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Establish a Physical Presence

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When expanding operations into Switzerland, companies should consider key factors related to site development, commercial real estate availability, and regulatory requirements. Whether opting for a greenfield investment or leasing office space, understanding local permitting procedures, environmental regulations, and regional cost differences is essential for a smooth and compliant market entry.

In Switzerland, there are numerous agencies, such as the cantonal economic development organizations, which support foreign companies in the whole process and give support in understanding the modalities.

Land Use and Permits

Switzerland's land use planning system provides clear zoning regulations that distinguish between residential, commercial, and industrial zones. This structured approach supports sustainable growth and gives businesses certainty when acquiring or developing property.

For new constructions and certain property modifications, investors must obtain a building permit from the relevant local authorities. Approval timelines vary depending on the scope and complexity of the project. Industrial and service-sector developments may also require additional operational or environmental permits to meet health, safety, and regulatory standards.

Swiss Real Estate Law

Foreign investors may acquire commercial real estate in Switzerland such as offices, industrial sites, and hospitality properties without prior approval. However, under the Lex Koller law, restrictions apply to the purchase of residential property and undeveloped land for noncommercial use, particularly in popular tourist resorts and lake regions. Authorization is required unless the acquisition directly supports business operations (e.g., employee housing). The law aims to limit foreign ownership of residential and recreational property to preserve national control over land use.

Transaction-Related Taxes

In Switzerland, taxes related to real estate transactions are set at the cantonal level, meaning that each of the 26 cantons applies its own rules and rates. This results in variations in both the structure and level of taxation, depending on the property's location:

- Certification and land registry fees: These Fees vary from 0.05% to 1.3%.
- Transfer taxes: The transfer taxes vary from 0% (in 8 cantons) to 3.3%.
- Real estate capital gains tax: This tax is a degressive tax to prevent speculative investments.
- Property tax: This tax varies from 0% to 1.3% p.a.

8.1 Greenfield Investments

If you are planning to establish a production site, greenfields offer the opportunity to design and construct purpose-built facilities aligned with operational goals. Local and cantonal governments offer ready-to-develop land as part of their local development strategies and provide access to zoned land and industrial parks, fast-track permitting for strategic investment projects, and integration with public utilities and transportation links, allowing you to construct factories, office buildings, or logistics centers tailored exactly to your needs.

Before starting construction, you will need to navigate a structured building permit process governed by municipal and cantonal regulations, primarily under the Spatial Planning Act (SPA) and the Spatial Planning Ordinance (SPO). Key steps include early engagement with local building authorities, transparent communication with neighboring property owners, and adherence to environmental and zoning laws. All greenfield developments require compliance with zoning laws and environmental regulations. For large-scale projects, an environmental impact assessment (EIA) may be required. The EIA process ensures environmental risks are managed early on, enhancing long-term investment resilience and project approval timelines.

Environmental Compliance and Energy Considerations

Switzerland enforces some of the strictest environmental standards in Europe, grounded in the precautionary principle and the polluter-pays model. For companies establishing or operating facilities, early attention to environmental compliance is both a legal obligation and a strategic advantage.

Key compliance areas:

- Air and soil protection: Emissions limits and contamination controls apply to all industrial activities.
- Noise management: Sound thresholds are regulated, particularly in mixed-use or residential zones.
- Waste treatment and recycling: On-site waste separation and approved disposal systems are mandatory.
- Hazardous substance handling: Chemical storage and use must meet strict safety standards.

Incorporating environmental safeguards into the planning phase improves approval timelines and enhances project credibility with local communities and regulators.

Energy Supply: Clean, Stable, and Predictable

One of Switzerland's strongest environmental and economic assets is its low-carbon electricity mix, driven by:

- Hydropower ($\approx 60\%$): A stable, renewable backbone for industrial and commercial power needs
- Nuclear energy ($\approx 30\%$): Complements base load demand, ensuring high grid reliability
- Minimal reliance on fossil fuels, reducing exposure to volatile global energy prices

Switzerland's transparent grid pricing, high energy reliability, and green electricity sourcing provide an attractive backdrop for sustainable operations and ESG-aligned reporting. Cantons such as Appenzell Innerrhoden (18.5 Swiss cents/kWh), Uri (19.2 Swiss cents/kWh), Glarus (19.8 Swiss cents/kWh), Obwalden (20.1 Swiss cents/kWh), and Nidwalden (20.5 Swiss cents/kWh) offer some of the lowest energy prices.

8.2 Commercial Real Estate Market

Real estate prices in Switzerland vary by location. Urban centers like Zurich and Geneva come with higher costs due to high demand and excellent infrastructure. If you are looking for more affordable options, consider cities such as Lausanne, Lucerne, or St. Gallen. These cities offer cost-effective alternatives while maintaining excellent connectivity—a key advantage in Switzerland’s compact and highly efficient transportation network.

Commercial Real Estate Prices

Commercial real estate prices in Switzerland vary widely depending on location and usage.

- City of Zurich is a prime real estate market, with prime office rents around CHF 1,050 (Q4 2024) (approx. USD 1,300) per m²/year.
- Geneva follows at around CHF 920 (approx. USD 1,150) and Lausanne at around CHF 450 (approx. USD 560) per m²/year.
- Bern and Basel average at CHF 370 (approx. USD 460) per m²/year.

Regional cities like Lucerne, St. Gallen, Aarau, Schaffhausen, and Solothurn offer cost-effective options with excellent infrastructure, public transport, and talent access—often within 45 to 90 minutes of major airports and business centers. If you are looking for cost-effective options, consider locations such as:

- Lucerne (office CHF 150–330 (approx. USD 180–410), retail CHF 160–600 (approx. USD 200–750) per m²/year)
- St. Gallen (office CHF 120–280 (approx. USD 150–350), retail CHF 120–380 (approx. USD 150–470) per m²/year)
- Aarau (CHF 120–280 (approx. USD 150–350) per m²/year)
- Schaffhausen (CHF 130–270 (approx. USD 160–340) per m²/year)
- Solothurn (CHF 110–250 (approx. USD 140–310) per m²/year)

All of these locations offer strong infrastructure and connectivity at lower rental costs.

8.3 Laboratory and R&D Spaces

If you are planning R&D operations in Switzerland, you will find a wide range of lab and innovation facilities tailored to life sciences, high tech, and engineering needs. These spaces are concentrated in key hubs like Zurich, Lausanne, Basel, Bern, and Geneva, often integrated with universities and hospitals. Options include:

- Science parks (e.g., Switzerland Innovation Parks, Technoparks)
- Private biotech hubs (e.g., Superlab Suisse in Zurich, Lausanne, or Basel)
- Academic campuses (e.g., Biopôle Lausanne)

Facilities range from shared incubator labs to fully equipped private suites, supporting both early-stage and mature R&D teams. In addition to infrastructure, these environments promote collaboration and fast-track development through access to academic, clinical, and industrial networks.

What to Expect from the Swiss Lab Infrastructure

Most facilities in Switzerland offer high-end, ready-to-use environments with the ability to scale or customize depending on your operational maturity.

Standard features include:

- Fully equipped wet and dry labs, cleanrooms, and prototype workshops.
- Shared instrumentation and technical staff (e.g., autoclaves for sterilizing lab equipment, biosafety cabinets, nuclear magnetic resonance spectrometers and PCR machines).
- Advanced IT infrastructure with secure data management, cloud access, and isolated network environments.
- Specialized utility connections such as high-purity gases (nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and compressed air), deionized water for sensitive lab applications, and uninterruptible power supplies, and HVAC zoning for containment processes, temperature- or humidity-sensitive processes, and meeting biosafety and certification needs (e.g., BSL-2 or GMP compliance).

Value-Added Services and Integration

In addition to physical infrastructure, Swiss laboratory environments typically include a range of integrated services aimed at accelerating your setup:

- Regulatory and compliance support (e.g. help with BSL certifications or Swissmedic coordination)
- IP strategy and legal advisory access
- Access to researchers, engineers, and PhD talent from local institutions
- Collaboration platforms for joint research, tech transfer, and pilot projects
- Business development resources, including investor networks and government grant introductions

Examples of Swiss Providers:

- Switzerland Innovation Park
 - Offers modular wet and dry labs, coworking zones, and pilot production areas
 - Direct access to ETH Zurich, EPFL, the University of Basel, PSI, universities of applied sciences, and other academic partners
 - Lease flexibility ranging from small R&D offices to multi-floor anchor tenant labs
- Superlab Suisse (Zurich, Lausanne, Basel)
 - High-end, turnkey BSL-1 and BSL-2 labs for life sciences, biotech, and pharma companies
 - Lab space starts from CHF 600–800 (approx. USD 660–880) per m²/year, depending on customization
 - Tenants include startups, scale-ups, and subsidiaries of multinational firms
- Biopôle Lausanne starts from CHF 330–370 (approx. USD 410–460) per m²/year
 - Home to over 130 companies and institutions focused on life sciences and digital health
 - Offers shared lab equipment, GMP-compliant space, and on-site business support
 - Integrated with the University Hospital of Lausanne (CHUV) and EPFL innovation ecosystem
- Technopark Zurich
 - Focus on medical technology, artificial intelligence, data science, and environmental and energy technology
 - Home to 260 tech companies, 47,000 m² site area
- Basel Stücker Park
 - A hub for life sciences, medical technology, nanotechnology, cleantech, and information and communication technology (ICT)
 - Encompasses approximately 69,000 m², with plans to expand the total rental space to over 111,000 m²

8.4 Infrastructure and Connectivity

Digital Connectivity

Switzerland offers top-tier infrastructure, making business setup smooth and reliable—even outside major cities. High-speed fiber-optic internet (up to 10 Gbps) is standard in most business areas, supported by providers like Swisscom, Sunrise, and Salt. Redundant connections and SLAs are available for companies with critical digital needs.

The Swiss power grid is among Europe’s most reliable, with minimal outages and easy access to renewable energy—especially hydroelectric power. Green energy options can be specified in contracts. Most office and production spaces are move-in ready, equipped with modern cabling, server room capacity, and energy-efficient systems. Depending on your sector, you may need custom IT or security fit-outs.

Before leasing, check whether Internet and telecom services are bundled or require separate contracts. Many business parks offer integrated infrastructure and on-site support to streamline setup.

High-Performance Computing and Quantum Infrastructure

Switzerland is home to one of Europe’s most advanced supercomputing environments. The Swiss National Supercomputing Centre (CSCS) in Lugano supports leading computational research and is accessible to industry through partnerships. In addition, the Department of Physics at the University of Basel hosts the country’s first dedicated quantum computer—developed by Quantum Basel and installed at uptownBasel. This facility is a major step toward quantum-assisted industrial innovation and is designed for secure and commercial-grade applications.

Cloud, Data Sovereignty, and Cybersecurity

Major cloud providers like Microsoft Azure, Amazon Web Services (AWS), and Google Cloud maintain regional data centers in Switzerland, offering compliance-grade data residency and low-latency service delivery. In parallel, local hyperscale data center operators such as Green Datacenter provide high-security, energy-efficient infrastructure that supports colocation, hybrid cloud, and full-stack platforms.

Cybersecurity is governed by the revised Federal Act on Data Protection (nFADP, 2023), which aligns with EU GDPR standards. The National Cybersecurity Centre (NCSC) provides guidance and coordination in the event of cyber incidents and helps businesses navigate regulatory and technical security requirements.

For international companies with stringent compliance, performance, and privacy needs, Switzerland provides a secure, scalable, and regulation-aligned base for digital operations.

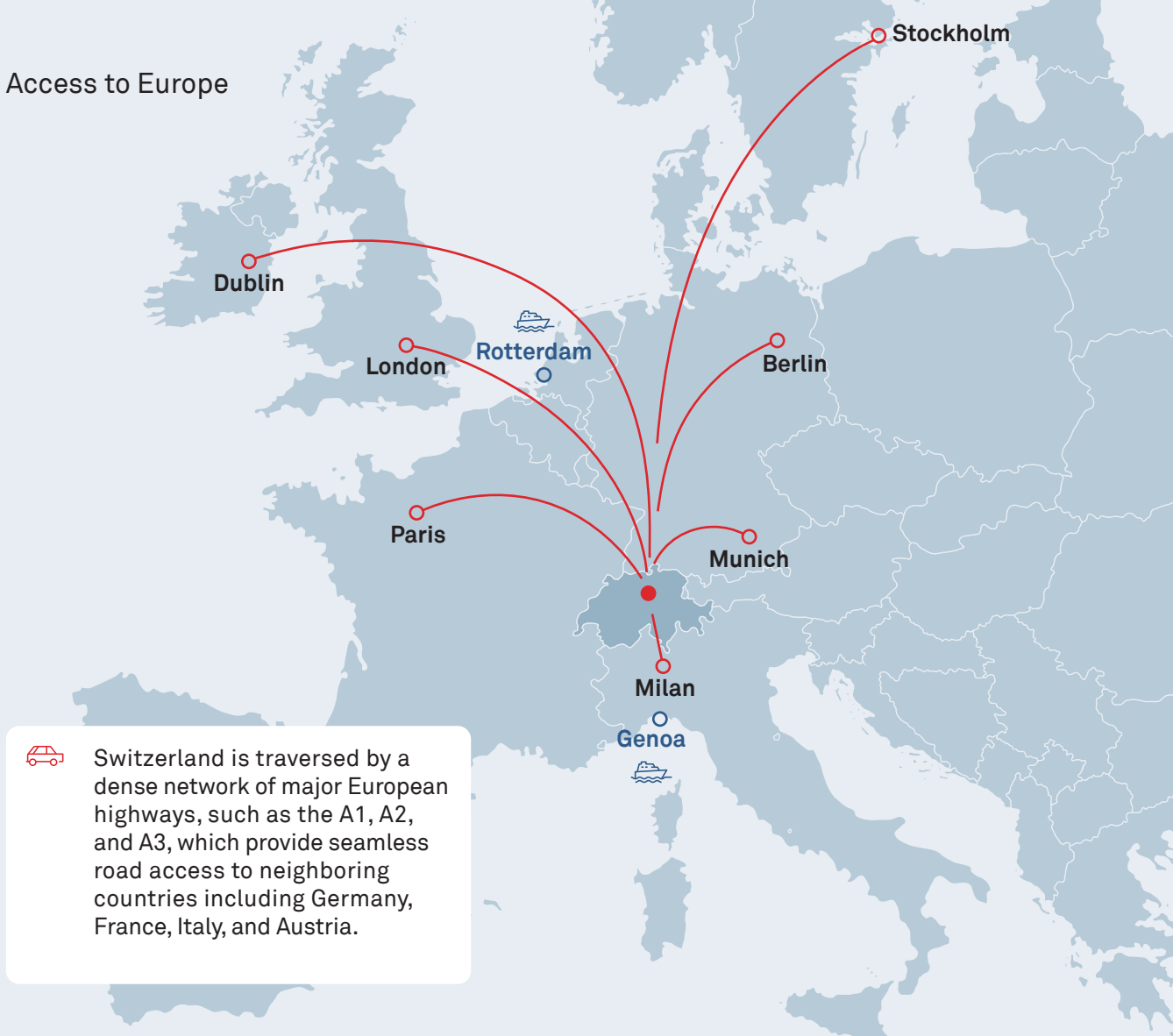
Sources and More Information

Swiss geography—facts and figures
Swiss Real Estate Association (SVIT)
Square Meter Prices by Country/City
Energy Cost Calculator
Property Market Switzerland 2024
Quantus Real Estate Finance
Wüest Partner
Acquisition of property by foreign non-residents (Lex Koller)

Support services:

- Cantonal and regional economic development organizations
- Real estate platforms for property acquisition, for example Homegate
- Swiss Circle real estate network

Access to Europe



Switzerland is traversed by a dense network of major European highways, such as the A1, A2, and A3, which provide seamless road access to neighboring countries including Germany, France, Italy, and Austria.

	Paris	Munich	Berlin	London	Dublin	Milan	Stockholm
	1 hour	1 hour	1 hour	1.5 hours	2 hours	1 hour	2.5 hours
	6 hours	3.5 hours	8 hours	10 hours	18 hours	3 hours	18 hours
	3 hours	4 hours	8.3 hours	8 hours	26 hours	3 hours	21 hours

Geographic Connectivity

Thanks to a highly developed transport infrastructure, “regional” still means well-connected in Switzerland. A production site in Neuchâtel is just 1 hour 15 minutes from Geneva Airport. An office in Schaffhausen is only 45 minutes from Zurich by car, and an office in Chur is only 60 minutes away.

Cantons such as Glarus, Uri, Grisons, Fribourg, Valais, and Solothurn, located on the periphery of major economic centers, offer attractive conditions for international investors. These cantons are closely integrated into the national

road and rail network, allowing swift access to urban hubs and airports. They combine excellent infrastructure with lower real estate and labor costs and more competitive energy pricing. For companies looking to balance cost efficiency with strategic access, these cantons present a compelling alternative to larger metropolitan areas, particularly for industrial production, logistics, and support functions.

Switzerland’s central geographic location in Europe enables convenient and rapid access to the major markets of the European continent.