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Global Industry Competitiveness Index (GICI) 2026

Competitiveness analysis of the Swiss chemical and pharmaceutical industry

A study by BAK Economics, commissioned by scienceindustries



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This publication uses the generic masculine to refer to persons and positions, rather than employing both masculine and feminine forms. All terms apply equally to both men and women.

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Editorial

Good foundations are only the beginning: pace decides at the top

Switzerland continues to rank among the most competitive chemical and pharmaceutical locations in the world. Third place in the Global Industry Competitiveness Index 2026 is a strong result. Yet a closer look at the ranking reveals a concern: Switzerland is losing ground precisely in innovation and technology leadership, falling to seventh place.

This should give us pause for thought. The conditions could hardly be better: Switzerland has excellent research, highly qualified specialists, and one of the most research-intensive chemical and pharmaceutical industries in the world. Yet in international competition, what matters is not only the knowledge we create. What counts is how quickly that knowledge is converted into new applications, products, and value added.

Artificial intelligence makes this challenge particularly visible. Its potential ranges from drug discovery and materials research, through clinical trials, to industrial production. AI can accelerate development processes and raise productivity. Yet technological potential alone does not create a competitive advantage. That requires high-quality and accessible data, the right competences, and a regulatory framework that provides legal certainty without stifling innovation.

A small, internationally networked country, in particular, cannot afford to be slower than its competitors in adopting new technologies. Switzerland must translate its strength in research more consistently into industrial innovation — and offer companies the best possible conditions in which to develop, deploy, and scale new technologies here.

The GICI 2026 shows where this is already working well and where improvements are needed. Good foundations are a privilege.

They become a competitive advantage only when we put them to use.





Dr. Annette Luther
President scienceindustries

Executive Summary

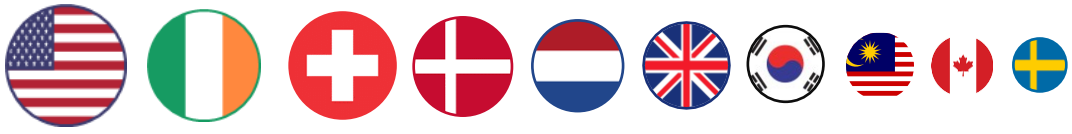
For the seventh consecutive time, Switzerland ranks among the three most competitive locations for the global chemical and pharmaceutical industry in the Global Industry Competitiveness Index (GICI). However, the renewed deterioration of its position in innovation and technology leadership is a cause for concern. The opportunities to improve the framework conditions for research and innovation must be seized. The GICI identifies clear weaknesses in this regard.

The Global Industry Competitiveness Index (GICI) measures the international competitiveness of the chemical and pharmaceutical industry. It is conducted by BAK Economics on behalf of scienceindustries, the Swiss Business Association Chemistry Pharma Life Sciences. It is based on four dimensions: 'Performance', 'Market Position and Efficiency', 'Innovation and Technology Leadership', and 'Location Quality'.

Switzerland still exhibits a balanced profile and ranks among the leading nations worldwide across all four dimensions. However, it is losing ground in 'Innovation and Technology Leadership' and falls to seventh place. The results suggest that the framework conditions for clinical research and for the digitalisation of research are stronger in other countries.

Switzerland's lead over Denmark is narrow, and the gap vis-à-vis the United States and Ireland has widened further. The USA retains its position as the most competitive chemical and pharmaceutical location, driven above all by its outstanding innovation performance and strong market presence. Ireland consolidates its second place on the basis of a very high level of productivity, but also shows clear weaknesses. China has clearly improved its ranking, as have Canada and Malaysia.

The top 10 most competitive chemical and pharmaceutical locations



US	IE	CH	DK	NL	UK	KR	MY	CA	SE
124	123	118	116	109	108	108	106	106	106

Source: BAK Economics

Focus 2026: Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the pharmaceutical and chemical industry from research and development to sales and marketing. Switzerland brings an outstanding scientific starting point to this endeavour. What will be decisive is how quickly this strength is converted into industrial applications, innovation, and productivity gains. The analysis is qualitative in nature; a quantitative country comparison based on indicators is not currently possible, as industry-specific, internationally comparable data on AI in the chemical and pharmaceutical sector are lacking.

In the pharmaceutical industry, AI supports drug discovery, makes clinical trials more targeted, and accelerates regulatory approvals and drug safety monitoring. In the chemical industry, it supports the development of new materials, the optimisation of reactions, and the management of production processes. In addition, there are cross-sector applications in production, administration, finance, sales, and logistics that are equally relevant for both industries.

AI is boosting efficiency across companies on a broad front. In early-stage drug discovery, time and cost savings of 25 to 50 per cent are considered achievable — a significant figure given development timelines of often 10 to 15 years and a success rate of only around 10 to 14 per cent. In administration, customer service, and knowledge work, controlled studies provide evidence of significant productivity gains. The potential in research and development, by contrast, rests more heavily on estimates and must first be validated in practice.

The greatest obstacles to successful AI scaling are access to high-quality data, the explainability of model decisions, regulatory requirements, and unresolved liability questions. Companies make progress when they standardise data organisation, integrate pilot projects into regulated everyday operations, combine domain expertise with AI competences in shared teams, define responsibilities clearly, and build partnerships with universities and start-ups.

Switzerland impresses with a strong research base and good availability of talent. Senior managers from the chemical and pharmaceutical industry assess the overall framework conditions as adequate, but not outstanding. Regulation, for example, is considered not yet sufficient. Four areas for government action stand out as priorities:

- A risk-based, sector-specific, and internationally compatible regulatory framework..
- Better, legally clearly defined access to data, particularly health data.
- Targeted upskilling of the existing workforce and the recruitment of qualified specialists.
- Innovation support that strengthens the transfer of research into industrial applications and that combines funding, computing capacity, and the testing of new applications.