

Booming Biotech

With the amount of newly developed technologies and life science companies, Switzerland has rightfully earned a reputation as one of the most innovative locales for biotechnology in Europe.

Words Lane Nieset

With more than 1,500 lakes, 7,100 km of ski slopes, and 66,000 km of marked hiking trails, Switzerland often attracts visitors for its breathtaking natural beauty and culture—all of which is easily accessible thanks to public transport like sustainable, hydro-powered railways. It's this blend of urban nature that makes the country so popular for congresses. But Switzerland also attracts associations thanks to its major innovations and inventions, especially in the biotech and life science sector.

Besides its relatively small size, the country is home to 312 biotech companies that count 15,000 employees in the sector and a revenue of CHF 4.8 billion. A few of the major players include **AC Immune**, **Biogen**, **Evolva**, **Helsinn** and **Polyphor**. In terms of research and development, Swiss companies spent 15.6 billion Swiss francs in the sector in 2017, investing 40% (or over 6 billion Swiss francs) in pharmaceuticals, chemicals and biotechnology. The cooperation between the research taking place at globally leading universities like **ETH Zurich** and **EPFL Lausanne** and the private sector has resulted in the high productivity in the biotech sector, and Switzerland now ranks as one of the world's leading countries thanks to the number of products in the research pipeline.

DRIVING DEVELOPMENT

In addition to a landscape that includes modern research laboratories and production facilities, Switzerland offers access to international systems for the protection of intellectual property (European Patent Office EPO and **World Intellectual Property Organization WIPO**), which has made it one of the countries with the highest number of biotechnology patents per capita.

Switzerland is also the headquarters of the **International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations (IFPMA)**, which represents research-based pharmaceutical companies and associations

around the world, as well as the **Swiss Biotech Association**, which features about 220 companies, and scienceindustries, a Swiss business association for the pharmaceutical, chemical and biotech industries that includes more than 250 member companies. In Basel in particular, the Herzog & de Meuron-designed **Switzerland Innovation Park Basel Area**, a 50,000 sqm innovation space, in addition to more than 700 companies in the Basel Area, is a new hub for the life sciences cluster in Europe.

As Sascha Bucher, Head Basel Roivant Pharma and Head of Global Transactions, puts it: *"Switzerland is a very welcoming place for business to be conducted, and Basel*



is an ideal location for a growing biotech company. Basel is home to two of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies - Novartis and Roche - but it also serves as a regional headquarters for many other pharma companies and is a leading hub for many smaller biotech and medical device companies and start-ups. It is easy for us to hire experts across the entire biopharma value chain."

Roche, for example, is working in both pharmaceuticals and diagnostics and excelling in the realm of personalized healthcare, as well as **cancer immunotherapy**. For the past 50 years, the company has been developing medicine designed to redefine treatment in oncology. Basel-based Biogen, meanwhile, is fighting against antimicrobial resistance (AMR) by creating impactful solutions that could help save the 700,000 people who die annually from drug-resistant infections.

"When it comes to the ongoing development of the city as a business location, Basel Area Business & Innovation and the services of the Economic Development Unit also have a key role to play," explains **Karin Sartorius-Brüschweiler**, chairwoman and congress promoter at Congress Board Basel. *"The innovation support they provide ranges from accelerator programs for start-ups, together with numerous events and workshops, right through to the provision of collaborative*

workspaces and high-tech laboratories such as those at the Technologiepark Basel and the Switzerland Innovation Park."

LIFE SCIENCE LEADERS

The economic hub of Zurich is also home to a cluster of biotech companies, such as Hemotune, which utilizes biomedicine and nanotechnology to develop a blood purification platform based on magnetic beads, as well as OxyPrem, whose devices monitor brain oxygen levels of preterm infants using a non-invasive infrared light. The city is also home to the **Life Science Zurich Business Network**, an independent association of representatives from the life sciences cluster in the Zurich area that is closely affiliated with **Life Science Zurich**, a platform helmed by ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich. In addition, the Inartis Network is the Innosuisse National Thematic Network (NTN) for Life Sciences and helps propel cross-industry R&D projects across Switzerland.

In Geneva, meanwhile, the **Campus Biotech** is considered a Swiss centre of excellence in biotechnology and life sciences research, and focuses on three sectors: neuroscience and neurotechnology, digital health, and global health. The campus is designed around a philosophy of collaboration that aims to break down the traditional barriers between disciplines, institutions, academia, business, and philanthropy.

In the Vaud canton, whose capital is Lausanne, there are nearly 400 companies and the same number of laboratories in the life sciences sector, which has earned the region the nickname "Health Valley." The Lausanne Montreux Vaud area features seven technology parks and one of the leading research institutions, **EPFL (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne)**. More than 25,000 people work or study on the campus, which overlooks Lake Geneva, and the site is also home to the new **SwissTech Convention Center**, one of the largest in the Lake Geneva region and the world's first fully automated congress centre.

With world-class technology and innovation park infrastructure in place across the country, as well as research institutions working alongside start-ups, Switzerland's rapidly developing biotech sector is offering associations plenty of local resources and knowledge sources to tap into when hosting events by giving researchers and scientists the tools and knowledge they need to develop projects and make medical breakthroughs.

More info on Switzerland as a convention destination:

myriam.winnepenninckx@switzerland.com
www.MySwitzerland.com/meetings