



Chamber Talk SWISSCHAM

SwissCham Southern Africa



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How is the economy for Swiss business in South Africa looking in 2014?

On the South African Business Environment there are concerns in many areas. South Africa has many complicated laws which make doing business a slow, money- and time intensive affair. The unavailability of Government decision-makers poses a problem and so do long waiting times for any permits or licenses. It is vital that foreign investors who having a reasonable investment in the country can introduce expats with a minimum of red tape and waiting times, without having to prove in great detail why a particular expat is required and unique and necessary, expats are simply needed and a factor for foreign investors in South Africa. Also government policies, which of recent have been unclear and conflicting, in particular with regard to labour. Confusing signals are being sent to investors, concluding more and more "do not invest", investors are made insecure and feel unwelcome.

Whilst crime used to be one of the greatest deterrents for investors in South Africa, it has by now taken a second place behind corruption. The wide spread perception in the world and thus also in the world of investors is that corruption has increased within Government, which makes any fairness and proper competition wherever business is affected by government, uncompetitive. Compared to other countries there is not much ease to doing business in South Africa and so the country loses out on foreign capital which is deployed elsewhere where it is easier to do business

Does this reflect in any way on the Swiss chamber in SA? Fortunately there isn't any sensible impact so far.

How many Swiss citizens are currently living in SA and can you say how many are here on a temporary basis vs permanent?

Currently around 12,000.

Who are the major Swiss companies based in SA?

Out of the almost 400 Swiss Companies represented in South Africa I would like to mention just a few, such as Nestlé, Bühler, Clariant, Endress+Hauser, Egon Zehnder, Glencore/Xstrata, Hilti, Kuehne&Nagel, SGS, Syngenta, Schindler, Sulzer, Swiss International Airlines, Swissport, Novartis, Roche, RLG Africa, Zürich Insurance, ABB, and financial institutions such as Credit Suisse, UBS, and HBZ Bank.

Are there any Swiss companies that have chosen bases in Africa (chosen a location vs South Africa)?

Yes, there are also companies based here that have bases elsewhere in Africa.

Is there an appetite from Switzerland to invest in Africa?

Generally many business leaders remain skeptical about Africa, their perceptions lagging behind the continent's new realities. Africa is now home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies and offers the highest risk-adjusted returns on foreign direct investment among emerging economies. While companies are visiting, not as many are concluding, for the many reasons mentioned earlier.

What portion of these investors are big corporations vs entrepreneurs?

Large corporations are predominant.

Should someone wish to attract a Swiss investment or look to invest in Switzerland where should they start?

Either with SwissCham Southern Africa – South Africa Chapter (e-mail: info@swisscham.co.za), or with the Swiss Business Hub, headed by Max Bertschmann (e-mail: max.bertschmann@eda.admin.ch).

Which countries are Switzerland's largest trading partners in Africa?

Switzerland's main trading partners in Africa are South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Morocco and Tunisia.

What are the main commodities traded?

On import it is mainly Minerals, Wine On Export it is Hightech Electronic as well as Pharmaceutical equipment, Mining equipment etc.

How many Swiss chambers are there in the world?

While I don't have an exact figure for you, there is Swiss representation virtually worldwide.

Does the chamber have offices or representation in any other African countries?

Unfortunately not, or not yet at least.

Is there any such plan?

Efforts are underway in regard to Mozambique.

How many embassies and or consulates does Switzerland have in Africa?

Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia and Zimbabwe.

Do many Swiss tourists visit SA?

Yes it's a popular destination especially now with the favourable exchange rate, although crime talk is a negative factor in a country that citizens are not particularly known for taking high risk. Media coverage is not always favorable and SA Tourism needs to address a balance in sometimes one sided reporting.

Please let us know what the main purpose of the Swiss Chamber is and who you'd encourage to join?

SwissCham is an independent bilateral, non-political, subscription based non-profit organisation, with our financial assistance from government dedicated to strengthening and expanding trade relations between Switzerland and South Africa.

We promote and advance not only a business friendly environment, but the interests and views of Swiss Business in South Africa. For our membership we conduct social and business events with leading speakers from industry, government and opinion leaders as an excellent networking and communication platform, where our members not only can socialize, but develop business orientated relationships.

The Chamber actively voices concerns for and on behalf of the Swiss Business Community, and comments on draft policies, bills, legislations that are or have been published for comment. Anybody is welcome to join SwissCham, our members range from self-employed or small and medium enterprises to large, multi-national corporations and are drawn from every sector of the economy.

In the era of e-mail, social media etc., a Chamber of Commerce may seem like a dinosaur. However they remain one of the best ways to network with other entrepreneurs in virtually any community. The benefits of a Chamber membership are numerous. Some benefits will be more important to you than others, the main benefits though are universal. Chamber membership conveys credibility and stability to your customers, and will open the door to many contacts that can help grow your business.

Do you feel that multi national corporations use SA as a springboard into Africa and could we see more head offices relocating to North of the border, in the future?

Yes it's a current trend. This is mainly due to governance related factors.

Any exciting projects or news, coming from the chamber that you would like to share?

Early 2013 SwissCham, in cooperation with the Swiss Embassy and the Swiss South African Cooperation initiative (SSACI) started an Initiative on Skills Development, on the background of a less than optimal output from vocational colleges in South Africa, which is a key contributor to the chronic shortage of skills faced by industry, including the Swiss companies operating in the country. The government of South Africa recognizes that Switzerland has a demonstrated strength in the area of vocational education and training and its vocational institutes (TVET) produce highly skilled and employable students.

Later in 2013, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and SwissCham had entered into a partnership aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in public TVET colleges, and making them centres of excellence in the national skills development landscape.

This partnership was officially announced on the 16th of April 2014 by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande at the launch of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) – SwissCham College Improvement Partnership at the Ekurhuleni West College (EWC), in Germiston.

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