

Edition 2023

# SECO

A portrait of the State Secretariat  
for Economic Affairs



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,  
Education and Research EAER  
**State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO**







“SECO sees itself as a service provider in all matters relating to Swiss economic policy – for businesses, civil society and above all for the people in our beautiful country. We promote sustainable economic growth and strive for high employment while maintaining fair working conditions. My colleagues are committed to maintaining prosperity in Switzerland. We do this by creating the necessary economic policy framework conditions.

This SECO portrait gives you an insight into the diversity of our tasks and challenges.

I hope you enjoy reading it!”



Helene Budliger Artieda  
SECO Director

# SECO at a glance

SECO is the federal government's centre of expertise for core issues relating to economic policy. Its aim is to ensure sustainable economic growth, high employment and fair working conditions by providing a stable environment for regulatory, economic and foreign trade policy.

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## Labour Directorate

The Labour Directorate is responsible for supervision, management and implementation in the areas of working conditions, public employment services, unemployment insurance and accompanying measures. More than 10 different laws form the basis for the directorate's activities.

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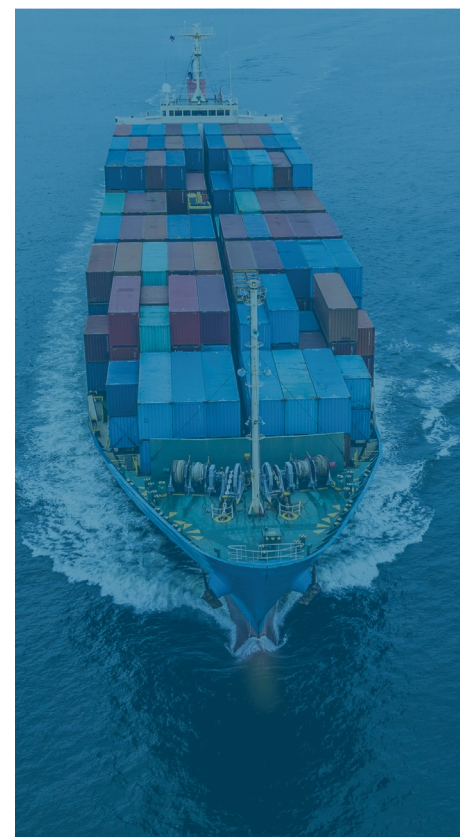
## Economic Policy Directorate

The Economic Policy Directorate monitors national and international economic development, identifies the need for economic policy action and analyses federal legislation relevant to the whole economy.

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## Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate

The Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate is committed to an open Swiss economy. It safeguards the interests of our economy abroad by promoting free and fair world trade.





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## Promotion Activities Directorate

The Promotion Activities Directorate supports the adaptation processes of our SME-driven economy and thus contributes to the Switzerland's competitiveness as an economic hub and that of its diverse regions.

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## Organisation, Law & Accreditation Directorate

The Organisation, Law & Accreditation Directorate ensures the efficient operation of SECO's business. It also exercises the Confederation's right of action in accordance with the Unfair Competition Act (UCA) and is responsible for accrediting conformity assessment bodies.

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**Focus**

State Secretary Helene Budliger Artieda has been the director of SECO since 1 August 2022. In an interview, she describes SECO's role, explains why diversity is important to her and what she expects from her colleagues.









# Labour Directorate

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“The aim of our work is to enable as many people of working age as possible to be engaged in gainful employment under fair, safe and healthy working conditions.”

Boris Zürcher  
Head of the Labour Directorate



# Labour Directorate

The Labour Directorate works to ensure clear rules in labour market policy, which includes employee protection, unemployment insurance, employment services and the free movement of persons.

The Labour Directorate works in close collaboration with its social partners and the cantons. The common objective of all the parties involved is to enable as many people of working age as possible to be engaged in gainful employment under healthy conditions, and to earn salaries that enable them to live a dignified life.

## **Favourable framework conditions**

Protecting health is one of SECO's core tasks. Competition and social developments constantly present companies with new challenges. Good framework and working conditions – such as statutory working time and rest periods – are therefore particularly important. These also benefit the Swiss economy as healthy employees are more productive and less likely to miss work days.

## **Unemployment benefits**

Unemployment is directly linked to the economic cycle. It is important to have effective instruments ready for the good times and the bad so as to be able to provide efficient support to those out of

work. The Labour Directorate is responsible for unemployment insurance and public employment services. In cooperation with the cantonal offices and the regional employment centres, unemployment insurance offers unemployed persons an adequate compensatory income and helps jobseekers achieve quick and lasting reintegration into the labour market.

## **Successful social partnership**

A well-functioning social partnership is the cornerstone of Switzerland's successful model. The Directorate provides the necessary framework conditions. It promotes dialogue between the social partners and enables them to play an active role. In enabling collective employment agreements to be declared generally applicable, the state specifically protects social partnership agreements, thus helping to ensure social stability.

## **Free movement of persons and labour market supervision**

Under the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP), Swiss and EU nationals have the right to choose their place of work. With the opening of the Swiss labour market, accompanying measures were set up to protect Swiss and foreign workers from abusive wage practices and working conditions. SECO's observation report ensures a continuous analysis of the impact of the AFMP on the labour market. In addition to supervising the implementation of the accompanying measures, the Directorate also has the key task of combatting illegal employment.

## **Private employment agencies and temporary recruitment services**

The Labour Directorate works together with the cantons to monitor the activities of private employment agencies and temporary recruitment services. These are regulated under the Federal Act on

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In 2021, the average weekly working time for full-time employees was 39.4 hours.

Source: FSO



Employment Services and the Hiring of Services. As such, they require a licence so as to protect jobseekers and recruited workers. The Directorate verifies compliance with the legal requirements to ensure that workers hired through private employment agencies or temporary recruitment services are protected and that there is proper competition between companies.

### Commitment to international labour law

The Directorate also promotes respect for workers' rights at the international level. It maintains bilateral contacts with labour ministries, addresses questions relating to the economy and human rights, and supports the promotion of international labour standards. The Labour Directorate represents Switzerland in international bodies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO).



#### The Labour Directorate's key responsibilities at a glance

- Working conditions
- Unemployment insurance
- Labour market supervision and combatting illegal employment
- Private employment agencies and temporary recruitment services
- Declaring collective employment agreements to be generally applicable
- Matters relating to international labour law



- [www.seco.admin.ch/labour](http://www.seco.admin.ch/labour)
- [www.work.swiss](http://www.work.swiss)
- [www.posting.admin.ch](http://www.posting.admin.ch)
- [www.avg-seco.admin.ch](http://www.avg-seco.admin.ch)
- [www.nap-bhr.admin.ch](http://www.nap-bhr.admin.ch)

## Digitalisation of unemployment insurance is progressing

The vast majority of jobseekers and companies are satisfied with the services provided by the regional employment centres and the unemployment insurance funds (80 per cent according to the latest survey conducted in 2021). In order to maintain and further increase this level of satisfaction, the unemployment insurance (UI) gives priority to strategic projects to modernise and digitalise specialist applications and services.

In today's world, citizens expect digital services to be simple, understandable and available at any time. That's why the UI is continuously expanding its eServices for insured persons and jobseekers at [arbeit.swiss](http://arbeit.swiss) in the eALV digitalisation project. This is in line with the 'digital first' mission statement in the 2020–23 Swiss eGovernment Strategy.

In ASALfutur, a key project of the unemployment insurance, an application for the processing and payment of unemployment insurance benefits has been specially developed for unemployment insurance funds. ASAL 2.0 is also intended to greatly improve the transparency of case processing, error prevention and user support.

As part of the AVAM modernisation project, the UI has also updated the specialist application of the public employment service and labour market statistics. The most important working tool for the regional employment centres now has a modern and optimised user interface and is based on long-term secure technologies.



The unemployment insurance is continuously expanding its digital services and offers efficient eServices.







# Economic Policy Directorate

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“We provide well-founded economic forecasts and analyses to support the Federal Council, Parliament, the Federal Administration and the public in economic policy decisions.”

Eric Scheidegger  
Head of the Economic Policy Directorate





# Economic Policy Directorate

A well-functioning economy requires an economic policy based on reliable analyses. The Economic Policy Directorate prepares scientifically sound forecasts and analyses to support the federal government in its economic policy decisions.

The Economic Policy Directorate analyses and reports on Switzerland's economic development. In so doing, it not only focuses on short- and medium-term business cycles. It also monitors long-term economic developments, and analyses trend growth, productivity developments and other key success factors for a prosperous business location. In addition, the Directorate is responsible for the economy's competition policy framework conditions, for instance by further developing the Cartel Act and the Internal Market Act. The Directorate staff provide the basis for decision-making in the form of analyses of global economic integration and the challenges posed by the digital economy. The Directorate represents Switzerland's position in various economic policy committees of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

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In 2021, the Swiss economy recovered from the slump of the previous year caused by the pandemic. GDP grew by 4.2 per cent.

Source: FSO

Development (OECD). It also supports policies in sectors such as energy, environment, finance, healthcare and infrastructure. It examines projects from other offices and departments from an economic point of view, and seeks to propose more efficient options.

## Focus on economic development

The Economic Policy Directorate monitors the national and international economic situation and analyses current economic developments. It calculates the quarterly trends in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in accordance with international standards. As part of the Federal Government's Expert Group for economic forecasts, the Directorate prepares forecasts for the Swiss economy. Four times a year, it issues the consumer sentiment survey.

## Bases for policy decisions

The Economic Policy Directorate prepares economic bases for decisions regarding labour market policies and uses this expertise to act as an interface between social and economic policies. The issues vary according to existing or emerging challenges. They include fields such as migration, youth unemployment, older workers, female labour market participation, atypical labour relations and education policy issues. Its activities also include analyses of general labour market trends and potential labour market policy instruments. Furthermore, the Directorate evaluates the effectiveness of public employment services and active labour market measures at regular intervals.

As the centre of expertise for regulatory issues, the Economic Policy Directorate is committed to reducing administrative burdens and improving regulation. This provides an effective means of preventing market and state failure and contributes



to sustainable economic growth. The Directorate assists the offices concerned in analysing the economic impact of new or amended acts and ordinances as part of its regulatory impact assessments. In addition, the Directorate is responsible for cross-cutting issues such as the regulatory brake or regulatory costs.

### Publications

The Economic Policy Directorate assumes editorial responsibility for the following publications issued by the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER): the magazine 'Die Volkswirtschaft' (available in German and French) and the official gazette portal, through which the Swiss Official Gazette of Commerce (SOGC) and various cantonal official gazettes are published. The Publications section is also responsible for operating and developing the platform simap.ch, which is a central eGovernment application of the Confederation and the cantons.



#### The Economic Policy Directorate's key responsibilities at a glance

- Labour market and social policy analyses
- Calculation of quarterly GDP figures
- Economic forecasts
- Consumer sentiment
- Regulatory analyses and policy
- Growth and competition policy
- Official and economic publications



- [www.seco.admin.ch/economic-policy](http://www.seco.admin.ch/economic-policy)
- [www.sogc.ch](http://www.sogc.ch)
- [www.simap.ch](http://www.simap.ch)

## Energy and inflation: Headwind for the economy

Over the past 30 years, inflation has been remarkably low globally, and at times even below zero in Switzerland. The recent sharp increases in energy prices have ended this phase for the time being.

In 2021, prices rose significantly throughout the world as the global economy recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortages of raw materials and intermediate goods and bottlenecks in transport capacities slowed down global supply, while at the same time demand increased significantly. The war in Ukraine caused prices to rise further in 2022. In particular, gas prices in Europe skyrocketed, pushing up electricity prices as well. Inflation also rose significantly in Switzerland, yet remained lower than in other European countries. The Swiss National Bank reacted to this by raising the base rate.

### Reliable economic policy instruments

The "automatic stabilisers" are a series of proven and effective instruments that help Switzerland stabilise its economy. In addition to the debt brake, these include unemployment and short-time work compensation. In the event of an economic slowdown or recession, Swiss economic policy therefore usually refrains from more far-reaching measures. This does not exclude extraordinary economic policy measures in a severe recession, as was recently the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order for such measures to be effective, they must meet the '3 T's': they must be targeted (no blanket measures), temporary (no permanent increase in government spending), and timely impact at the right time.



The increase in energy prices is also clearly noticeable in Switzerland.







# Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate

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“We open up markets abroad for domestic companies, help shape the global economic framework conditions and advocate for sustainable economic development.”

**Ivo Germann**

Head of the Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate





# Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate

**The Swiss economy has a global focus. The Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate opens up foreign markets for Swiss companies, creates legal certainty for our exporters and is committed to sustainable economic development.**

The Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate represents the interests of Switzerland as a business location abroad and ensures that the results of negotiations are implemented in Swiss law. It helps shape global economic framework conditions and represents Switzerland's economic interests in major regional and multilateral organisations, particularly the World Trade Organization (WTO), the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the G20.

## **International cooperation**

Good economic relations with the various countries of the world cannot be taken for granted. They have to be established and nurtured. This is why the Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate represents Switzerland's economic and trade policy interests

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**Foreign trade in goods and services accounts for more than one third of Switzerland's total economic value added.**

Source: Foreign economic policy strategy

towards our partners abroad, operating in line with the foreign economic policy strategy adopted by the Federal Council in November 2021.

The Directorate fosters economic cooperation with developing countries, states in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and with 13 Central and Eastern European member states of the EU. It promotes reliable economic policy framework conditions and innovative private-sector initiatives. This allows people and companies to access markets, and creates prospects and decent employment opportunities in partner countries, strengthening the basis for economic growth and sustainable prosperity. In order to increase its impact, the Directorate works with the World Bank Group, the regional development banks and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, among others, and represents Switzerland's interests vis-à-vis these institutions.

## **International agreements**

The Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate works to ensure a smooth and legally secure cross-border exchange of goods, services, investment and data by negotiating economic agreements with other countries. At present, in addition to the EFTA Convention and the free trade agreement with the EU, Switzerland has a network of 33 free trade agreements with 43 partners and over 110 bilateral investment protection agreements. Our agreements also help to diversify our procurement and sales markets. Barrier-free access to foreign markets is vital to the entire national economy: 70 per cent of Swiss SMEs also operate across borders as exporters, suppliers or investors.

Opening up new markets increases opportunities for exporting companies to sell their products while making it easier to

import products. This benefits both producers (less expensive input materials) and consumers (lower prices and a larger variety of products). In its new free trade agreements Switzerland also promotes international standards such as trade-related provisions on environmental protection and labour standards as well as general human rights standards.

### Important export controls

As an export-oriented country, Switzerland has a history of active support for open markets worldwide. However, in the case of certain categories of goods, controls of exports, imports and the transit of goods are required for reasons of security. In times of international tension, the export, import and transit of certain goods may be banned.

The Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate is responsible for controlling exports of war material and dual-use goods. It also adopts coercive measures to implement sanctions imposed by the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or Switzerland's key trading partners.



#### The Foreign Economic Affairs Directorate's key responsibilities at a glance

- Foreign economic expertise
- Bilateral economic relations
- World trade
- Economic cooperation and development



- [www.seco.admin.ch/foreign-trade](http://www.seco.admin.ch/foreign-trade)
- [www.seco-cooperation.admin.ch](http://www.seco-cooperation.admin.ch)
- [www.efta.int](http://www.efta.int)
- [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)

## New foreign economic policy strategy

Switzerland benefits from its integration into the global economy. Swiss foreign trade makes an important contribution to our standard of living. Swiss foreign economic policy creates the necessary framework conditions for this. In November 2021 the Federal Council adopted a new foreign economic policy strategy to guide the implementation of foreign economic policy in the coming years.

The volume of global trade has more than doubled since the turn of the millennium. More and more countries are participating in the global trading system. Globalisation also accelerates technological development and thus leads to societal changes. Global connectivity/interconnectedness and exchange of information has also rapidly increased.

At the same time, current challenges need to be addressed, in particular those arising from the geopolitical changes manifested in the rivalry between the US and China and in the growing tendency of countries to form regional economic blocs. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian attack on Ukraine have reinforced existing protectionist tendencies and highlighted the vulnerability of global production and supply chains.

Finally, the demands on foreign economic policy are becoming thematically more diverse. Advancing digitalisation is creating new opportunities and regulatory approaches, while the goal of sustainable development requires a horizontal/transversal consideration of environmental concerns and social issues.

In order to address these economic, environmental, social and geopolitical developments, on 24 November 2021 the Federal Council adopted the new foreign economic policy strategy for the coming years.



[www.seco.admin.ch](http://www.seco.admin.ch) → Foreign trade & Economic cooperation → Foreign Economic Policy → Switzerland's foreign economic policy strategy







# Promotion Activities Directorate

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“Swiss companies have to face global competition every day. The Promotion Activities Directorate supports them in this, for the benefit of the economy as a whole and the diverse regions of Switzerland.”

Eric Jakob  
Head of the Promotion Activities Directorate





# Promotion Activities Directorate

Swiss companies must respond to global competition on a daily basis. The Promotion Activities Directorate provides support to companies, benefiting the economy as a whole.

Over 99 per cent of companies in Switzerland are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They employ two thirds of the working population and are therefore often regarded as the backbone of our economy. SMEs are often heavily affected by administrative burdens and structural changes. The Promotion Activities Directorate helps improve the framework conditions for SMEs, facilitates access to financing and provides specific funding instruments to help boost their economic performance. In doing so, it seeks to harness the opportunities offered by digital transformation.

## For exporters and investors

The Swiss economy is heavily dependent on foreign trade. The Promotion Activities Directorate helps Swiss companies to export goods and services and seize international business opportunities. This is done via Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE),

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The resources of business, funding instruments and the public administration are pooled in order to tap additional economic potential in large-scale international infrastructure projects.

Source: SECO

the Trade Fair and Project Commission and through specific measures that facilitate access to large-scale infrastructure projects abroad.

Switzerland requires good macroeconomic framework conditions to remain an attractive business location on the international stage and to help foreign companies locate to Switzerland (direct investments). These include a flexible labour market, a highly qualified workforce and a moderate tax burden. However, this alone is not enough. As part of its location promotion activities, the federal government and the cantons – via Switzerland Global Enterprise – provide potential investors with all the important facts about what Switzerland has to offer as a location for business and research, and advise them on sustainable location opportunities in Switzerland.

## Promoting regions for a stronger Switzerland

The Promotion Activities Directorate supports structurally disadvantaged rural areas and mountain and border regions, helping to boost their competitiveness. Operating with the cantons within the framework of the New Regional Policy (NRP), it provides grants and loans to projects that protect and create jobs, thus ensuring an economic future for the regions. The NRP focuses on innovation and tourism, while digitalisation, the local economy and sustainable development are important cross-cutting themes. Regional



policy also supports projects at thematic interfaces and projects that go beyond cantonal and national borders and thus contributes to sustainable and coherent spatial development.

Tourism plays a huge role in the Swiss economy, especially in the Alpine region. For this reason, the Directorate creates favourable framework conditions for tourism businesses. It supports innovation, cooperation and knowledge creation in the Swiss tourism sector. It also helps to promote Switzerland as a travel destination through a mandate to Switzerland Tourism, and supports the hotel and accommodation industry through a mandate to the Swiss Association for Hotel Credit.

The Promotion Activities Directorate also ensures that financial support provided to the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic is properly processed and overseen, and coordinates activities for a next national exhibition (Expo).

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### The Promotion Activities Directorate's key responsibilities at a glance

- SME policy
- Export promotion
- Location promotion
- Regional and spatial planning policy
- Tourism policy

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- [www.seco.admin.ch/promotion-activites](http://www.seco.admin.ch/promotion-activites)
  - [www.kmu.admin.ch](http://www.kmu.admin.ch)
  - [www.easygov.swiss](http://www.easygov.swiss)
  - [www.serv-ch.com](http://www.serv-ch.com)
  - [www.s-ge.com](http://www.s-ge.com)
  - [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)

## New liaison office for Team Switzerland

The Swiss economy is to have better access to large-scale foreign infrastructure projects. This was decided by the Federal Council in 2021, and a liaison office was set up in SECO to coordinate among partners. The purpose of the office is to improve communication between Swiss industry, the relevant offices of the Federal Administration and federal promotional instruments (such as Switzerland Global Enterprise S-GE and the Swiss Export Risk Insurance SERV) and to ensure that Swiss supply meets foreign demand in a more targeted way. Together, the aforementioned players form Team Switzerland.

### Expertise pooled in Team Switzerland

The cooperation in Team Switzerland brings together and processes knowledge about large-scale infrastructure projects abroad, the general conditions there, general contractors, financing solutions, and the range of products and services offered by Swiss exporters. For example, current project tenders shall be published on an online platform, providing quick access to opportunities abroad. Team Switzerland also uses trips by federal councillors and platforms such as the World Economic Forum to specifically promote Swiss goods and services.

Team Switzerland's approach is successful: general contractors from abroad are showing great interest in integrating high-quality Swiss products into their orders. Several of them have set up branches in Switzerland. Furthermore, since the beginning of the mandate, the SERV has insured projects worth several hundred million Swiss francs in which numerous exporters have participated.



Representatives of associations, funding instruments and federal offices at WEF 2022.





# Organisation, Law & Accreditation Directorate

“We are committed to fair competition for all market players and to reliable and high-quality products. We intervene when collective interests are affected and use our instruments to strengthen quality and confidence.”

Catherine Cudré-Mauroux

Head of the Organisation, Law and Accreditation Directorate





# Organisation, Law & Accreditation Directorate

The Organisation, Law & Accreditation Directorate ensures the efficient operation of SECO's business. The Swiss Accreditation Service SAS examines and accredits conformity assessment bodies.

In addition to the traditional legal services provided by the Organisation, Law & Accreditation Directorate, SECO exercises the federal government's right to take legal action in accordance with the Unfair Competition Act (UCA). The Directorate also represents Switzerland's interests within the ICPEN, the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network, particularly with regard to internet scams. The Directorate furthermore provides the general public with relevant recommendations and advice, and it monitors cantonal implementation of the Price Indication Ordinance (PIO). The Directorate

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In 2022, SECO received 339 enquiries about the Price Indication Ordinance.

Source: SECO Legal Affairs

coordinates cantonal measures and licensing procedures for travelling trades, fairgrounds and circuses.

## Over 820 staff

The Directorate coordinates several thousand items of official business every year. It ensures that SECO's business for the Federal Council and Parliament are processed smoothly. It also ensures that SECO is able to adopt a timely position on matters from other federal departments as part of consultation proceedings. The Human Resources section looks after roughly 820 staff in Switzerland and abroad, and plays an active role in building SECO's image as an attractive employer.

In the area of finance, the Directorate manages an annual budget of around CHF 1.4 billion and processes around 20,000 financial documents. The IT and Information Management section provides IT support for staff and provides information management services. The Logistics section ensures staff have a safe working environment and are supplied with appropriate office equipment, allowing them to carry out their work efficiently. The Directorate is also responsible for controlling and the coordination of risk management at federal office level.

## For quality and trade

The Swiss Accreditation Service SAS examines and accredits calibration and testing laboratories, inspection and certification bodies, reference material producers and proficiency testing providers. Accreditation formally acknowledges the competence of

a body to execute conformity assessments according to specified requirements. The aim of accreditation is to strengthen confidence in the competence and services of the accredited bodies. The assessments carried out by these bodies in turn reliably guarantee the quality and safety of the tested products and services. They also ensure that products and services meet minimum technical standards and the regulatory requirements. The SAS functions under the supervision of the State Secretariat of Economic Affairs (SECO). However, it takes decisions concerning accreditation independently and autonomously – in accordance with the applicable national and international requirements.

## Price Indication Ordinance – what you need to know

If the price of a food item is indicated on the shelf or on the product, or the price is written on the clothes on display in a shop window; is this solely due to the goodwill of the shopkeeper? No, it's not; the law requires retailers to indicate prices, as regulated in the Price Indication Ordinance (PIO).

Why is there an obligation to indicate prices? This is so that prices are clear to consumers and can be compared with each other, and to ensure that there is no misleading indication of price.

Does the obligation to indicate prices only apply to goods? It also applies to selected services, for example in the hospitality industry, hairdressing, fitness institutes, concerts, air travel and package tours. Only the services listed in the PIO are covered.

Who checks whether the prices are correctly indicated? The cantons are responsible for checking whether prices are correctly indicated, for monitoring advertising and for reporting any breaches of the law.

What does SECO do? SECO advises the cantons and is the point of contact for the sectors concerned and interested organisations. It also publishes brochures explaining how to comply with the obligation to indicate prices. An overview of the general regulations can be obtained from the brochure 'Wegleitung für die Praxis' [de, fr, it]. SECO also publishes brochures for specific sectors, for example for online retailers, food sellers and car dealers.



Price indication in a bakery.

### The Organisation, Law & Accreditation Directorate's key responsibilities at a glance

- Accreditation of conformity assessment bodies
- Business management
- IT and information management
- Logistics
- Financial resource management
- Human resource management
- Legal services and implementation (UCA and PIO as well as travelling trades)
- Risk management

- [www.seco.admin.ch/advertising-methods-business-practices](http://www.seco.admin.ch/advertising-methods-business-practices)
- [www.sas.admin.ch](http://www.sas.admin.ch)

SECO brochure 'Wegleitung für die Praxis' → PIO – Guide 2022 (admin.ch)



# “We need to open up”

Helene Budliger Artieda has been SECO Director since August 2022. She is impressed by the specialist knowledge of her employees, but would like to see greater exchange between the directorates and sections.

**You have been SECO Director since August 2022. Is there a topic that has particularly concerned you during your first months in this position?**

I am very concerned about energy prices and inflation. The issue of sanctions against Russia is also high up the list, especially as the EU regularly adopts new sanction packages. COVID is also still a relevant issue... in other words, there are plenty of crises to deal with, but I believe it is important to look ahead, beyond the crises, and to try to achieve positive impact.

**SECO is a large federal office with around 800 employees. What kind of work culture do you wish for?**

I am very impressed by the phenomenal amount of expertise among the employees. The dossiers I receive are of a very high quality and I can obtain more in-depth information from my staff if necessary. I appreciate that very much because I still have many questions.

The disadvantage of such a culture, however, is clearly that people have fixed habits and work in teams that have existed in the same form for a very long time. This is not a problem per se, but it is noticeable and we need to be aware of it.

In a nutshell, we need to work on being more diverse, beyond issues such as gender and language. I am a great believer in group intelligence. It is essential to listen to other people and other views, and to reach out to others. It is only like this that we will find

really good solutions. We need to open up; SECO needs fresh blood, new ways of looking at things, new ideas. We need people who have perhaps taken a less conventional path.

**How do you want to achieve that?**

The question is wrongly posed! We can only develop a cultural identity as an organisation with shared values together. And that certainly won't happen overnight.

SECO deals with a huge range of subjects. Moreover, there are very different roles at SECO: we are policy-makers, donors, supervisors, police men and women... so to some extent we even have opposing roles. This of course can make things difficult, but it is worth it. We are one SECO!

It is up to each and every employee to break through the existing silos. From my own experience I can say that leaving one's comfort zone is always enriching. We can no longer afford to operate in isolation, either as a country or as an employee. That only weakens us.

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“I am a great believer in group intelligence.”

Helene Budliger Artieda  
SECO Director

**Your communication style is direct and contradicts the diplomat cliché. Do you also encourage your employees to say what they think?**

My direct manner has certainly not only helped me (laughs). Initially people are sometimes taken aback because does not correspond to the norm. But as leader, I want to be able to say when something has not worked out or when something disappoints me. And I don't want employees to

be afraid of their superiors, but to be able to say what bothers them or where they have doubts.

### **How should SECO employees deal with mistakes?**

Mistakes are unavoidable when we work. The most important thing is to inform those affected immediately. Being able to take responsibility for one's own mistakes and apologise for them is a sign of greatness. For me, it is crucial to feel that my employees want to make a difference. And for that, sometimes you have to take a little risk.

### **What would you like to achieve?**

Our task is clear: we want to create the best economic framework conditions for Switzerland. At the same time, we are committed to protecting jobs and to safety in the workplace. Right now, we also have to get through the current crises. Furthermore, it is very important to me that we fulfil our role as a door-opener, especially in somewhat more complex markets. SECO will also be more involved again in shaping Switzerland's relations with Europe, a dossier in which our expertise is urgently needed. And our companies, researchers and students urgently need a positive sign.

### **What role does SECO play for the Swiss economy?**

We promote liberal regulatory policies. A healthy middle ground between neoliberalism and interventionism has proven very successful for Switzerland: the state must always play a subsidiary role and only step in when there is no other way. SECO must defend and promote this model.

### **SECO is accused of being too close to business. What do you say to that?**

We are not only the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, but also the labour ministry. In most other countries, these tasks are organised in separate ministries. So we cannot just be close to business. The merger between the Federal Office for



Industry and Labour and the Federal Office for Foreign Economic Affairs is still being discussed today and still causes friction. But I think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

### **What has surprised – or disappointed – you most about SECO so far?**

I very much appreciate the respectful way in which we treat each other. I find this very important. We spend so much time at work, we should treat each other properly. On the downside, I find the organisation at SECO cumbersome. I am surprised by the amount of forms, permits and signatures needed in some cases. This is astonishing for an office that stands for liberal values, deregulation and personal responsibility. In this respect, I now really do find myself in the Federal Administration! (laughs)



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[www.seco.admin.ch/seco-a-portrait](http://www.seco.admin.ch/seco-a-portrait)

