the Swiss dress code. For business meetings, men should wear a suit and tie, women a suit and dress. Jewelry should be simple and discreet.

How to prepare a visit

- The Swiss are particularly committed to punctuality, whether for meetings with business partners or clients.
- The Swiss attach great importance to references. That's why it's vital to highlight your achievements and the projects you've successfully carried out internationally.

Negotiating

- The Swiss appreciate professionalism when it is associated with seriousness and a degree of responsibility. This approach is reflected in the way they run their businesses.
- In Switzerland, where the market is small and highly corporatist. Networks, whether educational, professional, military, sporting or philanthropic, are of paramount importance, so it's essential to use them wisely.
- Do not expect quick fixes in Switzerland. Decisions can take time. Patience and building trust are essential.
- Gifts are given after a successful business transaction and are usually reciprocated. Gifts with the company logo or good wine or other spirits are considered appropriate gifts.

What are the public holidays?

- In Switzerland, normal working hours in companies, generally vary between 40 and 44 hours a week. In industry, this is set at 45 hours a week. In the retail sector, the limit is 50 hours. Every employee in Switzerland is entitled to at least 4 weeks paid holiday a year. Part-time work is customary.



5. What can we do for you?

Local contact points

The General delegates and local representatives employed by hub.brussels are official representatives of the Brussels Government abroad, they support Brussels companies that want to explore new avenues abroad.

They have the information, expertise and in-depth knowledge about the specifics of different foreign markets. Based on that knowledge, they help to refine and fine-tune your export plans, with advice on regulations, competition, market entry conditions, permits, etc. Furthermore, they can support you with your questions regarding exports, certain sectors within the jurisdiction, contacts with intermediaries, business culture, and much more.



Maxime Dohogne

Zwitsersland (Geneva)

Chemin des mines 2

CH1202 Geneva

Zwitsersland

+41 (0)76 606 98 44

mdohogne@hub.brussels

Key addresses

- Embassy of Belgium in Switzerland: Weltpoststrasse 4, 3015 Bern.
- Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations: Rue de Moillebeau 58 (6th Floor) , 1209 Geneva

Useful website to delve into

Add any important links for websites here, these can be interesting databases, governmental websites for companies, trade agencies, data websites for economic analysis,

- <https://www.eda.admin.ch/aboutswitzerland/en/home.html> (About Switzerland)
- <https://www.uid.admin.ch/> (Business and Enterprise Register)
- <https://www.seco.admin.ch/seco/fr/home.html> (Secrétariat d'Etat à l'économie)
- <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics.html> (Federal statistical office)
- <https://www.kmu.admin.ch/kmu/en/home.html> (SME Portal for small and medium-sized enterprises)

