Emilia Pfeiffer – Executive Director, SwissCham Mexico



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The Swiss Chamber in Mexico (SwissCham) represents Swiss companies operating in Mexico, a country that has become Switzerland's top commercial partner in Latin America. Executive Director Emilia Pfeiffer outlines the role of SwissCham, the robust presence of the Swiss healthcare and life sciences companies in the country, the Chamber's advocacy efforts for members in the sector, and initiatives such as its certificate programme in health and sustainability in collaboration with the Swiss School of Public Health.

Could you outline some of the most pressing issues that the Swiss Chamber is addressing on behalf of its members here in Mexico?

The Swiss Chamber in Mexico, while relatively young with eight years of operations, plays a crucial role for Swiss companies in the country. Our primary focus is on representing these companies, ensuring their operations run smoothly, and supporting the expansion and strengthening of their investments in Mexico. As the voice of Swiss businesses here, we work diligently to address their needs and challenges, providing a platform for their concerns and advocating on their behalf.

We are seeing significant growth in Swiss investments in Mexico, which brings both challenges and opportunities. One major challenge is infrastructure. As investment increases, so does the need for adequate resources and infrastructure to support it. This includes essential services such as electricity and water, as well as infrastructure like roads, ports, and customs facilities. Addressing

these needs is crucial to sustaining and enhancing the operations of Swiss companies here.

Germany is currently Mexico’s leading European partner. Where does Switzerland stand in comparison?

As of early 2024, Switzerland ranks as the ninth largest foreign investor in Mexico, which is notable given our relatively small population of around 8 million. On the flip side, we are thrilled to report that Mexico has become Switzerland’s top commercial partner in Latin America for the first time this year, surpassing Brazil. This shift underscores the dynamic and growing relationship between our two countries.

What key sectors or industries are attracting significant investment from Switzerland in Mexico, and what factors are contributing to this investment?

Switzerland’s investment in Mexico covers a broad array of sectors, highlighting the country’s focus on technology and innovation. Although Switzerland is often associated with products like chocolate and cheese, Swiss companies are making substantial investments across various industries.

The health sector is a major area of investment, with Swiss companies significantly involved in pharmaceuticals and laboratories. Infrastructure is another crucial sector, with firms such as Holcim and ABB opening new production plants in southern Mexico. This aligns with ongoing public infrastructure projects like the Maya train and the Trans-Isthmic Corridor. Additionally, Nestlé has expanded its operations by inaugurating a new plant in Veracruz, reflecting growth in the food and beverage sector.

Insurance and banking sectors are also seeing increased Swiss investment. Interestingly, despite Switzerland’s lack of a coastline, the logistics sector is thriving with major Swiss shipping companies like MSC making notable investments.

This diverse investment landscape is driven by the expansion of existing companies rather than the arrival of new ones, indicating a growing confidence in Mexico’s market and infrastructure developments.

How well represented are healthcare and life sciences companies within the Swiss Chamber in Mexico?

The healthcare and life sciences sectors are prominently represented within the Swiss Chamber. In fact, chemicals and pharmaceuticals constitute 48 percent of Mexico's imports from Switzerland, reflecting the significant role these sectors play in our bilateral commerce.

Within the Chamber, we have major Swiss pharmaceutical companies operating in Mexico, including Novartis, Roche, Sandoz, and Ferring, which specializes in fertility treatments. Additionally, BioPharma provides consulting services in health topics, and Galderma focuses on dermatology. We also have Medartis and Straumann, which are involved in medical devices and products for body replacements.

These companies illustrate the robust presence and impact of the Swiss healthcare and life sciences sector in Mexico, contributing significantly to both the commercial exchange and the advancement of medical innovations.

Do you have any key agenda issues with healthcare and life sciences companies that the Chamber is actively advocating for?

The Swiss Chamber does engage in advocacy on behalf of its members, focusing on two main pillars: innovation and shared responsibility. We emphasize the need for multisectoral collaboration to support these areas.

For innovation, our goal is to ensure that the regulatory framework in Mexico keeps pace with the rapid development of new technologies. This involves working closely with key stakeholders, including Cofepris and the Health Ministry, to promote a more effective and supportive regulatory environment for Swiss companies and, more broadly, for innovation in Mexico.

Sustainability is another crucial aspect of our agenda. We advocate for practices and policies that align with Swiss values of innovation, sustainability, and quality, aiming to foster an environment where these principles can thrive and benefit both our members and the wider community.

How are Swiss companies in Mexico addressing sustainability and corporate social responsibility? Can you share any notable initiatives or success stories?

There are several noteworthy examples. One prominent initiative is our annual event SWISStainability, which rotates between different cities in Mexico. The next edition, taking place in October, will be hosted in Mexico City and will focus on innovation in health and agri-tech. For instance, Adecco and Novartis are part of the sponsors, showcasing their commitment to sustainability and innovation in these critical areas.

Additionally, this year we are launching a new report from the Swiss-Mexican Chamber detailing best practices of Swiss companies in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria specifically within Mexico. This report will provide valuable insights and concrete examples of what Swiss companies are doing in the sustainability space, and I look forward to sharing these findings with you in the coming months.

Another significant initiative is our collaboration with the Swiss School of Public Health to offer a certificate programme in health and sustainability. This programme, which has been running for four years, includes scholarships provided together with Roche Mexico for both the private and public sectors, and features participation from various stakeholders, including health ministers and parliament members. It started here in Mexico and has since expanded to other Swiss chambers, illustrating its success and impact.

The certificate programme is designed as a platform for knowledge exchange. It consists of six sessions, each featuring an expert from Switzerland who provides in-depth insights and expertise on various cutting-edge topics related to public health. This format ensures that participants gain valuable knowledge and practical insights directly from leading specialists.

Mexico is currently undergoing a period of transformation. What are your thoughts on the country’s direction, and how do you perceive this shift?

Mexico is in a phase of transformation. While there was a significant shift in political direction about six years ago, we are now observing more of a period of continuity. This shift is perceived positively, as it suggests stability and ongoing collaboration. We have had fruitful engagements with various entities, particularly through initiatives like our certificate programme. We see this as an opportunity to further strengthen collaborations and ensure that health initiatives reach the most needed sectors of society.

Looking ahead, what are the Swiss Chamber's strategic priorities in Mexico, and how do you plan to enhance bilateral relations between Switzerland and Mexico?

Our strategy is focused on three main pillars. Firstly, we aim to maintain strong connections with strategic counterparts across academic, public, and private sectors to position Swiss companies as leaders in innovation, sustainability, and quality. Secondly, we are committed to supporting our members in enhancing commercial opportunities. Through these efforts, we hope to foster deeper bilateral relations and ensure continued mutual benefit for both Switzerland and Mexico.

Do you see a trend of medium-sized companies from Switzerland coming to Mexico, or is it mainly the larger multinationals?

Most of the Swiss companies we represent in Mexico are indeed large multinationals. We are seeing a significant amount of reinvestment and expansion from these large firms. For instance, Sulzer, a company specializing in pumps, recently opened a large new facility in the State of Mexico, relocating production from Portland. This is indicative of how established companies are increasing their investments in Mexico.

While the focus has been predominantly on larger companies, there are also medium-sized and smaller firms showing interest. We see a notable presence of start-ups, particularly in sectors like FinTech and HealthTech. These smaller and innovative firms are exploring the Mexican market and contributing to its dynamic business landscape.

To wrap up, what aspect of your role excites you the most on a personal level?

What excites me most about my role is the realm of opportunities it presents. Being in a position to leverage and navigate these opportunities is incredibly fulfilling. The pace of change is rapid, and the potential of Swiss investment in Mexico is vast. It feels like there is no limit to what can be achieved. I am passionate about having a tangible impact and helping shape the future of bilateral relations between Switzerland and Mexico.

What message would you like to leave our readers with?

I encourage everyone to not miss out on the chance to explore the hidden opportunities behind Swiss investment in Mexico. The country offers a wealth of possibilities, and Swiss companies bring innovation, quality, and sustainability to the table. Embrace these opportunities and discover what lies beyond the surface.

Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not covered yet?

I would like to invite everyone to follow us on our social media channels and visit our website. We regularly update these platforms with information about our events and initiatives. In September we will be very active in Switzerland with several events. Stay tuned about upcoming news!

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