How to do business in Switzerland

Legal considerations
The European Economic Area (EEA) includes all 28 European Union (EU) countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. It allows them to be part of the EU’s single market.

Switzerland is neither a member of the EU nor of the EEA, but is part of the single market. This means Swiss nationals have the same rights to live and work in the UK as EEA nationals.

There has been no change to the rights and status of EU or EEA nationals in the UK, and UK nationals in the EU or EEA as a result of the UK’s referendum on membership of the EU in June 2016. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-the-status-of-eu-nationals-in-the-uk.

The Federal Government of Switzerland legislates in areas such as trade and commerce, banking, foreign affairs, defence and taxation. Other areas of legislation are dealt with by individual cantons.

Contact the DIT team in Switzerland at: https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/department-for-international-trade-switzerland#contact-us to help find legal advisers for official transactions in Switzerland.

The Swiss Federal Customs Administration has information on the importation of banned and restricted goods, at: https://www.ezv.admin.ch/ezv/en/home/information-companies/bans--restrictions-and-conditions.html.

Export licences for Switzerland

You may need a licence to supply goods to Switzerland which are on the UK strategic export control lists.

Find out about supplying goods to Switzerland which are on the UK export control lists, at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/beginners-guide-to-export-controls.

Some other products may need certification and licensing.

Find out which products will need certification or licensing before they can be exported to Switzerland, at: https://www.gov.uk/starting-to-export/licences.
Law on marketing and selling in Switzerland

Swiss consumer and data protection laws have been widely harmonised with the laws of the EU. If you are selling to consumers (rather than businesses) you must comply with EU consumer protection law.


The Swiss Federal Consumer Affairs Bureau (FCAB) has a complete list of Swiss consumer protection laws and regulations at: https://www.konsum.admin.ch/bfk/de/home.html.

Standards and technical regulations in Switzerland

Switzerland is not a member of the EU, but a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). To facilitate free trade with the EU, Swiss legislation is adapted to EU law in several areas.

Products to be imported into Switzerland have to comply with Swiss requirements regarding product safety. The distributor (manufacturer or importer) is responsible for the safety of the product.

Switzerland has different requirements related to product safety. Suppliers and manufacturers have an obligation to make sure products are safe under Swiss regulations. Products must:

- meet relevant safety standards
- have clear instructions for proper use
- include warnings against possible misuse

Unlike in the EU, the CE marking is not compulsory for all products in Switzerland (http://europa.eu/youreurope/business/product/ce-mark/index_en.htm). However, as a member of the European agency for standards (CEN), Switzerland applies ‘Harmonized European Standards’ pertaining to health, safety and environmental criteria. All products covered by these standards must carry the CE label as a sign of compliance in all EU countries.

Products which conform to the technical requirements of the EU are allowed to be exported to Switzerland. However, there are exceptions. Find out more about product regulations in Switzerland at the Swiss Standards Association (SNV) (http://www.snv.ch/en/), which has details and links to all standards and certification organisations in Switzerland.
For more information on the Swiss legislation regarding product safety and the import of goods, including bans, restrictions and conditions contact the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) at: https://www.ezv.admin.ch/ezv/en/home/information-companies/bans--restrictions-and-conditions.html.


For more information, see the European Commission (EC) guidance on EU trade with Switzerland, at: http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/switzerland/.

You should consider taking out product liability insurance if you manufacture or supply a physical product that is sold or given away for free. See: https://www.abi.org.uk/products-and-issues/choosing-the-right-insurance/business-insurance/liability-insurance/product-liability-insurance/.

**Protecting your intellectual property (IP) in Switzerland**

Trademarks, designs, patents and copyright are the principal forms of intellectual property protection available under Swiss law. They are all governed by legislation and you should register your intellectual property in Switzerland where appropriate.

Swiss law also provides protection against a person passing off goods or services as those of another, as well as protection for confidential information or trade secrets.

The Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property (IPI) at: https://www.ige.ch/en.html is responsible for intellectual property protection.


Contact the DIT team in Berne at: https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/department-for-international-trade-switzerland#contact-us to help find tax and legal advisers before entering into agreements in Switzerland.

**Packaging and labelling your products for Switzerland**

Swiss Customs are very strict about the quality of packaging and labelling, particularly of food products. False descriptions are prohibited.
You should adapt your labelling and documentation to one or more of Switzerland’s four main languages (German, French, Italian and Romansch).

You must use the e-mark (https://www.gov.uk/weights-measures-and-packaging-the-law/labelling-packaged-goods) on packaging when exporting food products to Switzerland, but as Switzerland is not in the EEA they may still carry out their own weights and measures checks on your packages.

Product labelling needs to comply with Swiss law. However, the required information and form depend on the product and the position of the supplier in the supply chain. The DIT team in Switzerland at: https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/department-for-international-trade-switzerland#contact-us can advise you.

Tax and customs considerations in Switzerland

The UK and Switzerland have signed a double taxation agreement, ensuring the same income is not taxed in more than one country. See: www.gov.uk/government/publications/switzerland-tax-treaties.

Value added tax (VAT)

Switzerland is a member of EFTA. For trading purposes, goods moved between EFTA and EU member states are treated similarly to goods moved between EU member states.

The destination country principle applies to VAT, known as Mehrwertsteuer(MwSt), Taxe sur la valeur ajoutée (TVA) or Imposta sul valore aggiunto (IVA) in Switzerland. Goods to be exported are exempt from local tax in their country of origin. They are subject to tax at their destination – in effect an import tax.

In principle, VAT is levied on all imports of goods, even on consignments with ‘no value’. The normal tax rate is 8%, which is the same rate applicable for domestic purchases. Some basic necessities, such as food, are subject to the reduced rate of 2.5%. Overnight stays at a hotel (incl. breakfast) are taxed at a special rate of 3.8%.

Excise duty in Switzerland

You should check you have paid excise duty on any alcohol, alcoholic drinks, energy products, electricity or tobacco products you send to Switzerland.

Company and corporate tax in Switzerland

Federal taxes are charged at a flat rate, while cantonal tax rates vary by location and sometimes by level of capital or profit. Direct federal taxes are levied on after-tax profits.

Cantonal taxes

The cantons are free to decide on their own tax systems and tax rates. They have the power to charge any tax that the Swiss Confederation does not claim exclusive rights over. This means that the tax laws and tax rates vary widely from canton to canton.

Communal taxes

Communal tax systems are regulated by cantonal tax legislation. However, communes set their own tax rates.

Read more about taxes in Switzerland from the Swiss Federal Tax Administration at: https://www.estv.admin.ch/estv/en/home.html.

Contact the DIT team in Berne at: https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/department-for-international-trade-switzerland#contact-us, to help find local tax advisers before entering into agreements in Switzerland.

Customs and documentation

The Swiss Customs Administration at: https://www.ezv.admin.ch/ezv/en/home/customs-declaration.html regulates all goods imported into Switzerland. Customs duty and VAT Mehrwertsteuer (MwSt), Taxe sur la valeur ajoutée (TVA), Imposta sul valore aggiunto (IVA) may apply to goods entering Switzerland.

However, tax rates depend upon a number of factors, including the type of goods and services and the country of origin. All imported goods and services must be cleared with customs.

You can get export tariffs numbers and additional information from the Swiss Customs Administration at: https://www.ezv.admin.ch/ezv/en/home/information-companies/customs-tariff---tares.html.

Switzerland applies the Harmonized Customs System (HS). Customs duties are generally levied in Swiss Francs (CHF) on the basis of weight.

There are also environmental taxes collected as prepaid royalties by the distributor/importer for the elimination of waste, which are included in the retail selling

Find more information on customs and duties on goods entering Switzerland at: https://www.ezv.admin.ch/ezv/en/home/information-companies/taxes-and-duties.html.

Shipping your goods to Switzerland

You can usually send samples of your goods through the postal system.

Your local post office can also be used to export small orders to Switzerland which can be easily packaged and are within the current weight restrictions.

If you are sending goods by post you must check that the items are not prohibited or restricted by mail services in the UK and in Switzerland.

Find out more about prohibited or restricted items in Switzerland on Royal Mail’s website at: http://www.royalmail.com/switzerland.

When using postal services on a more commercial basis you must complete the required customs form with the commodity code that relates to your goods.

Find your commodity code in the UK Trade Tariff at: https://www.gov.uk/trade-tariff.

Find out how to contact the HMRC Tariff Classification Service for more help, at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notice-600-classifying-your-imports-or-exports/notice-600-classifying-your-imports-or-exports#list-of-useful-contacts.

You must get a Certificate of Posting (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/374167/ce132.pdf) form C&E 132 from the post office branch and ensure it is date-stamped. This supports the VAT zero-rating of your goods. If you are exporting UK duty-paid excise goods, you will need the Certificate of Posting form to support a claim for reimbursement of the UK excise duty.

For bigger orders, most businesses use a courier or freight forwarder.

Special rules apply if you are shipping dangerous goods to Switzerland. See: https://www.gov.uk/shipping-dangerous-goods/what-are-dangerous-goods.

A pro-forma invoice (and licence, if you need one) must be attached to your consignment. Records of pro-forma invoices must be kept for four years.
The Common Transit procedure can be used for movements between the EU and the Common Transit countries. As a member of EFTA, Switzerland (together with Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland plus Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia) is a Common Transit country.

Log in to the New Computerised Transit System (NCTS) at: https://www.gov.uk/new-computerised-transit-system to submit Union transit declarations to HMRC.

**Terms of delivery for Switzerland**

Your contract should include agreement on terms of delivery using Incoterms. See: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/international-trade-paperwork-the-basics#international-trade-contracts-and-incoterms.

For bigger orders, most businesses use a courier or freight forwarder. A forwarder will have extensive knowledge of documentation requirements, regulations, transportation costs and banking practices in Switzerland.

You can find freight forwarding companies to help you transport your goods to Switzerland via the British International Freight Association (BIFA) at: http://www.bifa.org/home, or the Freight Transport Association (FTA) at: http://www.fta.co.uk/.

Find out more about shipping your goods to international markets, at: https://www.great.gov.uk/operations-and-compliance/plan-the-logistics/.

**UK Export Finance**

The government can provide finance or credit insurance specifically to support UK exports through UK Export Finance (UKEF) – the UK’s export credit agency. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-export-finance.

For up-to-date country-specific information on the support available see UKEF’s cover policy and indicators for Switzerland at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/country-cover-policy-and-indicators#switzerland.

[Source – DIT/UKEF/gov.uk]

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