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MENA Strategy
2021–2024

Foreign Policy Strategy
2020–2023

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MENA Strategy
2021–2024

The present report, which was approved by the Federal Council on 14 October 2020, is a geographical follow-up strategy to the Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23. In accordance with objective 6.3, Switzerland has formulated a strategy for the MENA region.

Foreword

A major consideration of the Federal Council's Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 is ensuring coherent foreign policy. Through the whole-of-government approach, the Federal Council seeks to ensure that all seven departments, the Federal Chancellery and Switzerland's 170 representations abroad pursue a coherent foreign policy. This MENA strategy responds to the need for transparent and coherent state activities.

According to Switzerland's Federal Constitution, the Federal Council is responsible for foreign policy – with the participation of Parliament and the cantons. In addition to government bodies, private economic actors, Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences, and civil society organisations – from NGOs to political parties – also play a role. While state and non-state actors may have very different opinions, from abroad they are perceived as representatives of Switzerland – in short as 'Switzerland'. An additional goal of this strategy is thus to reinforce the common "*whole-of-Switzerland*" approach.

I am therefore delighted to present the first of the Federal Council's geographical strategies announced in the Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23. This document highlights both Switzerland's interests in the MENA region, and Swiss values that we promote internationally.

The acronym MENA stands for 'Middle East and North Africa' and describes the region spanning from Morocco to Iran. The MENA region is considered the cradle of cultures and civilisations. It is in close geographical proximity to Switzerland and we share a strong historical and cultural heritage. The region is enormously significant to Switzerland, both in political and economic terms. In the past, we have seen that when the MENA region fares well, Europe fares well. On the other hand, crises in the MENA region have a direct impact on Europe.

However, I would prefer not to confine myself to the crises in this region, and to look instead at the opportunities. Because there are certainly some positive leverage points in the region:

- Five of the world's seven oil-richest countries are located in the MENA region and play an important role in the global energy sector.
- The region has significant potential in terms of renewable energies. Countries like Morocco are at the forefront of the energy transition.
- With a trade volume of over CHF 31 billion in 2019, the MENA region is an important trading partner for Switzerland.
- In the area of digitalisation, important developments are taking place, particularly in countries of the Arabian Peninsula and in Israel. For example, the world's first university of artificial intelligence was recently set up in the United Arab Emirates.

The MENA region is also characterised by its young population. And for me, youth is synonymous with new beginnings and optimism. Through this MENA Strategy 2021–24, the Federal Council aims to tackle political instability, sluggish economic growth and obstacles to entrepreneurship, with and for the benefit of future generations, both in the MENA region and in Switzerland.

Ignazio Cassis
Head
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

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Summary

The Federal Council's Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 includes the goal of drawing up a separate strategy for the MENA region, which – in addition to the protection of international law and human rights – focuses on economic development and job prospects for young people.

As Europe's direct neighbour and on account of its geopolitical importance, the MENA region plays a key role with regard to the safeguarding of Switzerland's diverse interests. The current difficulties facing some countries in the region – violent conflicts, authoritarian regimes, migration and displacement, economic stagnation and high youth unemployment – present complex challenges, which can only be addressed by Swiss foreign policy through coherent diplomatic, political, economic and development policy instruments. A regional strategy aims to keep sight of the bigger picture and set country-specific priorities through instruments that allow Switzerland to take coherent action, both at home and internationally. The coherence of Switzerland's foreign policy and how it interconnects with domestic policy are two key parameters in Switzerland's Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23.

The Federal Council has set out five strategic focus areas for the MENA region on the basis of a geopolitical analysis of the region:

1. Peace, security and human rights
2. Migration and protection of people in need
3. Sustainable development
4. Economic affairs, finance, science
5. Digitalisation and new technologies

However, the MENA region is politically and economically heterogeneous. To accommodate that, this MENA Strategy 2021–24 divides the region into three geographical sub-regions:

1. North Africa
2. Near East
3. Arabian Peninsula and Iran

This strategy sets out Switzerland's three most important thematic areas for each sub-region, and its foreign policy priorities for each country. Finally, chapter 5 lists the partners for implementation of the strategy. The annexes include a glossary and list of abbreviations.

Switzerland has built up a good reputation in the region as an honest broker, an actor in the areas of peacebuilding and humanitarian aid, and as an economic partner.

Active use is made of its good offices, particularly in the form of various protecting power mandates it performs on behalf of other countries. These activities build trust and goodwill and will continue to be pursued. The same applies to Switzerland's economic and development cooperation. By promoting high-quality education and vocational education and training for young people at the local level, Switzerland can help tackle rising unemployment. If people see opportunities for employment, peace and participation in decision-making, this also reduces migratory pressure.

1 Introduction

The MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region comprises 18 countries, extending south of the Mediterranean Sea from Morocco to Egypt, and east from Yemen through the countries of the Arabian Peninsula to Iran. In order to take account of the different economic and political realities, specific strategies have been drawn up for each of the three sub-regions: **North Africa** (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia); the **Near East** (Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territory, Syria); and the **Arabian Peninsula and Iran** (Bahrain, Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen).

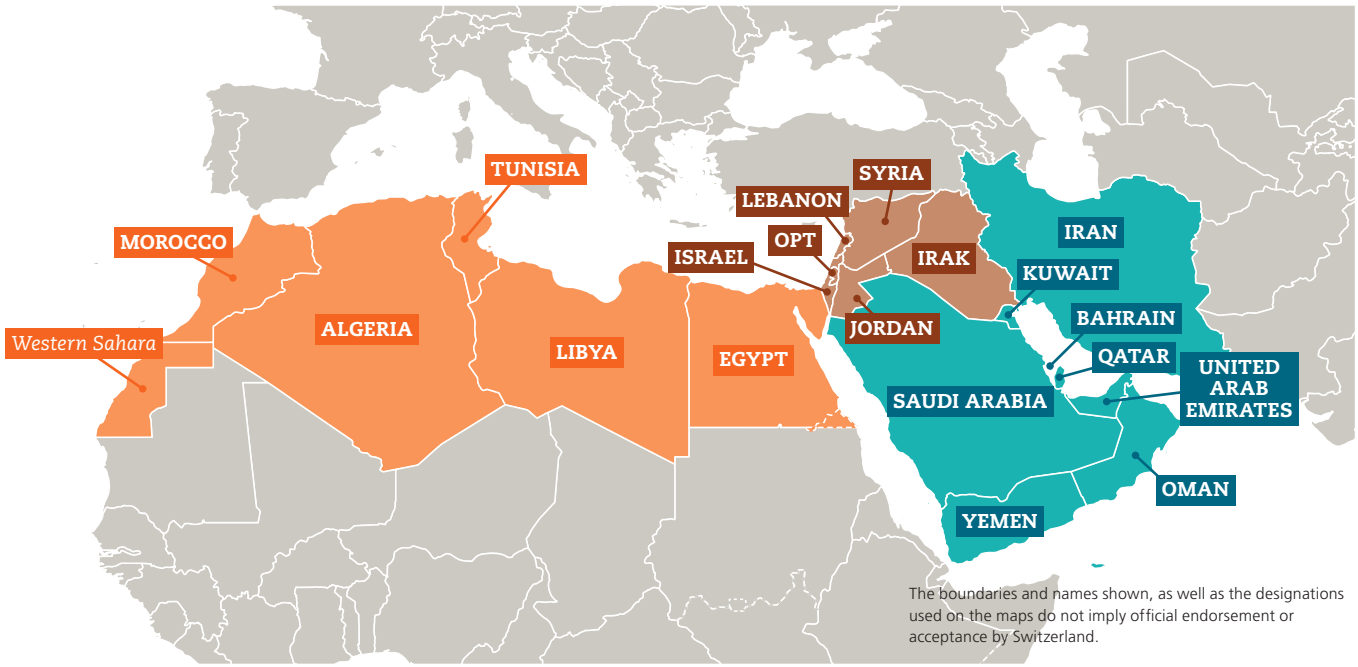


Figure 1: The countries and sub-regions of the MENA region (source: FDFA)

1.1 Why a MENA strategy?

The MENA region is an important partner for Europe owing to its **geographical proximity** and geopolitical significance, and Switzerland has a direct interest in its stability and economic advancement. Thanks to its neutrality and soft power, Switzerland plays a key role in **peacebuilding** and **good offices**, and is playing a leading role in various regional initiatives.

Four countries in the region – Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen – are caught up in serious armed conflicts. The region as a whole is plagued by poverty, social inequality and shortcomings in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. It is therefore one of four **priority regions** set out in the Federal Council's International Cooperation Strategy 2021–24 (IC Strategy 2021–24 🔗).

As Europe's direct neighbour, the MENA region plays a key role in Switzerland's **security**. Further destabilisation of the region could involve an increased risk of jihadist attacks in Europe, and further increase migratory pressure. In many countries across the MENA region, there is a tendency towards migration, with young people in particular leaving their home countries owing to the difficult economic and political situation.

However, the MENA region is itself also a **transit region** for refugees and migrants, accommodating people from neighbouring war zones and countries in sub-Saharan Africa looking for a safe place to live, a new home and economic opportunities. Those who continue their journey to Europe take great risks and it is not uncommon for them to lose their lives in the process. A solution to this problem can only be found internationally and together with the MENA countries.

On the other hand, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa have significant economic **potential** thanks to their abundant natural resources, young populations and good level of education. Many MENA countries have sufficient wind and solar resources, in addition to oil and gas, and harnessing them could help ensure a sustainable energy supply, including for Switzerland.

The Gulf states are already **key trading partners** for Switzerland; they have evolved to become an important hub in the areas of finance, renewable energies and artificial intelligence, and owing to their geostrategic location, they build a bridge between Asia and Africa. The COVID-19 crisis will weaken the economies of the MENA region in the long term, too; on the other hand, the crisis can also open up opportunities to take advantage of global trends, such as reshoring, i.e. returning production to the region, and restructuring of global and regional value chains.[1]

Through its MENA strategy, the Federal Council aims to keep its eye on the bigger picture and set country-specific priorities using various instruments that indicate Switzerland's coherent national and international action.

1 See OECD Policy Paper: Investment in the MENA region in the time of COVID-19; June 2020.

1.2 Development of the MENA region

The MENA region is shaped by historical conflicts owing to the arbitrary demarcation of borders after the colonial era and as a consequence of the Cold War, competition for commodities, inter-Arab and inter-religious tensions, and the Middle East conflict. The proliferation of terrorist groups such as 'Islamic State' have overshadowed peaceful developments in individual countries and their efforts to prepare their mostly young populations for the challenges of the 21st century.

Ten years after the outbreak of the 'Arab Spring', the outcome is sobering, and hopes that it would mark the beginning of a new political era have been dashed. Instead, many countries in the region are characterised by repression, civil war and jihadism. Yet the protests mark a historical watershed that opens up new vistas for the future.

Switzerland has been working bilaterally with most countries in North Africa and the Middle East since the early 1960s, and has a number of representations in the region. Switzerland opened an embassy in Iran in the 1930s and in Lebanon in the 1940s. Embassies in the first Gulf states followed in the 1980s, with Oman and Qatar being added in the last ten years.

As a neutral actor with no colonial past and a strong democracy, a stable and prosperous country, host state of UN institutions and specialist in good offices, Switzerland enjoys credibility and trust among the MENA countries. This allows it to act as a mediator in transnational issues, keep communication channels open and help defuse conflicts. It can offer its expertise in vocational education and training, economic development and democratisation processes. Switzerland currently has five protecting power mandates in the region. It continues to host various peace talks (Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iran nuclear agreement).

Switzerland has successfully initiated a regular migration dialogue with most countries in North Africa in the last ten years, and in 2012 it entered a migration partnership with Tunisia. It responds to the large number of refugees in the region through direct humanitarian action and by working with multilateral organisations. This includes supporting the approximately 5.6 million Syrian refugees in the region who Switzerland has helped protect through the resettlement of particularly vulnerable refugees. Switzerland's humanitarian effort in connection with the war in Syria is the biggest humanitarian operation in its history. It has invested more than half a billion Swiss francs in the region since 2011 and granted protection to many refugees – 19,000 people alone under resettlement measures. As Switzerland belongs to the Schengen/Dublin area, close cooperation with the EU is also in its interest in terms of ensuring a successful migration policy.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Switzerland has taken a balanced position based on international law. It has called on all actors to engage in dialogue and has offered its good offices to facilitate further negotiations.

While the conditions in the individual MENA countries are very different, they all face a common challenge: creating job opportunities for young men and women. The youth

unemployment rate of 25-30% is also the consequence of education and training that is not tailored to the needs of the real economy. This leads to particularly high numbers of well-qualified academics unemployed or in poorly-paid jobs.[2] Switzerland therefore supports these countries through its international cooperation projects, and works with the local and Swiss labour markets in vocational education and training. These efforts have been successful and the majority of young people involved in the schemes find a job.

There is also potential in the area of digitalisation and innovation. New technologies have become an important driver of social change, particularly in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and in Israel. For example, they are creating jobs in global service sectors (e.g. IT call centres) for their well-qualified and often multilingual young populations. The United Arab Emirates recently set up the world's first university dedicated to artificial intelligence, while in Saudi Arabia, technological change is an integral part of economic development. In Israel – the leading country for innovation in the region – Switzerland is developing partnerships in various new technology fields, including in fintech and medtech.

To safeguard its interests in the region, Switzerland is reliant on good bilateral relations and on cooperation with multilateral actors and like-minded countries. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of strengthening countries' macroeconomic stability and resilience so they are better able to absorb the impact of external shocks.

2 World Economic Forum, Executive Briefing, The Future of Jobs and Skills in the Middle East and North Africa – Preparing the Region for the Fourth Industrial Revolution; May 2017.

1.3 Coherence

The MENA strategy is the first geographical strategy issued by the Federal Council under its overarching Foreign Policy Strategy 2020-23. It was drawn up on an interdepartmental basis and involves all departments. It will be used to derive operational implementation documents (e.g. international cooperation programmes) with objectives and indicators. The cascade strategy serves to guarantee the coherence of the Federal Council's foreign policy.

The Federal Council has a responsibility to regularly review Switzerland's foreign policy interests in this rapidly-changing region, to identify risks and opportunities, and to adjust the focus where necessary. Conflicting objectives cannot be ruled out in foreign policy: they reflect a pluralistic political system and close integration of foreign and domestic policy, and should be addressed transparently and resolved in a democratic decision-making process. Conflicting objectives may occur in a number of areas, including the following:

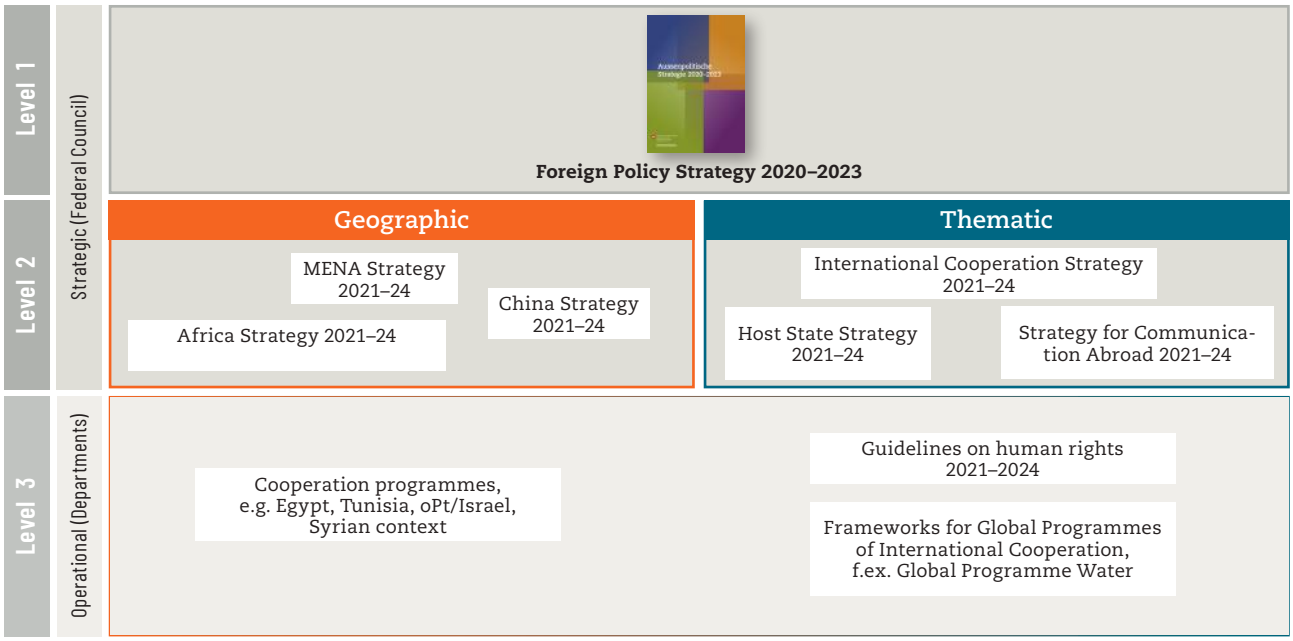


Figure 2: Foreign policy strategy cascade (source: FDFA – illustrative selection of documents).

→ Peacebuilding and mediation activities may result in Switzerland engaging in dialogue with state- and non-state actors that have different values from Switzerland or that incite violence.

→ Swiss companies in the MENA region create jobs locally. However, their activities – depending on the sector and production method – may also contribute to the exploitation of natural resources and therefore be at odds with the promotion of human rights and tackling climate change.

→ International cooperation is intended to sustainably improve quality of life at local level, which in the medium term can also lead to greater mobility. On the other hand, skills shortages in certain sectors in Switzerland can lead to well-qualified people leaving their home countries (brain drain).

→ Armament efforts in the MENA region illustrate the tension between the economic interests of Swiss companies in the region and the restrictive export regulations for war materiel. Even if individual Swiss companies have an interest in such arms contracts, they are not granted an export licence.

→ Criticism of MENA states owing to violations of international law and human rights may jeopardise bilateral relations at political and economic level.

Switzerland's legal framework serves as a frame of reference to counter conflicts of interest or eliminate them by weighing up the merits. Structures such as the Interdepartmental Structure for International Cooperation on Migration (ICM Structure) also help balance interests. This strategy will enable the Federal Council to further improve the coherence of Switzerland's action in the MENA region.

The desired seat on the UN Security Council in 2023–24 will offer further opportunities to place such efforts in a wider framework and to play a purposeful part on the UN Security Council.

2 Geopolitical overview

2.1 Regional alliances and global actors

Shifting regional alliances

Since 2011, the political, economic and cultural influence of the three MENA sub-regions, and the relations between them, have been in turmoil. The countries of North Africa are increasingly focusing on their allegiance to the African continent, as reflected in their greater involvement in the African Union. By contrast, cooperation within the Arab Maghreb Union has virtually come to a standstill, particularly because of the tensions between Algeria and Morocco over Western Sahara. In recent decades, the countries of the Arabian Peninsula have replaced the Near East and Egypt as the economic centre of the MENA region, but internal tensions (Qatar crisis, war in Yemen, tensions in Iran) are causing them to become increasingly unstable. New regional disputes are overshadowing the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian population and – following years of informal rapprochement – have paved the way for the normalisation of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and subsequently Bahrain, announced in summer 2020. This makes the UAE and Bahrain the third and fourth Arab countries after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994 to normalise their relations with Israel – a sign of the tectonic shifts the Arab world has been experiencing for some years. They have created a new momentum, and other countries may also follow suit. Saudi Arabia and the UAE play a key role in the formation of new alliances and rifts in the region. Furthermore, armed, non-state and semi-state actors are weakening stability in many countries in the region.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran dominates the Gulf and neighbouring countries – a geopolitically important area in the MENA region. Political, economic and security policy efforts to secure regional influence have contributed to heightened tensions throughout the region. While the risk of outright war remains low, both Saudi Arabia and Iran interfere by various means in Yemen and Syria and wrestle for influence in Lebanon and Iraq via their proxies. This rivalry is resulting in alliances and allegiances throughout the region, which may shift depending on political developments. Recently, a number of states on the Arabian Peninsula have been seeking to de-escalate tensions with Iran in order to minimise the domestic fallout of an escalation between the United States and Iran.

Meanwhile, new rifts are opening up as actors wrestle for control on the Red Sea and in the Eastern Mediterranean. For example, the UAE and Saudi Arabia (together with Egypt) and Qatar (allied with Turkey) have developed their alliances with East African countries and expanded their influence in the Horn of Africa – for example by means of military bases, investment in strategic ports and land connections, and through development aid. This is motivated by short-term interests (e.g. gaining military control in the Yemen conflict), and longer-term interests, such as using the region as a gateway to the African growth market, mitigating the influence of Iran, and strengthening ties to China, which is actively involved in Africa. In Syria, Iraq and Iran, the situation of the Kurds has become more complicated owing to both the internal situation and regional unrest, while the victory over the 'Islamic State' group has led to a decrease in international attention. For Turkey, the 'Kurdish question' remains a central factor in domestic and regional policy.

Global actors

From a global perspective, too, the power balance in the region is undergoing profound change. The withdrawal of the **United States** from its role as a guarantor of stability is resulting in uncertainty and a repositioning of regional and global actors. The previous presence of the United States in the region is now in doubt owing to both its growing rivalry with China and domestic political developments. Its role as protector of Israel and its dispute with Iran that began in 1979 remain constant elements of US policy, however. The latter has intensified in recent years owing to the US policy of putting maximum pressure on Iran and the withdrawal of the United States from the Iran nuclear deal.

The political influence of the **EU** on the main conflicts in the MENA region has weakened. As the most important partner for development cooperation and humanitarian aid, and on account of its market potential, the EU remains an important actor, however. In addition, under the new European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, the EU has reaffirmed its foreign policy ambitions (geopolitical Commission). As co-signatories of the Iran nuclear deal, the E3 – the UK, Germany and France – play an important role in the area of security as they have a hand in preserving the agreement.

Russia and Turkey have taken advantage of the conflicts in Syria and Libya to extend their geostrategic spheres of influence. Turkey has increasingly distanced itself from the West in recent years and is seeking new alliances and a more active role in the MENA region. Backed by Qatar, it is mainly competing with Saudi Arabia and Egypt for regional dominance. Russia has positioned itself as an essential interlocutor in the conflicts in Syria and Libya.

China is mainly pursuing economic interests in the region: it relies on oil from the Gulf, and the region is crucial for protecting shipping routes for commodity trading. China has so far stayed out of politicised regional conflicts. However, the military base in Djibouti that was opened in 2017 and its investments in the Belt and Road Initiative will bolster China's influence in the MENA region.

Although Russia and China are set to expand their influence in the region, it is unlikely that either country will replace the United States as the dominant regional guarantor of stability. The region will in future be increasingly left alone to cope with conflicts and other challenges. The traditional allies of the United States in the region have started diversifying their relations with world powers. The constantly shifting coalitions in regional conflicts are causing great instability, while misunderstanding and distrust between individual states are growing. This means efforts by neutral partners such as Switzerland to keep the channels of communication open will be all the more important. The growing militarisation in the region and the presence of non-state and semi-state actors are exacerbating the situation and undermining short- and medium-term prospects of stability.

2.2 Regional trends

Despite its heterogeneity, various long-term trends can be identified in the region. The individual countries are affected by these trends to varying degrees. The effects of the COVID-19 crisis are likely to accelerate many regional trends.

Geopolitics

The **geopolitical balances of power** in the MENA region have significantly shifted in recent years. The world order under the rules and standards of the United Nations that has existed since the end of the Second World War is in turmoil. The region is politically fragmented and regional cooperation is minimal. Political, religious and ethnic fault lines and rivalries prevent the emergence of a regional identity.

International law and human rights are increasingly being challenged and violated, without states feeling they have to justify their actions or expect negative consequences. The actions of some governments – under the guise of fighting terrorism – have undermined respect for international law, particularly international humanitarian law.

Geopolitics
- Geopolitical shifts
- Erosion of rules-based international order and violation of rules and standards

Environment
- Climate change
- Water stress
- Lack of food security

Demographics
- Population growth
- Urbanisation
- Migration and displacement
- Youth unemployment
- External shocks

Governance
- Poor Governance
- Corruption
- Individual freedom
- Human rights
- Restriction of civil society space

Economy
- Sluggish economic reforms
- Diversification of oil-dependent economies
- Digitalisation and new technologies

Security
- Terrorism/violent extremism
- Regional and local conflicts
- Armament in the region
- Strategic straits

Figure 3: Overview of regional trends in the MENA region (source: FDFA).

The environment

The MENA region is one of the worst affected by **climate change**, which is resulting in rising temperatures and more frequent extreme weather events. A central challenge is **water stress**. Nearly all the countries in the region already use several times the volume of renewable water available, with serious foreseeable consequences.

Increasing urbanisation, climate change and water stress are leading to a steady loss of agricultural land and jeopardising **food security**. The MENA region already imports around half of its food from outside the region and is therefore particularly exposed to price increases on the international market and weak supply chains.

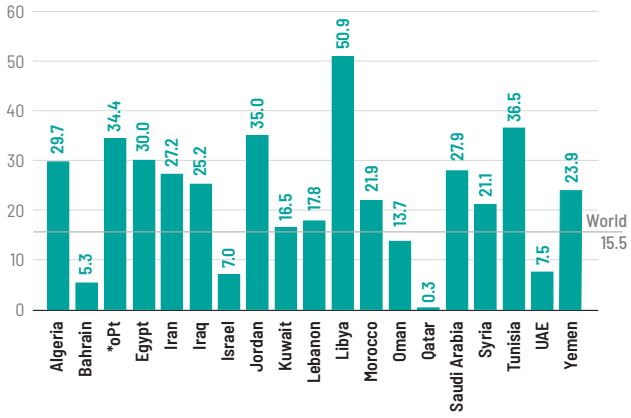


Figure 5: Youth unemployment among 15–24 year olds in the MENA region in percent (source: World Bank /ILO ILOSTAT Database, June 2020).

Demography

The population of the countries in the MENA region is currently 465 million, of whom 211 million are under 24. According to UN forecasts, the **population** is set to **grow** to 540 million by 2030.[3] The population is growing much faster than the labour market, with around five million young people entering the market to look for work every year. The MENA region and sub-Saharan Africa have the world's highest level of **youth unemployment**. Power structures, which are often based on clientelism, exclude the vast majority of the population from participation in decision-making and revenue from natural resources and lead to major **social inequalities**.

In many countries in the region, the size of the urban population relative to the total population is growing rapidly. The degree of **urbanisation** varies in the individual countries and offers opportunities for some and challenges for others.

Migration and displacement are important issues throughout the region. Many countries are origin, transit and destination countries for refugees and migrants. There are 17 million *displaced people* in the region, of whom some

3 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Dynamics; World Population Prospects 2019.

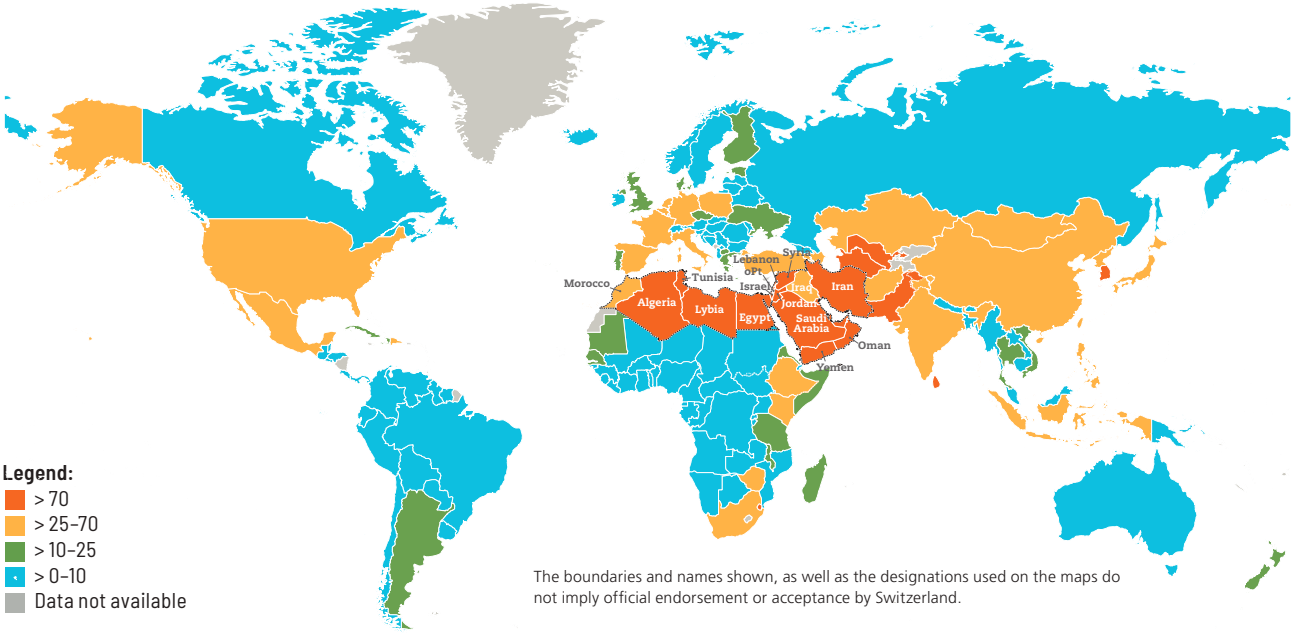


Figure 4: The majority of the countries projected to be the most water stressed are in the MENA region (source: UN World Water Development Report 2019).

10 million are internally displaced.[4] The host regions and surrounding host countries face huge challenges. Migration is also influenced by the political and social developments in neighbouring regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. Various factors suggest that migration will increase.

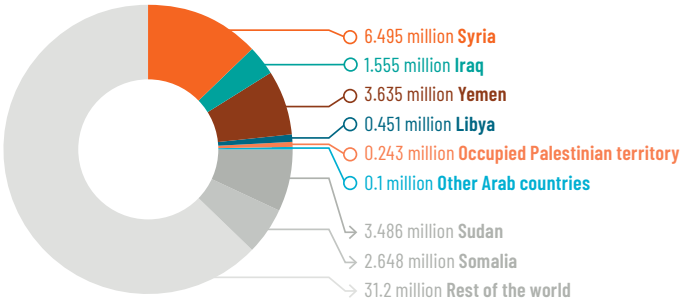


Figure 6: Internally displaced persons by country of origin 2019/2020 (source: Global Internal Displacement Database).

Meanwhile, a number of countries in the region – particularly on the Arabian Peninsula – are a major destination for economic migrants from developing countries: on the Arabian Peninsula alone, some 30 million migrants[5] send over USD 100 billion back to their home countries every year. The economies of the region are reliant on this workforce.

The protest movements that flared up in Algeria, Iraq, Iran and Lebanon in 2019 showed that – apart from Tunisia – the 2011 'Arab Spring' did little to improve the situation; **social pressure** for change remains high.

Globalisation and interconnectedness mean that **external shocks** have an ever increasing influence on regional developments. The COVID-19 crisis is a perfect example. The sometimes drastic measures taken to control the pandemic have far-reaching consequences (recession, increased repression). At the same time, the crisis opens up opportunities, such as accelerating digitalisation and the efforts of European countries to shorten supply chains.

Governance

The population's hopes for democratisation and the rule of law have for the most part not been fulfilled. While the state has lost influence in some regions due to internal armed conflicts, or is non-existent (e.g. Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Syria), security forces in particular have gained power in countries where the military and intelligence service are traditionally part of the power base. Reforms have come to a standstill and **poor governance**, corruption and human rights abuses are pervasive, albeit to varying degrees.

With a few exceptions, individual freedom, civil society space and opportunities for civil society actors to engage in dialogue with governments are increasingly being restricted, which is having a negative impact on human rights. This particularly applies to freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, prohibition of torture and the right to life, but also in terms of the lack of gender equality and discrimination on the grounds of religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE MENA REGION

Women's rights are an important political and social issue in the MENA region. Although legal texts often protect them and in most cases recognise their rights, women continue to suffer various forms of discrimination, in the private and public and economic spheres, often in the name of tradition or custom. Islamic law in some cases sets out different rules for men and women.

In their official discourse, some states advocate and support a policy of emancipation of women and promotion of their rights. A great deal of progress has been made in this area: a reduction in maternal death, an increase in the age of marriage and better access to schooling and higher education for women. In many countries, a growing number of women hold senior positions in government, academia and the private sector. Nevertheless, women's rights remain restricted in an often traditional social environment. The armed conflicts in the region also resulted in forced displacement. Together with domestic violence, and forced and early marriage, they further undermine the situation of women and girls. Women also continue to be victims of female genital mutilation in some countries in the region. In their fight for equality, it is crucial that women are more involved in political processes.

4 UNHCR Global Report 2018, Regional Summaries, Middle East and North Africa (plus approx. 3 million Afghan refugees in Iran).

5 UN DESA Population Division, International Migration Stock 2019/Country Profiles; KNOMAD, The Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development – Data on Outward remittances, April 2020.

Economy

The region has recorded **weak economic growth** in recent years, and has hardly any automatic stabilisers. The low oil price and the economic implications of the global spread of COVID-19 pose enormous challenges to the region and could reinforce protectionist tendencies in some countries. The economy is mostly shaped by monopolies and oligopolies, clientelism, economic sanction mechanisms, untapped potential and an often difficult business environment. These factors hinder private sector growth and competitiveness. The **rentier state** model, which focuses on real estate and consumption financed by oil and gas revenues, has reached its limits given the development of oil prices. The Gulf states in particular are therefore pursuing plans to **diversify their economies**, with varying degrees of success.

Start-ups in **innovative sectors**, such as medtech, fintech, cybertech, foodtech and artificial intelligence are emerging mainly in Israel and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, but also in North Africa and Iran. Meanwhile, certain obstacles need to be addressed in order to harness the digital potential – such as difficulties securing financing for start-ups and deficiencies in the fields of data security, data protection and protection of intellectual property.

Security

The MENA region is affected by several **armed conflicts**. The proliferation of arms, the increased involvement of regional and international actors, and the provocative rhetoric from some governments is further exacerbating these conflicts. The state monopoly on the use of force is restricted or disputed in some countries. There are a multitude of armed non-state and semi-state actors. These conflicts have disastrous consequences for the civilian population. They also threaten strategically important hubs in international shipping and telecommunications, such as the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.

Despite the dwindling influence of 'Islamic State', there is still a breeding ground for radicalism. The issue of foreign jihadist fighters returning to their home countries or third countries will continue to occupy the states of the MENA region as well as Europe and Switzerland.

Around a third of global **arms transfers** in the last five years have gone to the MENA region. It remains a hotspot for the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Newer technologies, such as drone and cyberattacks, are also increasingly being deployed. The withdrawal of the United States from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018 has increased the risk of nuclear **armament**.

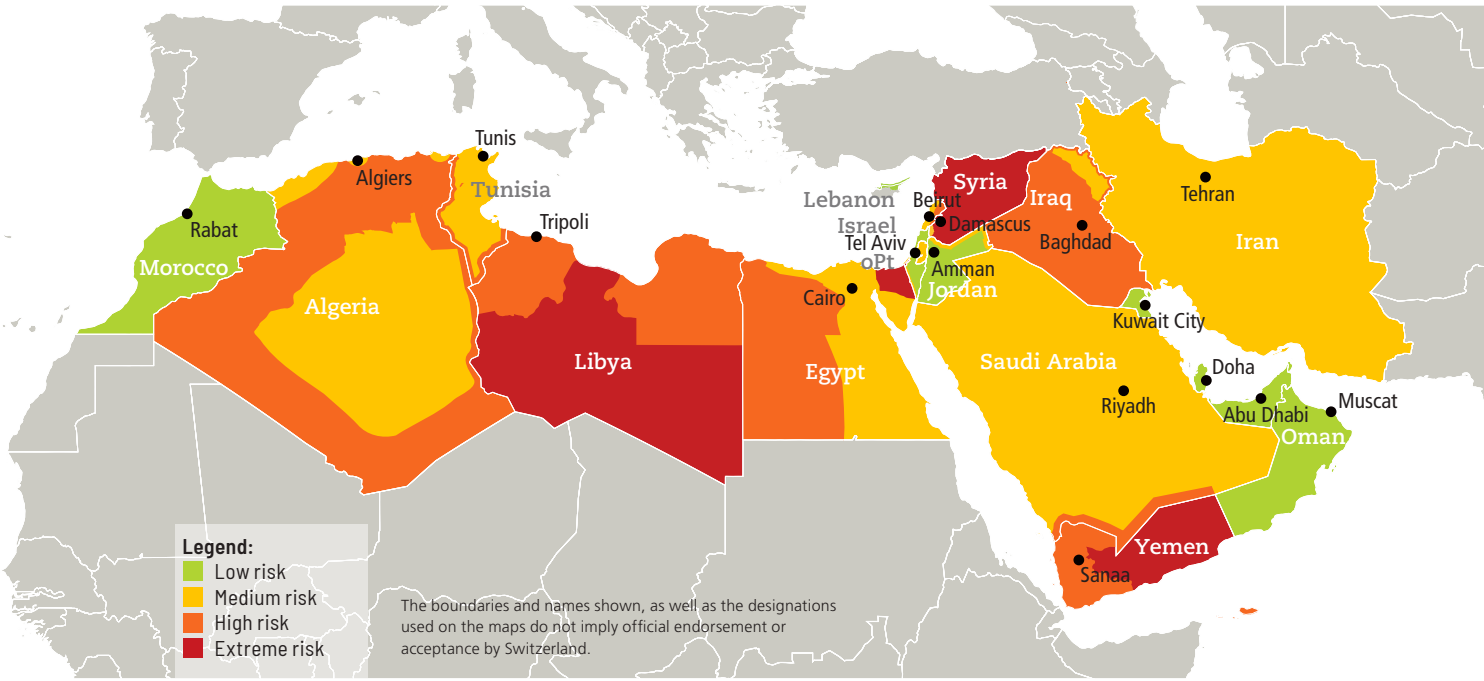


Figure 7: Security risks in the states of the MENA region (source: Risk Map Middle East 2020, from Control Risks)

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE MENA REGION

Religious ideologies are again playing a major role in the political sphere. This is a consequence of rapid social change and globalisation, and reflects people's need for stability, belonging and identity. Many states in the MENA region are experiencing a crisis of legitimacy vis-a-vis their citizens and are thereby paving the way for religious ideologies to recapture the political sphere. The return of the religious factor to the international arena is one of a series of ethnic, cultural and linguistic forms of identity that are used to reorganise various communities or regions.

The Middle East – the birthplace of the three monotheistic religions – is typical of a region with major tensions and divisions: religion is the key factor in understanding the community dynamics that have an impact at national and regional level – in Iraq and Syria as well as in the Israeli-Palestinian region. This also applies to the countries of North Africa where religious consciousness has increased in certain regions. Depending on the context and actors, religion has two main roles: either it is a cause of conflict, which is exploited by political state- and non-state actors, and can lead to civil wars; or it serves to promote peace by disregarding the 'theopolitical' perspective and appealing to shared values and a global ethic.

In the Middle East, religion – as a driver of peace or conflict – has great importance in internal political debate. It shapes international relations and has implications for cooperation in areas such as human rights and economic affairs.

3 Thematic priorities

Switzerland has a keen and multifaceted interest in the MENA region. A peaceful, prosperous and stable region that offers its citizens economic and social prospects is also conducive to prosperity and security in Switzerland. Based on the above analysis and the FPS 2020–23, the Federal Council derives the following five central themes for the MENA region. It is important to remain flexible to be able to respond to changing circumstances and unforeseen events.

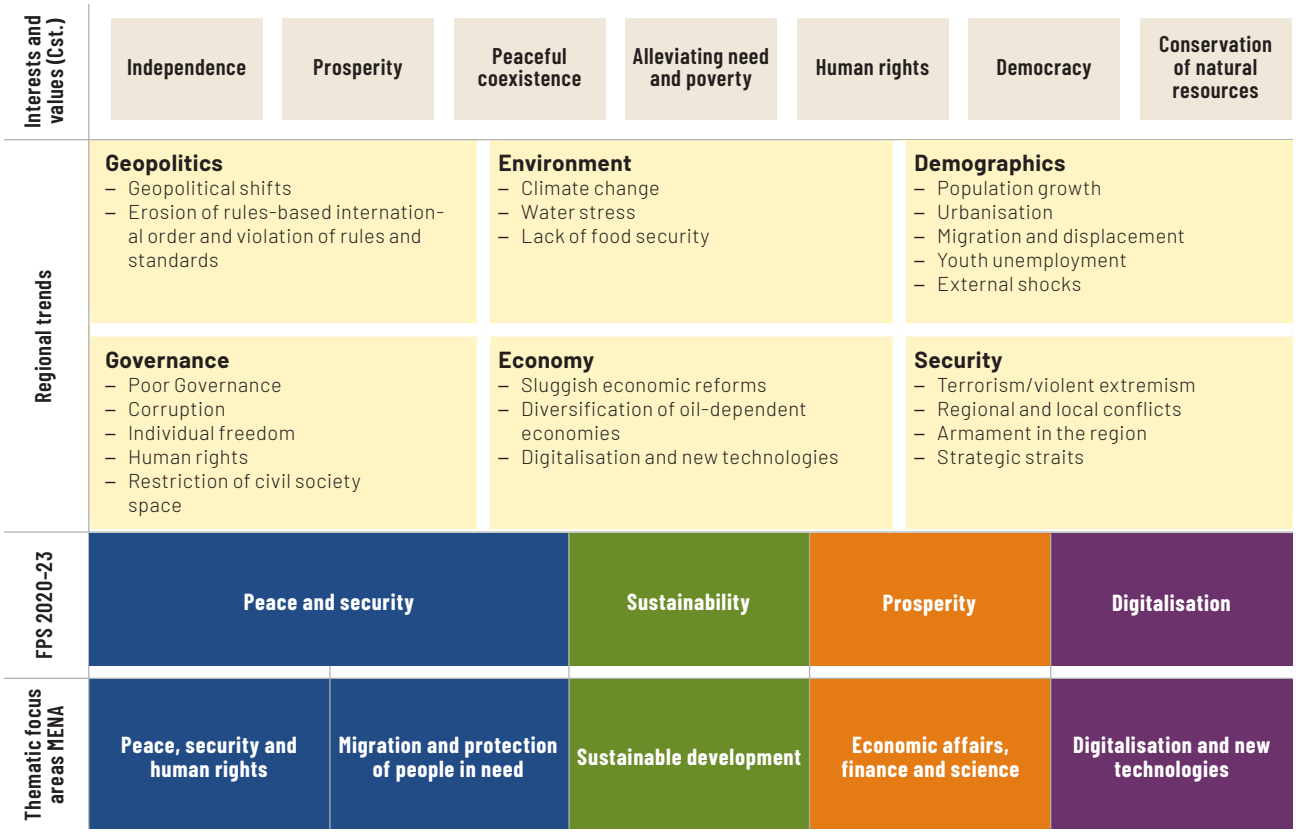


Figure 8: Derivation of the MENA thematic priorities (source: FDFA).

3.1 Peace, security and human rights

"Mediation, protecting power mandates, the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism, and the promotion of human rights and international law are making a valuable contribution to stability in the region. Protecting power mandates in particular (for the US in Iran, between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and for Iran in Canada) are priority action areas of Switzerland's good offices." (FPS 2020–23, MENA chapter)

→ Security is becoming more important within the scope of foreign policy. It is in Switzerland's interest to play a part in defusing geopolitical tensions and preventing the further spread of weapons of mass destruction. Respect for human rights and a commitment to peace are also essential.

→ Switzerland and like-minded countries want to prevent drug and arms trafficking and people smuggling to Europe driven by the unstable situation in the MENA region.

→ Switzerland wants to protect itself from violent extremism. This also includes the question of how to deal with jihadi fighters from Switzerland.

→ Switzerland is implementing sanctions against a number of states in the MENA region on the basis of the Embargo Act.

3.2 Migration and protection of people in need

"A quarter of the world's 70 million refugees are in this region. Switzerland works to protect them on the ground and along the migration routes. In North Africa it has adopted an approach that includes both the Sahel region and the North African countries, and which seeks to formalise cooperation through a migration agreement." (FPS 2020–23, MENA chapter)

→ Switzerland also benefits if the host states in the region are able to manage migration efficiently and successfully and can accommodate refugees. On humanitarian grounds, it works to ensure that refugees find shelter in their region of origin.

→ Switzerland aims to prevent irregular migration by taking a long-term approach to addressing the complex root causes of migration in the region. These include political instability, armed conflicts, violations of international law, human rights abuses, economic crises, structural economic challenges, deficits in governance and unemployment. It promotes the strategic linking of international cooperation and migration policy in the region.

→ Switzerland supports the creation of long-term prospects in the regions of origin and is committed to durable solutions for refugees.

3.3 Sustainable development

"Climate change leads to conflict in the MENA region. Through international cooperation, Switzerland is working on sustainable solutions in climate protection and water diplomacy. As a member of IRENA – the International Renewable Energy Agency based in Abu Dhabi – it is working to promote the sustainable use of renewable energies. It supports the new donors in the Gulf states in professionalising their development cooperation and in establishing South-South cooperation." (FPS 2020–23, MENA chapter)

→ The UN's 2030 Agenda is the global frame of reference for sustainability policy. Through implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Switzerland seeks to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner, including in the MENA region.

→ It aims to help defuse the humanitarian crises and potential for conflict that occur as a result of environmental degradation, climate change and water scarcity. Conflicts could also threaten Switzerland's security.

→ Switzerland has an interest in strengthening dialogue and cooperation with potential donors in the MENA region and ensuring that their funds are used in accordance with recognised international cooperation standards. It is thus following the recommendations in the 2030 Agenda.

3.4 Economic affairs, finance, science

"Through economic development and development cooperation, Switzerland is working to improve prospects at the local level, particularly for young people, e.g. in vocational education and training, and job creation. It promotes good governance, democratic structures, gender equality and initiatives to tackle mismanagement and corruption. There is potential for economic, financial and scientific cooperation with a number of states in the MENA region. In these countries Switzerland promotes a favourable economic environment and works to ensure a stable financial and monetary system." (FPS 2020–23, MENA chapter)

→ Switzerland already has trading partnerships and close financial market relations with the Gulf states and Israel. It has an interest in intensifying these and utilising the opportunities of economic diversification and the energy transition in those countries.

→ External economic promotion in the MENA region contributes to sustained economic growth in the countries and is also conducive to prosperity in Switzerland. Switzerland promotes non-discriminatory conditions, legal certainty and a favourable climate for investment through agreements on free trade, investment protection and double taxation, which are also designed to benefit Swiss firms.

→ In order to secure Switzerland's prosperity, it aims to attract more investment from the MENA region and promote mutual market access.

→ It promotes regional cooperation and strengthens trust between states; to this end, it is increasingly focusing on science diplomacy and is taking into account the objectives as set out in "Switzerland's International Strategy on Education, Research and Innovation".

→ Switzerland supports young scientists from the region and promotes partnerships with Swiss higher education institutions.

3.5 Digitalisation and new technologies

"New technologies are spreading rapidly in this region. In North Africa and the Middle East, social media, digital companies and start-ups are boosting the economy and offering new opportunities, particularly to young people. The Gulf states are focusing increasingly on digitalisation in the service sector, with new government departments and research centres on artificial intelligence, and are interested in exchanges with Switzerland in the field of data security." (FPS 2020–23, MENA chapter)

→ Switzerland seeks to ensure an open and stable digital space. New technologies should be accessible to as many people as possible for peaceful use. It is therefore entering partnerships in the MENA region and positioning International Geneva – but also universities such as the Swiss federal institutes of technology (ETH Zurich and EPFL) – as hubs for digitalisation and new technologies.

→ Developments in robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning are resulting in innovations and will have an impact on the labour market. Various countries in the MENA region have defined digitalisation as a key driver of growth and prosperity. Switzerland has an interest in entering new partnerships and is developing its Tech4Good international cooperation activities in the MENA region.

→ Switzerland seeks to utilise the economic potential of the digital transformation in the MENA region and facilitate access to this new market for Swiss firms.

4 Geographical priorities

In the following sub-sections, we will analyse the opportunities and challenges for three regions: **North Africa**, the **Near East**, and the **Arabian Peninsula and Iran**. This analysis will enable us to identify **three priority thematic areas** for each region in the **five key areas** (see Section 3). Finally, the analysis will be broken down by country, and **priorities** formulated. Based on the thematic areas identified for each region and national priorities, the various administrative units of the relevant departments will then be able to formulate coherent programmes and packages of measures including targets and indicators. This, in turn, will help the individual offices draw up country- and region-specific agreements on objectives (cascade strategy). Monitoring and reporting are carried out by the competent departments of the Federal Administration.

Two points should be made: First, the transversal themes of governance, gender and culture are relevant to the entire region even though they are not referred to specifically for each country; Second, there are inter-regional initiatives that are hard to classify but are relevant because of their geographical coverage. A case in point is scientific cooperation, for example the SESAME (Synchrotron-Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East) project, in which Switzerland has observer status; another example is the Transnational Red Sea Centre, a Swiss-backed red sea coral research project involving the cooperation of Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

4.1 North Africa

The three main challenges for North Africa – and therefore priority thematic areas for Switzerland – are **structural economic reforms** aimed at promoting employment and investment, the implementation of **good governance principles** and safe and orderly **migration**.

North Africa is among Switzerland's **closest neighbours**. Two of Switzerland's neighbours – Italy and France – share maritime borders with North African countries. Another link between Switzerland and North Africa is the French language. To the south, North Africa borders unstable, poverty-stricken countries in the Sahel region. It is in Switzerland's interest that North Africa be a stable, prosperous region governed by the rule of law.

The main catalysts of the 'Arab Spring' protests, namely the lack of economic prospects, youth unemployment, repression by state security forces and citizens' limited voice in politics, remain key challenges to this day. High population growth, unequal distribution of economic growth, low diversification resulting in a low-resilience economy, an education system for young people that is often out of touch with labour market needs, cumbersome bureaucracy and technology gaps lead to high levels of **youth unemployment** and perpetuate **inequalities in terms of the distribution of income and wealth** in many areas. Dynamic development is further hindered by a lack of political and economic integration at a regional level.

The region is an attractive **production location** with its low labour costs and linguistic proximity. In addition, Europe is keen to establish shorter supply chains in response to the COVID-19 crisis, for example in the agriculture and textile sectors. With its population of more than 200 million, the region is already among Switzerland's major **export markets** in Africa. This is also one of the reasons why Switzerland promotes inclusive economic development in North Africa that will provide prospects for young people in particular.

In Libya, the overthrow of the former regime has led to ongoing internal armed conflict. However, the Arab Spring has also set in motion some positive changes: Tunisia underwent a democratic transition, and, despite repression, today some countries have an active civil society engaged in supporting civil and political freedoms. Switzerland is in a position to promote dialogue thanks to its credibility and good contacts with governments and private organisations. In Libya, its contacts and expertise in international humanitarian law and human rights enable it to play an active role in the peace process.

With regard to the long-standing tensions surrounding Western Sahara, Switzerland supports the efforts of the United Nations to find a solution in accordance with international law. This is a prerequisite for a more stable region, which is also directly affected by events in its southern and eastern neighbourhood. Armed conflict in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Sudan, Syria, Yemen and Libya is destabilising the region, causing **irregular migration and refugee flows** as well as arms, drug and people smuggling and human trafficking, with North Africa acting as a transit hub owing to its geographical location.

Today North African countries are increasingly becoming countries of destination as well as countries of origin and transit for migration to Europe. For Switzerland, this opens up new opportunities for cooperation in migration and protection. Switzerland supports the local authorities and institutions in managing migration by providing expertise and promoting projects aimed at strengthening the local asylum system and border management. Other projects focus on protection and integration of migrants in initial host countries and along migration routes by providing emergency assistance, facilitating access to medical care and the labour market, providing legal advice, protecting human rights and preventing human trafficking. Switzerland focuses specifically on protecting unaccompanied children. In return, Switzerland expects cooperation on the return of rejected asylum seekers.

Various other developments are of importance to Switzerland. Some regions are directly affected by **climate change** and lack of access to fresh water. Rapid **urbanisation** poses major challenges to cities such as Algiers, Casablanca and Cairo. Switzerland can offer innovative solutions in this regard. Regular high-level meetings are essential, for example as part of bilateral political consultations, in order to efficiently pursue Switzerland's interests in North Africa.

NORTH AFRICA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA MOVING CLOSER TOGETHER

In recent years, North Africa has increasingly turned its attention to the African continent. Egypt has restructured its Africa policy under President al-Sisi and took over the chair of the African Union in 2019 – a sign that Cairo is keen to reassert its political and economic influence after being absent in previous decades. Algeria plays an important role in the Sahel and chairs the committee for monitoring implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. It was also the new Algerian head of state who called for the foundation of an agency for international cooperation in Africa. Libya was already very active on the African continent during the Gaddafi era. The armed conflict in Libya has severely impacted countries across the Sahel: therefore, the African Union has an important role to play in resolving the conflict. Morocco, too, has increasingly turned its attention to Africa since King Mohammed VI's accession in 1999 and has rejoined the African Union more than three decades after it left. The country currently plays an important role on the continent with particular regard to the economy and education, with Casablanca airport serving as an important hub for connections between Africa and other continents. Tunisia has also positioned itself as a hub for European companies, facilitating access to the African market, a strategy supported by scheduled flights to West Africa, the admission of large numbers of African students to Tunisian universities and visa exemption for nationals of various sub-Saharan African countries.

Thematic areas

1. Peace, security and human rights

- → Switzerland takes a leading role in promoting dialogue between the various parties in Libya.
- → Switzerland supports social and political transition and reform processes.
- → Switzerland is implementing a regional initiative aimed at preventing conflict and violent extremism.
- → In connection with its candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council, Switzerland is engaged in peace policy and is viewed as a competent partner.

2. Sustainable development

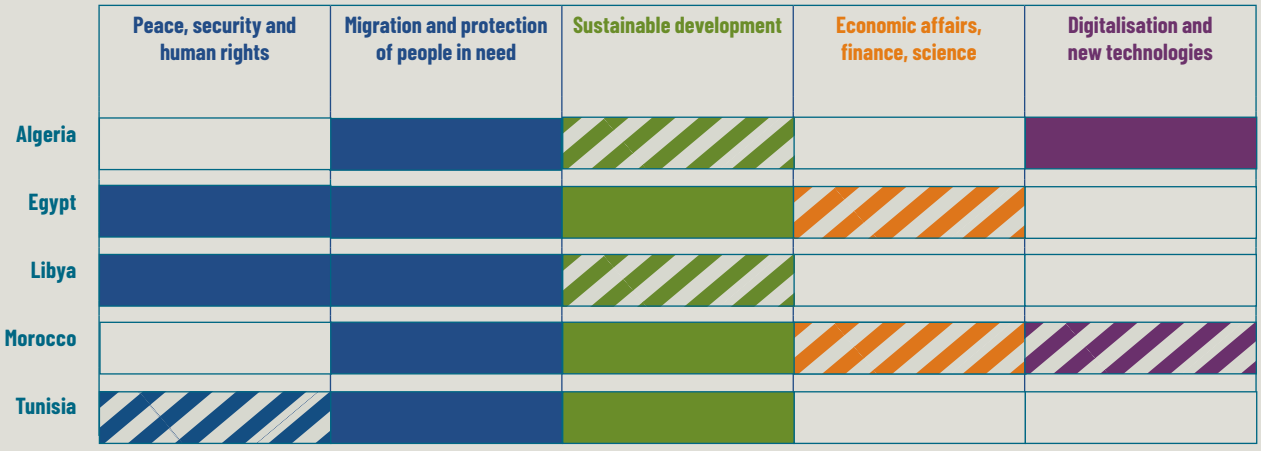
- → Switzerland supports sustainable and inclusive economic development.
- → Switzerland offers countries its expertise with a view to improving macroeconomic stability and the framework conditions for the private sector. This also facilitates access to attractive growth markets for Swiss companies.
- → Switzerland supports state institutions in providing social services.
- → Switzerland promotes access to employment for women and young people and is working with the private sector offering its expertise in dual vocational education and training.

3. Migration and protection of people in need

- → Switzerland addresses the root causes of irregular migration and refugee flows.
- → Switzerland implements projects and measures designed to protect migrants in the initial host countries and along migration routes, and promotes local integration.
- → Switzerland maintains a regular dialogue on migration matters with all North African countries and aims to conclude further bilateral agreements on migration, which will also regulate the readmission of rejected asylum seekers.
- → Switzerland promotes local migration governance by strengthening the capacities of local authorities and institutions in migration-related areas and by supporting legislative reform.

In addition to these thematic areas, Switzerland, together with the private sector and the countries of North Africa, is increasingly seeking sectoral cooperation in areas including transport, sustainable energy and agriculture.

Country-specific focus



Coloured boxes: strongly pronounced / hatched boxes: pronounced / empty boxes: not pronounced
The hatched boxes (pronounced) correspond to the titles in italics under Switzerland's focus section.

Algeria

ALGERIA

2015: 39.728 Mio
2030: 50.361 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 4114
CH trade volume: CHF 396.0 Mio

CH community: 486
Embassy since: 1962

Key agreements:
trade agreement, double taxation, readmission agreement

28.5 years	72.6% (2018)	157/190	2.6%	111/163
56/141	30% (2018)	102/141	89/141	86/141

Priority areas for the country:
- Hit by falling oil and gas prices, Algeria is seeking to implement socio-economic reforms and a diversification of the economy.
- The protests since February 2019 led to the resignation of the long-serving president. His successor must find a way to achieve greater social stability.
- Algeria has borders with several states engaged in armed conflict and is committed to promoting greater stability in the region.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Algeria

Migration:
Switzerland maintains a regular dialogue on migration to ensure consistent implementation of the agreement signed with Algeria. At the same time, it implements local projects aimed at helping migrants into employment.

New technologies:
Switzerland is working with the Algerian government as part of its international cooperation projects to identify areas in which it can support the country's reform efforts, for example in digitalisation, innovation and dual vocational education and training.

Trilateral projects:
Switzerland relies on the complementary roles of Algeria for trilateral South-South cooperation projects with countries in the Sahel on issues such as migration, peace support and security.

Egypt

EGYPT

2015: 92.443 Mio
2030: 120.832 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 2549
CH trade volume: CHF 1.3 Mia

CH community: 1413
Embassy since: 1957

Key agreements:
EFTA FTA, double taxation, investment protection

24.6 years	42.7% (2016)	114/190	3.3%	136/163
104/141	32.6% (2018)	135/141	91/141	136/163

Priority areas for the country:
- Since 2016, as part of a World Bank and IMF programme, Egypt has been implementing comprehensive economic reforms which can guarantee sustainable economic growth.
- Increasingly limited space for the civilian population and a lack of economic prospects for young people have led to discontent.
- In order to reduce the impact of rapid urbanisation and climate change, Egypt is taking steps towards a sustainable use of resources.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Egypt

Egypt is a priority country for international cooperation, with development programmes implemented by the FDFA (SDC, HSD) and the EAER (SECO), the details of which are set out in the Swiss Cooperation Programme for Egypt 2021–24 in accordance with Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021–24.

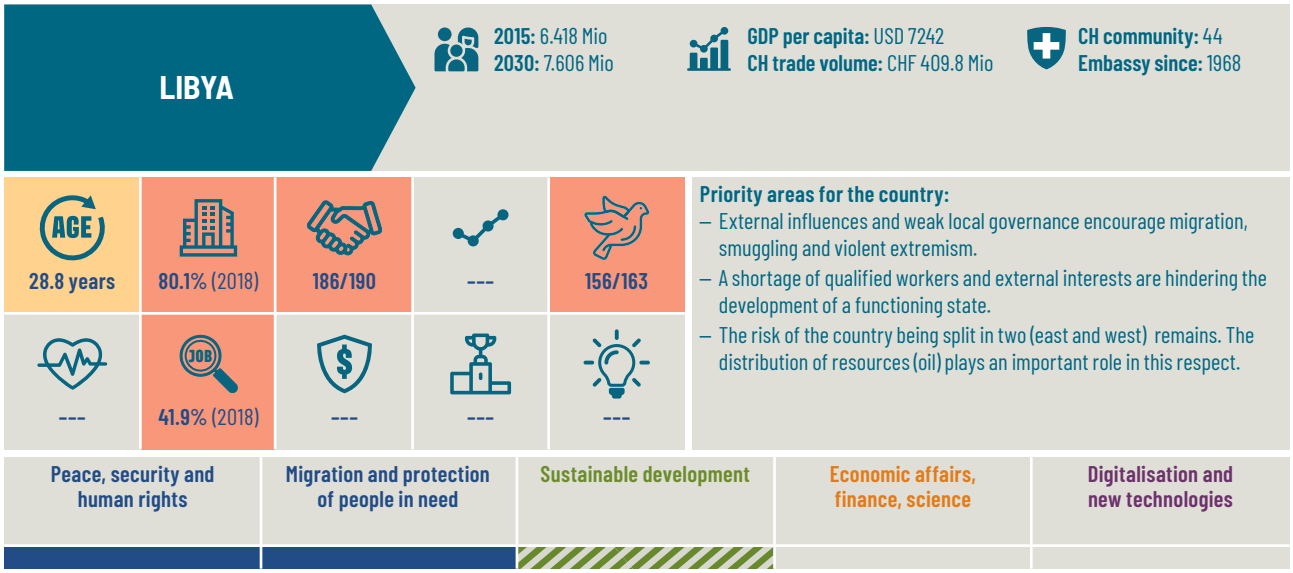
Human rights:
Switzerland discusses human rights issues with the government and supports and protects human rights defenders. It offers civil society organisations platforms to discuss cross-cutting issues. Peace, security and human rights are transversal themes and are taken into account in all areas.

Migration:
Switzerland works with local and international partners on the implementation of projects designed to combat human smuggling and trafficking, to promote the integration of migrants and to improve their access to employment.

Climate change and urbanisation:
Switzerland supports initiatives in water management, recycling and the green economy and works to mitigate the effects of climate change and urbanisation.

Economy:
Switzerland implements projects specifically designed to strengthen macroeconomic processes, infrastructure development and local SMEs. It focuses on facilitating access to funding, increasing the participation of women and young people in the labour market and promoting vocational training locally with the participation of Swiss companies.

Libya

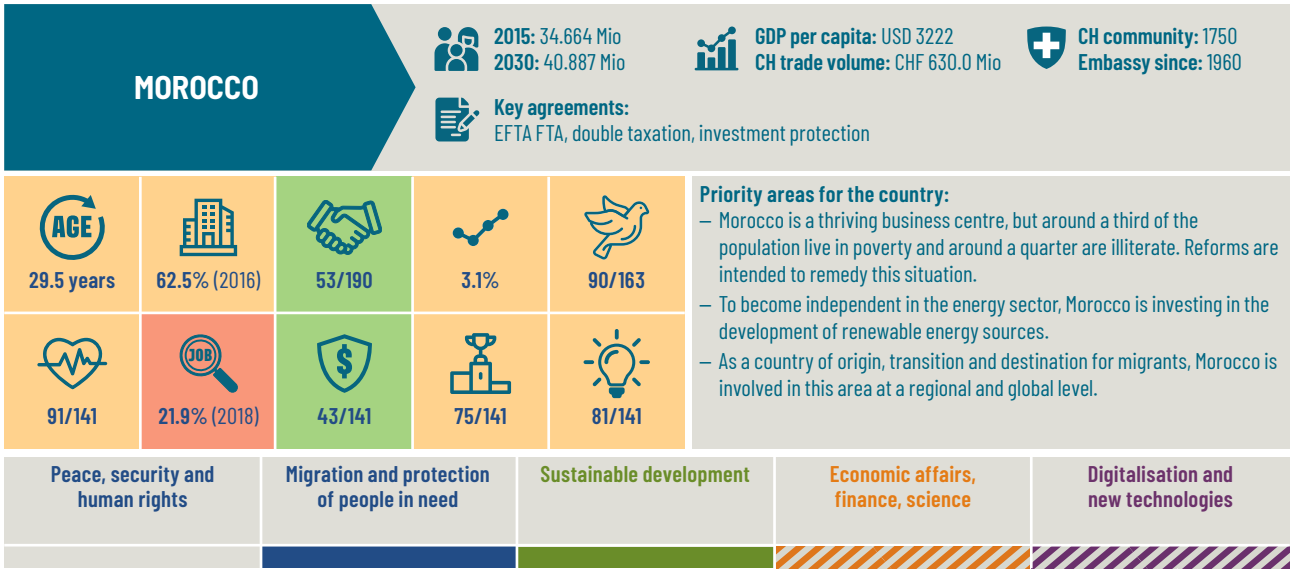


Switzerland's focus in Libya

Peace and good offices:
Switzerland promotes itself as a host country for UN political processes. It is actively involved in the Berlin process and co-chairs the working group on respect for international humanitarian law and human rights.

Humanitarian aid:
Switzerland supports people in need and is engaged in the political dialogue on humanitarian issues. It plays a key role in coordinating international humanitarian efforts.

Sustainability:
Switzerland organises study tours in Switzerland for Libyan actors on themes such as fiscal federalism, sustainable agriculture and water management for the purpose of transferring know-how and to strengthen relations with all parties.



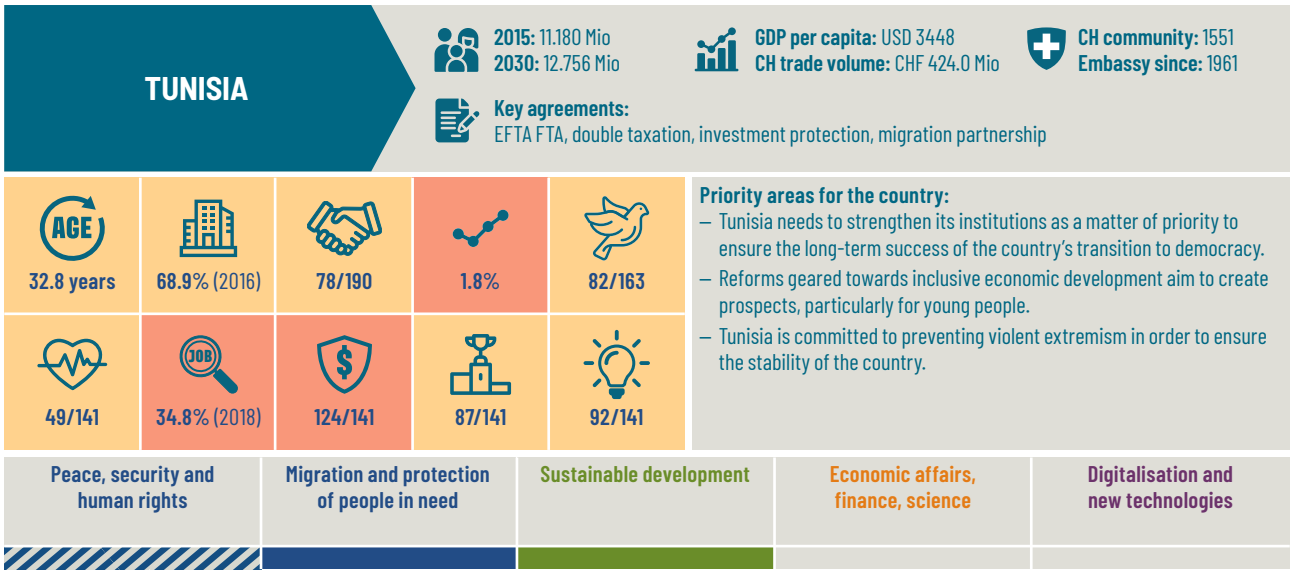
Switzerland's focus in Morocco

Migration:
Switzerland is keen to step up dialogue with Morocco on migration with a view to concluding a migration agreement that can be combined with other cooperation agreements (e.g. police cooperation, legal assistance, social security).

Sustainable development:
In accordance with the existing memorandum of understanding, Switzerland is working to strengthen cooperation in energy, transport and agriculture. It is committed to actively promoting implementation of the memorandum of understanding by facilitating the mutual secondment of experts and supporting Swiss private-sector projects.

Education
new technologies
Switzerland supports reforms in the education sector, including vocational training, by providing expertise and facilitating contact with local actors in Switzerland. It supports the initiatives of academic institutions in Switzerland seeking cooperation with Moroccan educational institutions in education, technology and innovation.

Tunisia



Switzerland's focus in Tunisia

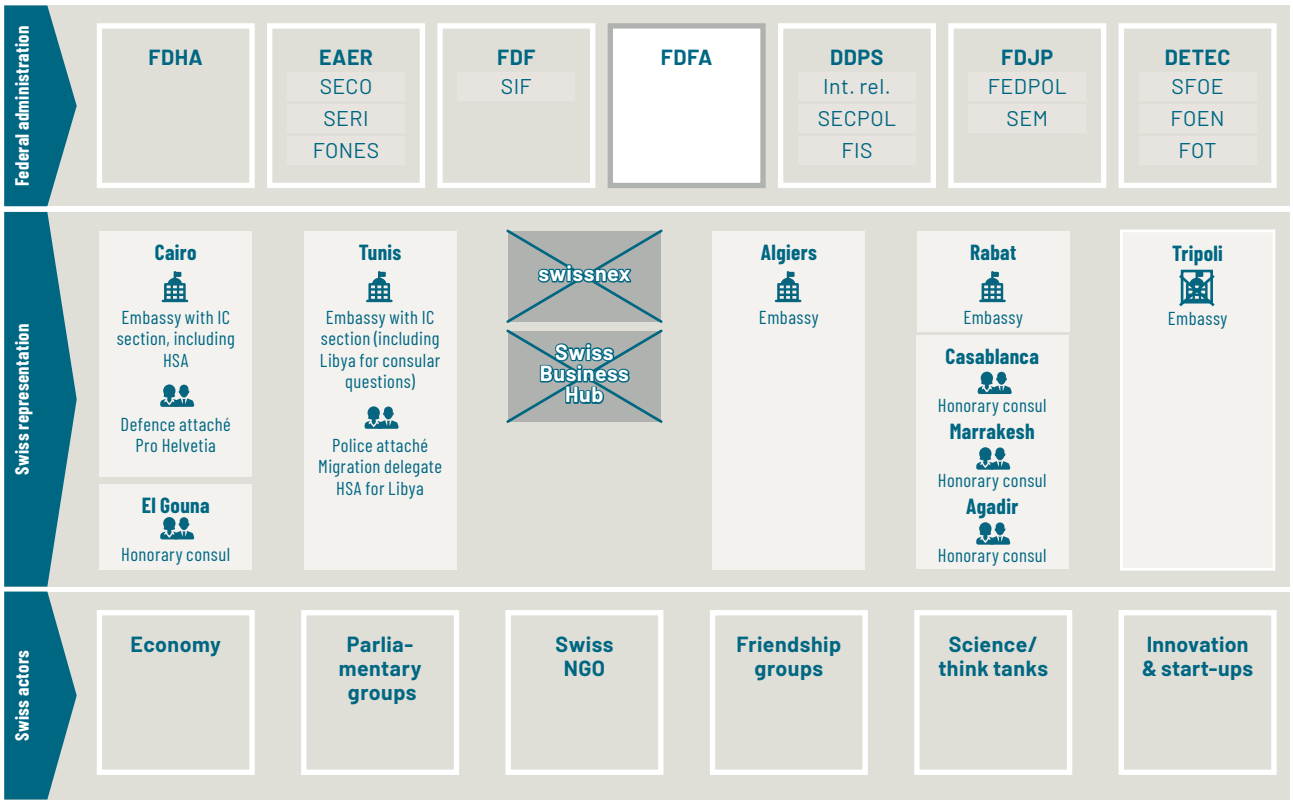
Tunisia is a priority country for international cooperation, with development programmes implemented by the FDFA (SDC), the EAER (SECO) and the FDJP (SEM), the details of which are set out in the Swiss Cooperation Programme for Tunisia 2021–24 in accordance with Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021–24.

Migration:
Switzerland will continue to actively pursue its comprehensive migration partnership with Tunisia, including the readmission of persons residing in Switzerland without authorisation, for example with local projects in areas such as police cooperation or legal assistance.

Sustainable development:
Switzerland supports Tunisia by offering its expertise to improve integration into global and regional value chains and create trading opportunities. It supports innovative projects in sustainable tourism and initiatives that exploit new technologies with a view to strengthening competitiveness and improving the investment climate.

Governance:
Switzerland is using its expertise to strengthen democratic institutions and introduce transparency in public finance management. It is supporting Tunisia in the implementation of decentralisation. In addition, the implementation of the memorandum of understanding on the prevention of violent extremism signed in 2016 serves as a tool to promote the accountability of state institutions.

Swiss actors in North Africa



Main lines of action

1. **Diplomatic visits:** High-level diplomatic visits are to be stepped up. In North Africa, high-level personal contacts are paramount in order to represent Switzerland's interests.

2. **Regional exchanges:** Regional exchanges are to be encouraged, particularly among experts. Exchanges create trust. To this end, Switzerland organises informal platforms and study trips on topics such as fiscal federalism, decentralisation, vocational training, violent extremism and the treatment of minorities.

3. **Trilateral projects:** Countries in North Africa have extensive knowledge and networks, particularly in the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa. Regional trilateral projects (between Switzerland, North Africa and countries in the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa) are to be promoted on issues such as migration, integration and the prevention of violent extremism.

4. **Vocational training:** Support is needed to develop a local vocational training system. Switzerland can use its expertise in vocational training to promote public-private partnership projects that will serve as models. In a second step, it can support the recognition of training courses at the regional level.

5. **Swiss embassy in Libya:** The Swiss embassy in Libya is due to reopen as soon as the security situation permits. This presence will enable Switzerland to better fulfil its role as a mediator in Libya.

6. **Economy:** Switzerland aims to strengthen cooperation with private-sector actors in North Africa. Besides international cooperation, there are further opportunities for economic relations, for example in the renewable energy sector.

4.2 Near East

The three main challenges for the Near East – and therefore priority thematic areas for Switzerland – are **armed and political conflicts, economic development** and **governance**. At the same time, the development of world-leading start-ups is opening up interesting opportunities for various countries in the region.

The **Israeli-Palestinian conflict** has gone on for more than seven decades and revolves around territorial claims. After the Second World War, the British handed the League of Nations mandate for Palestine to the UN. In 1947, the UN proposed to partition the mandated territory of Palestine into two states: one Jewish and the other Arab. The state of Israel was born in 1948. 1948 marked the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict and a refugee crisis that continues to this day. The total number of Palestinian refugees in 1950 was estimated at around 750,000. As refugee status is passed on from one generation to the next – until a political solution is found – and taking into account the population growth, the total number of Palestinian refugees currently registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (**UNRWA**) stands at more than 5.5 million. These people are either stateless or citizens of Middle Eastern countries. They live in occupied Palestinian territory, Jordan, Lebanon or Syria. One-third of them live in settlements (officially designated refugee camps). UNRWA delivers vital services to Palestinian refugees. Refugees typically have restricted access to employment, which prevents them from improving their long-term prospects and forces them to remain dependent on the system.

UNRWA

In the absence of a political solution to the conflict and the Palestinian refugee crisis, UNRWA continues to play a vital role in supporting the Palestinian population. By providing essential services such as health and education, it helps maintain stability in the region and prevent radicalisation.

Switzerland has supported UNRWA since it was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1949. In December 2019, the UN renewed UNRWA's mandate for a further three years. UNRWA operates in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and is the largest international humanitarian organisation in the region.

UNRWA has experienced management and financial problems for years. Its annual budget for 2020 is USD 1.4bn, with Switzerland contributing annually between 20 and 27 million Swiss francs.

Switzerland supports the necessary reforms within UNRWA, launched in response to criticism. Greater efforts are needed to create employment opportunities and access to the labour market for Palestinian refugees.

However, no solution has yet been found to reduce Palestinian refugees' dependence on UNRWA.

After the war of 1967 and Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, a broad international view was established that the search for a solution to the conflict should be based on a number of parameters. These include the recognition of the state of Israel and the establishment of a viable, sovereign, undivided Palestinian state, with the borders established in 1967, and a fair and comprehensive negotiated solution with particular regard to the issue of Palestinian refugees, borders, security aspects and the status of Jerusalem. Many countries take the position that Jerusalem should be the capital of both states and Switzerland supports this position, whereby it is primarily up to the parties to agree on a mutually acceptable solution.

All efforts to resolve the conflict have so far proven fruitless. The Middle East peace plan presented by US President Donald Trump in early 2020 was likewise not seen as an acceptable solution by both sides and did not meet with sufficient consensus among the Arab nations and worldwide.

There are numerous obstacles to conflict resolution: settlements in the West Bank have expanded rapidly into areas in and around Jerusalem, resulting in increased hostility and fighting between Israelis and Palestinians, thus making a two-state solution harder to achieve. Efforts to achieve inter-Palestinian reconciliation and the return of the Palestinian authority to the Gaza Strip have failed so far because of tensions between Hamas and Fatah. However, the legitimacy of Palestinian institutions and inter-Palestinian reconciliation – including elections – are necessary conditions for a two-state solution. In view of the deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, security remains fragile with a growing risk of renewed fighting.

SWITZERLAND'S POSITION ON THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT[6]

Switzerland supports the vision formulated by the UN Security Council of a region with two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, within secure, recognised borders. It is convinced that the negotiation of a two-state solution by Israelis and Palestinians in accordance with international law and internationally agreed parameters, including UN Security Council resolutions, is the only way to achieve lasting peace between the two sides.

1) the status of Jerusalem;
2) a just and comprehensive solution to the issue of refugees;
3) the future borders (agreement based on 1967, with the possibility of agreeing on an equivalent exchange of territory);
4) security arrangements for Israel and Palestine.

Switzerland calls on all parties to fulfil their obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law, and to refrain from unilateral measures that could undermine the peace efforts. It offers both parties its good offices to support the resumption of credible peace talks.

However, over the past decade, the region has experienced upheaval that goes far beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 2011, for example, the popular uprisings in **Syria** escalated into armed conflict resulting in a humanitarian and migration crisis of unprecedented proportions. Eleven million people in the region rely on emergency aid. More than 5.5 million Syrians are registered as refugees in neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq), while six million are classified as internally displaced. Many refugees live in extremely precarious conditions, and governments and host communities have reached their full capacity.

Delivering aid on the ground is an international priority. Switzerland provides emergency aid and supports projects that aim to protect those most affected by the conflict and to achieve lasting solutions. These include dealing with the registration and documentation of refugees, providing legal advice, protecting their basic rights and organising resettlement. Switzerland also strengthens the migration management capacities of local authorities in Syria's neighbouring countries by providing expertise in areas such as integrated border management. The return of refugees and the conditions for supporting reconstruction in Syria are the subject of controversial debate right now and will become increasingly important in the future.

A political solution to the Syrian conflict is needed in order to solve the humanitarian crisis. Therefore, in its role as host country of the UN peace process in Geneva, Switzerland supports the search for a political solution.

Iraq still has around 1.6 million internally displaced persons, and almost seven million people rely on humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, after years of war and crisis, the country has now entered the reconstruction phase. This has created new opportunities to strengthen bilateral agreements. Cooperation has already begun on the return of rejected asylum seekers, with plans to develop and possibly formalise this process. Switzerland is also keen to support the Iraqi authorities in reintegration and migration management. Economic cooperation can be strengthened. The spread of the 'Islamic State' group in Iraq has shown that strong institutions, rule-of-law structures and the reduction of religious resentment (between Shia and Sunni) in Iraq are key factors for the stability of the region. Many European countries have an embassy in the country; Swiss interests are pursued through the representation in Jordan.

The Middle East faces major economic, social and political challenges. Population growth, restrictions on fundamental rights and a **difficult economic situation** are pushing up unemployment and sparking protest movements. The younger generation in particular lacks economic prospects, which can fuel violent extremism. The protest movements in **Lebanon** since late 2019 and the reaction to the explosion in Beirut in August 2020 demonstrate strong political awareness and also frustration among the people.

Switzerland addresses the needs of young people in the region by promoting vocational training, thus facilitating access to the labour market. Here, the focus is very much on new technologies.

6 https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/aktuell/dossiers/alle-dossiers/ch-position-nahostkonflikt.html

Thematic areas

1. Peace, security and human rights

- → Switzerland offers its services as a facilitator in the region's peace processes, particularly in the Syrian and Middle East conflicts.
- → Switzerland is engaged in conflict prevention and the fight against violent extremism; it promotes the work of dealing with the past to ensure that no crime goes unpunished and that human rights violations are addressed. Its commitments include gender issues, human rights and international humanitarian law.
- → Switzerland is stepping up its peace-policy commitment in connection with its candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council.
- → Switzerland supports the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), founded in 1948, by deploying a dozen or so Swiss nationals. This ongoing UN peacekeeping mission works to maintain a ceasefire in the Middle East, specifically in Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.
- → Switzerland supports initiatives that aim to set fair rules for the collective management of transboundary water resources in order to reduce the risk of conflicts (Blue Peace initiatives).

2. Migration and protection of people in need

- → Switzerland continues to provide humanitarian aid to those most affected by the conflicts and is committed to protecting refugees and internally displaced persons.
- → Switzerland supports local authorities in their efforts to build their migration management capacity.
- → It promotes long-term prospects for refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants by providing high-quality education, creating employment prospects and resettling the most vulnerable refugees.

3. Sustainable development

- → Switzerland supports the local authorities in providing social services such as healthcare and water supply.
- → Switzerland is strengthening cooperation with private and public partners to exploit the potential of new technologies.
- → Switzerland promotes projects aimed at helping women and young people into employment.

In addition to these three priority thematic areas, Switzerland cooperates with Israel on economic and financial matters. It also works with Jordan, Israel and other countries in the MENA region on regional initiatives in science diplomacy.

Country-specific focus

Coloured boxes: strongly pronounced / hatched boxes: pronounced / empty boxes: not pronounced
The hatched boxes (pronounced) correspond to the titles in italics under Switzerland's focus section.

Iraq

IRAQ

2015: 35.572 Mio
2030: 50.194 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 5834
CH trade volume: CHF 235.6 Mio

CH community: 90
Embassy since: ---

AGE 21 years	70.5% (2018)	172/190	---	159/163
---	JOB 16.6% (2018)	---	---	---

Priority areas for the country:
- Security and stability are a priority: Iraq is doing everything in its power to prevent the resurgence of extremist groups.
- The new government wants to build trust, particularly among young people and the various ethnic and religious communities.
- Iraq plays a role in the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, positioning itself as a bridge builder between Shiites and Sunnis.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Iraq

Peace, security and human rights:
Switzerland's focus is primarily on promoting dialogue as well as on human rights, the rule of law and dealing with the past.

Migration, refugee flows and humanitarian aid:
The focus here is on the return and reintegration of rejected asylum seekers. Switzerland aims to step up and formalise bilateral relations with Iraq on migration-related matters and is committed to meeting the basic needs of internally displaced persons.

Economic development:
Switzerland engages actively with the government to improve the economic situation.

Israel

ISRAEL

2015: 7.978 Mio
2030: 9.980 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 41720
CH trade volume: CHF 1.8 Mia

CH community: 21150
Embassy since: 1958

Key agreements:
EFTA FTA, double taxation, automatic exchange of information

AGE 30.5 years	92.4% (2016)	35/190	3.4%	146/163
9/141	JOB 6.9% (2018)	1/141	20/141	15/141

Priority areas for the country:
- Further exploit the potential in the field of innovation.
- Contain regional security threats, with particular regard to the role of Iran.
- Peace process with the Palestinians and the Arab states.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Israel

Peace process:
Switzerland offers its good offices to facilitate Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. It calls on all key actors in the region to participate in this dialogue and to comply with international law.

Economy and financial market relations:
Within the framework of the existing agreements and memorandums of understanding, relations are being strengthened in the economic and financial services sector with the aim of improving mutual market access for Israeli and Swiss companies.

Science diplomacy and new technologies:
Scientific cooperation in various areas (fintech, cybertech, medtech, tech4good, climate etc.), following a bottom-up approach, can also help build the confidence to deal with the geopolitical challenges.

Green diplomacy
Joint projects on the environment and climate change (green diplomacy) allow knowledge transfer for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the 2030 Agenda.

Jordan

JORDAN

2015: 9.267 Mio
2030: 10.655 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 4242
CH trade volume: CHF 328.9 Mio

CH community: 265
Embassy since: 1970

Key agreements:
EFTA FTA, investment protection

AGE 23.8 years	91% (2016)	75/190	2.2%	77/163
45/141	37.2% (2018)	111/141	70/141	64/141

Priority areas for the country:
- Stability is a priority. Jordan is keen to prevent unrest after a possible annexation in the West Bank.
- Jordan seeks the return of the hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in order to ease the burden on the economy and infrastructure.
- Youth unemployment is high: there is an urgent need to improve access to the labour market.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Jordan

Protection and migration:
Switzerland is committed to finding lasting solutions and improving living conditions for people in need, refugees and other internally displaced persons by supporting projects and through trilateral dialogue with the Jordanian authorities and UNRWA.

Jobs:
Partnerships in vocational training aim to foster entrepreneurship and an innovation mindset.

Science diplomacy:
Transnational innovation and research projects run by autonomous institutions such as SESAME are being maintained and, where possible, used to build bridges for regional peace initiatives.

Lebanon

LEBANON

2015: 6.533 Mio
2030: 6.195 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 8270
CH trade volume: CHF 1.5 Mia

CH community: 1578
Embassy since: 1949

Key agreements:
EFTA FTA, investment protection, readmission agreement

29.6 years	88.6% (2016)	143/190	1.9%	147/163
59/141	17.4% (2018)	121/141	88/141	66/141

Priority areas for the country:
- Both the financial and economic crisis and the urgently needed reforms are at the centre of Lebanese politics.
- Lebanon seeks the return of the hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees to their country.
- Tensions between religious groups must be reduced and a scenario of civil war avoided by all means.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Lebanon

Peace, security and human rights:
Switzerland has very good access to all relevant government and non-government actors and supports dialogue as a means to resolve crises and conflicts as well as deal with the past and prevent violent extremism.

Protection and migration:
Switzerland promotes better access to water, sanitation and education for people in need. It enhances the migration management capacity of the local authorities, strengthens the local reception system and supports durable solutions, including resettlement in Switzerland.

Economic development:
As part of its development cooperation work, Switzerland engages actively with Swiss companies to improve the economic situation.

Occupied Palestinian territory

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

2015: 4.529 Mio
2030: 6.342 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 3199
CH trade volume: CHF 36.0 Mio

CH community: 107
Embassy since: 2001

Key agreements:
EFTA FTA, double taxation, investment protection, migration partnership

20.8 years	76.2% (2016)	117/190	---	142/163
---	46.8% (2018)	---	---	---

Priority areas for the country:
- Creating opportunities, especially for young people, by promoting entrepreneurial skills among young people and developinig bilateral economic relations.
- Peace process with Israel based on a two-state solution.
- Legitimisation of democratic institutions and inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in the occupied Palestinian territory

The occupied Palestinian territory constitutes a priority for international cooperation, with the FDFA running various development programmes there, the details of which are set out in the Middle East cooperation programme 2021–24.

Peace process:
Switzerland offers its good offices to facilitate Israeli-Palestinian and inter-Palestinian dialogue. It also aims to improve the rule of law, gouvernance and the respect for international humanitarian law through functioning Palestinian institutions.

Humanitarian aid:
Switzerland supports the local authorities in providing essential services to people in need – for example access to water in the Gaza Strip – and food and education to Palestinian refugees.

Sustainability:
Switzerland strengthens the population's resilience so as to reduce their dependency on humanitarian aid.

Employment and *new technologies:*
Switzerland is seeking cooperation with the private sector to create prospects, jobs and income-generating opportunities for young people, particularly in the field of new technologies.

Syria

SYRIA

2015: 17.997 Mio
2030: 26.677 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 2032
CH trade volume: CHF 37.9 Mio

CH community: ---
Embassy since: ---

Key agreements:
EFTA FTA, double taxation, investment protection, migration partnership

AGE				
25.6 years	54.2% (2016)	176/190	---	162/163
---	---	---	---	---

Priority areas for the country:
- The country's main military goal is to regain all regions, in particular Idlib Province.
- Syria is trying to raise funds to rebuild the country.
- Diplomatic representations in Damascus are to be increased.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

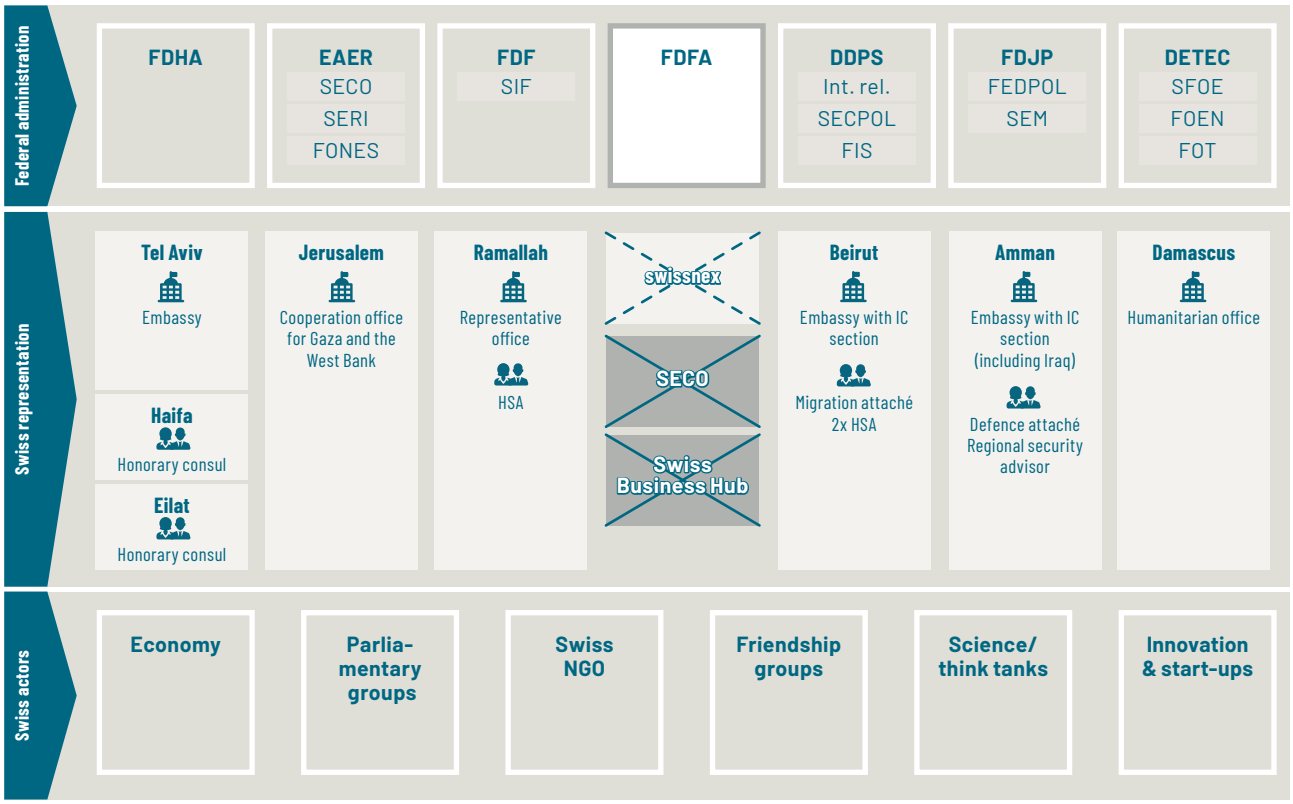
Switzerland's focus in Syria

Peace, security and human rights:
Switzerland supports the UN peace process in Geneva in its role as host country and promotes the engagement of civil society. It supports the improvement of the conditions of detainees and missing persons. It is committed to ensuring compliance with international law (for example via the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism) and is working with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria. It is engaged in preventing violent extremism, including jihadism.

Humanitarian aid:
Switzerland supports people in need by providing emergency aid, protecting the civilian population, protecting their livelihoods and providing access to essential services.

Sustainability:
Switzerland strengthens the population's resilience so as to reduce their dependency on humanitarian aid.

Swiss actors in the Near East



Main lines of action

1. **Israeli-Palestinian conflict:** Switzerland offers its good offices to facilitate Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. It calls on all key actors in the region to participate. It supports all efforts to bring about a fair and peaceful solution to the conflict in accordance with international law.

2. **Special envoy to the Near East and task force:** The special envoy's mandate will be reviewed and, if necessary, redefined in order to better exploit the potential of Switzerland's good offices. The Near East task force will meet regularly and present a coherent image of the Federal Administration.

3. **Implementation partners:** In a conflict-ridden context, it is particularly important to choose partners carefully and to review them regularly. Switzerland aims to minimise risk and cooperate with a smaller number of NGOs in a focused manner while maintaining constant funding levels.

4. **Jobs:** A lasting solution to the conflict requires job prospects for young people. Switzerland promotes entrepreneurship and initiatives designed to create career prospects.

5. **Migration:** Switzerland is working to maintain a protection area for refugees and displaced persons and to strengthen the capacities of local authorities.

6. **Sustainability:** Switzerland strengthens the population's resilience so as to reduce their dependency on humanitarian aid.

7. **Diplomatic presence:** Given the geopolitical importance of Iraq, Switzerland is keen to establish a diplomatic representation there.

8. **Science diplomacy:** Transnational innovation and research projects are being maintained and used to build bridges for regional peace initiatives in accordance with the Federal Council's international strategy.

9. **UNRWA:** Switzerland calls for implementation of the announced UNRWA reform programme and is committed to improving control mechanisms.

4.3 Arabian Peninsula and Iran

The three main challenges for the Arabian Peninsula and Iran region – and therefore priority thematic areas for Switzerland – are **regional stability and security, economic and financial cooperation**, and **sustainable natural resource management.**

The Arabian Peninsula and Iran have long been **at the heart of regional and international tensions**. The Bab-el-Mandeb and Hormuz straits, strategically important shipping lanes for international trade, are subject to frequent attacks on cargo vessels and military manoeuvres, highlighting the tensions between the US and Iran. Years of war in **Yemen** have resulted in the world's largest humanitarian crisis. There is no sign of an end to the tensions between **Qatar** on the one hand and Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the other. The growing geopolitical and economic presence of various MENA countries in the Horn of Africa creates the potential for new conflicts. Against this backdrop, dialogue between the countries is essential in order to build trust and defuse tensions. Through its various protective power mandates (for the US in Iran, Saudi Arabia in Iran, Iran in Saudi Arabia, Iran in Canada), Switzerland contributes significantly to de-escalation by maintaining communication between these states. As a reliable, discreet and neutral mediator, Switzerland has access to the government representatives of these states at the highest level. Switzerland is well positioned to promote dialogue thanks to its credibility, its good relations with all countries in the region and its extensive expertise in different areas. It already supports regional integration and trust-building initiatives but can strengthen its role by appointing a specialist for such initiatives in the region.

SWISS PROTECTING POWER MANDATES

A protecting power mandate comes into effect when a state breaks off diplomatic and/or consular relations with another state. If all the parties involved agree, the protecting power takes on the functions agreed with the sending state, grants protection to citizens of that state on the ground, and/or represents its interests in the host state. Protecting power mandates allow states to maintain low-level relations.

Switzerland has a long tradition of representing foreign interests. It first acted as a protecting power in the 19th century. Switzerland can either offer to act as a go-between on its own initiative or can fulfil the role at the request of the countries concerned, provided that all parties involved agree. Protecting power mandates are formally granted to Switzerland under an agreement – typically governed by international law – concluded between Switzerland and the sending state. The sending state pays Switzerland for the representation services rendered.

In its Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23, the Federal Council expressly pointed out that Switzerland is prepared to continue assuming protecting power mandates. Switzerland currently has seven such mandates: for the US in Iran (since 1980), for Russia in Georgia (since 2008) and vice versa (since 2009), for Iran in Egypt (since 1979), for Iran in Saudi Arabia (since 2017) and vice versa (since 2017), and for Iran in Canada (since 2019).

Volatile oil prices have led countries in the region to diversify their economies and look for new sources of income. Diversification promotes economic and social development in the region but leaves countries faced with the task of training their people to meet the demands of the new economic sectors. As a result, various Swiss companies present in the Gulf states have launched their own dual education and training programmes. Private-sector initiatives such as this are to be rolled out increasingly and integrated into a regional network. In general, Switzerland is working to ensure non-discriminatory market access for its private sector. Switzerland as a member of EFTA is one of few countries to have concluded a free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states. Switzerland also promotes responsible business conduct. To protect itself against reputational risks, Switzerland also supports Swiss companies on the ground in self-regulating and creating transparent supply chains. Social, economic and cultural change in the Gulf region does not always entail an improvement in the human rights situation. Therefore, Switzerland needs to go beyond the economic aspects and use the proposed reforms to strengthen the rule of law and human rights, focusing on women and migrant workers in particular.

All countries in the region are affected by climate change, with fresh water becoming increasingly scarce. Consequently, countries in the region are increasingly focusing on **sustainable use of natural resources.** In their efforts to diversify their economies, they are building new farms within their national boundaries and are buying farmland in other parts of the world (particularly East Africa and Asia). They also plan to **replace oil with sustainable energy sources** in the long term. Therefore, the Gulf states' reform programmes include sustainability and environmental protection goals. For Swiss companies that have specialised in sustainable technologies, the transition to new energy sources in the oil-rich countries offers great opportunities. According to the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the Gulf countries have for years been among the world's largest **international cooperation** donors (measured by the share of official development assistance expressed in GDP). Switzerland supports the Gulf countries in their efforts to professionalise, particularly with regard to South-South cooperation and compliance with international development standards in the areas of climate change, health and water management.

In addition, there are various hotspot areas of importance to Switzerland. With regard to migration and the protection of people in need, these are the conflict in Yemen, (economic) migration from Africa and Asia to the Gulf states, and Afghan refugees in Iran. Gulf states such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia are investing heavily in science and new technologies, while in Iran there is great interest in scientific exchange. Expo 2021 in Dubai and other channels of communication abroad offer Switzerland an opportunity to position itself in those fields.

THE MENA REGION AND THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

The rapid spread of new technologies affects the MENA region, too. The digital revolution offers many economic opportunities: it fosters youth employment, and promotes innovation and the development of a dynamic start-up scene. A number of countries – in particular Israel and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula – are investing in the development of artificial intelligence. For example, the world's first university entirely devoted to artificial intelligence was recently established in Abu Dhabi.

Accelerated digitalisation also involves risks, as it facilitates the surveillance and control of the population. Militarily, digitalisation is increasingly resulting in an arms race for offensive cyber capabilities in a regional context where mechanisms for security cooperation are lacking. And finally, the 'fourth industrial revolution' will likely result in a rapid change to the labour market. While digitalisation creates jobs with greater added value, it also renders many occupations redundant, which could reinforce social inequalities.

Switzerland is leading the way in the field of new technologies. The digital revolution in many countries in the MENA region is opening up opportunities for enhanced cooperation with research institutes and private sector actors, particularly in the fields of fintech and medtech. The question of digital governance – i.e. setting out rules for the use and expansion of the internet – is becoming ever more pressing. Switzerland is the initiator of important initiatives to develop a system of rules for the digital space, and Geneva has established itself as the global digital policy hub.

Thematic areas

1. Peace, security and human rights

- → Switzerland is launching regional security initiatives in order to promote dialogue and support confidence building between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula states. Switzerland also engages in regional issues in view of its its candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council.
- → Switzerland actively contributes to the UN-led peace process in Yemen.
- → Switzerland is committed to stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the region, specifically within the context of the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, chaired by Switzerland in 2020–21, and the Missile Technology Control Regime, which it chaired in 2022.

2. Economic affairs, finance, science

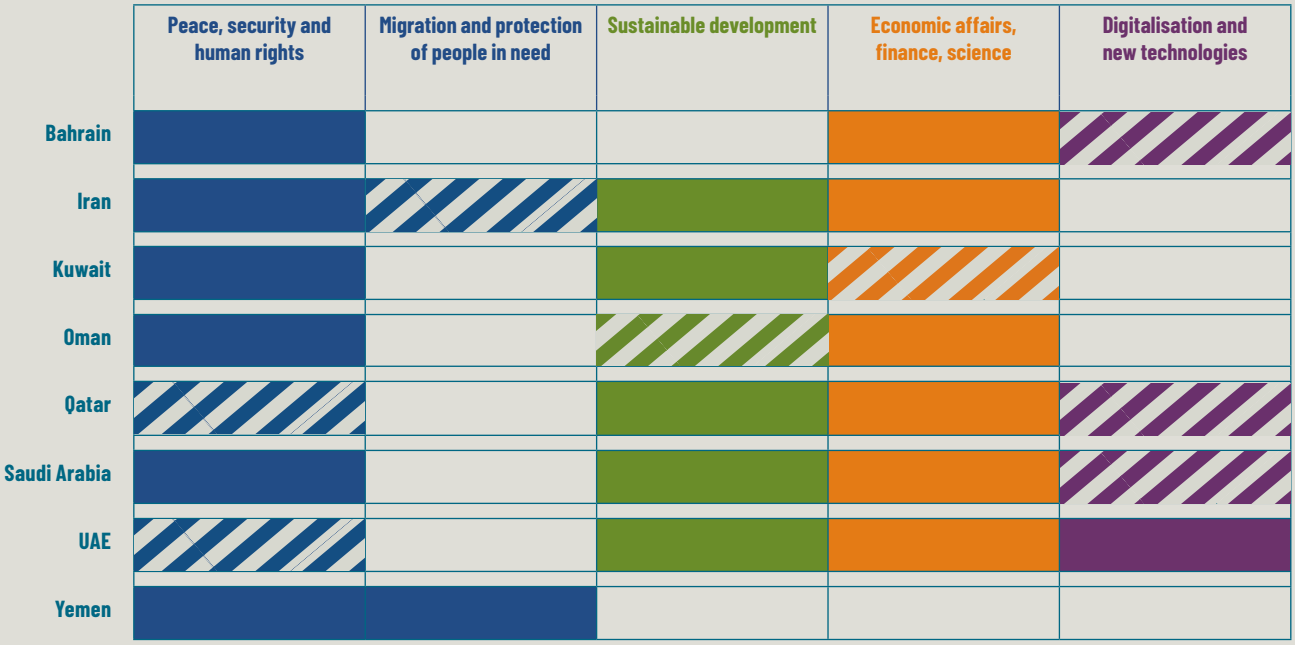
- → Switzerland is working to ensure non-discriminatory market access for its companies and helps them pursue economic opportunities. It promotes the implementation of the EFTA-GCC Free Trade Agreement.
- → Switzerland supports efforts for an inclusive diversification of the economy and promotes the integration of women and young people into the labour market.
- → Switzerland cultivates and consolidates the exchange between universities and researchers.

3. Sustainable development

- → Switzerland is implementing a South-South cooperation project in collaboration with donor states in the Gulf. It also promotes a sustainable use of natural resources with cross-border initiatives focusing on health, food security, water management and climate protection.
- → Switzerland is committed to improving the rights of women and migrant workers in society.
- → Switzerland promotes responsible business conduct and is stepping up dialogue with the private sector to increase transparency in gold trading among other things.

In addition to these three priority issues, Switzerland is engaged in the areas of migration, the protection of people in need as well as digitalisation.

Country-specific focus



Coloured boxes: strongly pronounced / hatched boxes: pronounced / empty boxes: not pronounced
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Bahrain

BAHRAIN

2015: 1.372 Mio
2030: 2.013 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 24 050
CH trade volume: CHF 438.1 Mio

CH community: 106
Embassy since: ---

Key agreements:
EFTA-GCC FTA

AGE 32.5 years	83% (2016)	43/190	3.1%	124/163
44/141	5% (2018)	117/141	45/141	65/141

Priority areas for the country:
- Bahrain is diversifying its economy with the aim of attracting foreign companies and investments.
- While the space for civil society is limited, Bahrain is actively engaged in improving the position and rights of women.
- Bahrain promotes the use of new technologies such as fintech as part of its economic diversification strategy.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Bahrain

Human rights:
Switzerland holds regular bilateral discussions on human rights in the context of memorandums of understanding, in addition to its multilateral engagement.

Market access:
Switzerland assists Swiss companies that are keen to pursue the opportunities available.

Fintech:
The Swiss Business Hub Dubai and the Swiss representation in Abu Dhabi are launching a dialogue between companies and the authorities.

Iran

IRAN

2015: 78.492 Mio
2030: 92.664 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 5628
CH trade volume: CHF 350.0 Mio

CH community: 232
Embassy since: 1936

Key agreements:
trade agreements, double taxation, investment protection

AGE 32 years	74.9% (2016)	127/190	1.3%	139/163
72/141	28.4% (2018)	134/141	99/141	71/141

Priority areas for the country:
- Iran seeks dialogue with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula with the aim of promoting security and stability in the region.
- The Iranian economy relies more heavily on diversification following the reintroduction of US sanctions.
- The water shortage requires a sustainable management of water resources within the country and the region as a whole.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Iran

Peace, security and human rights
Switzerland launches regional security initiatives to promote dialogue between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula states. The protective power mandates are implemented with the states involved and extended if possible (mandates in Saudi Arabia, Canada). They serve as a basis for further confidence-building measures by Switzerland. Switzerland is working internationally to ensure that the development of an Iranian nuclear weapons programme continues to be prevented. It supports the bilateral dialogue on human rights and justice with relevant projects.

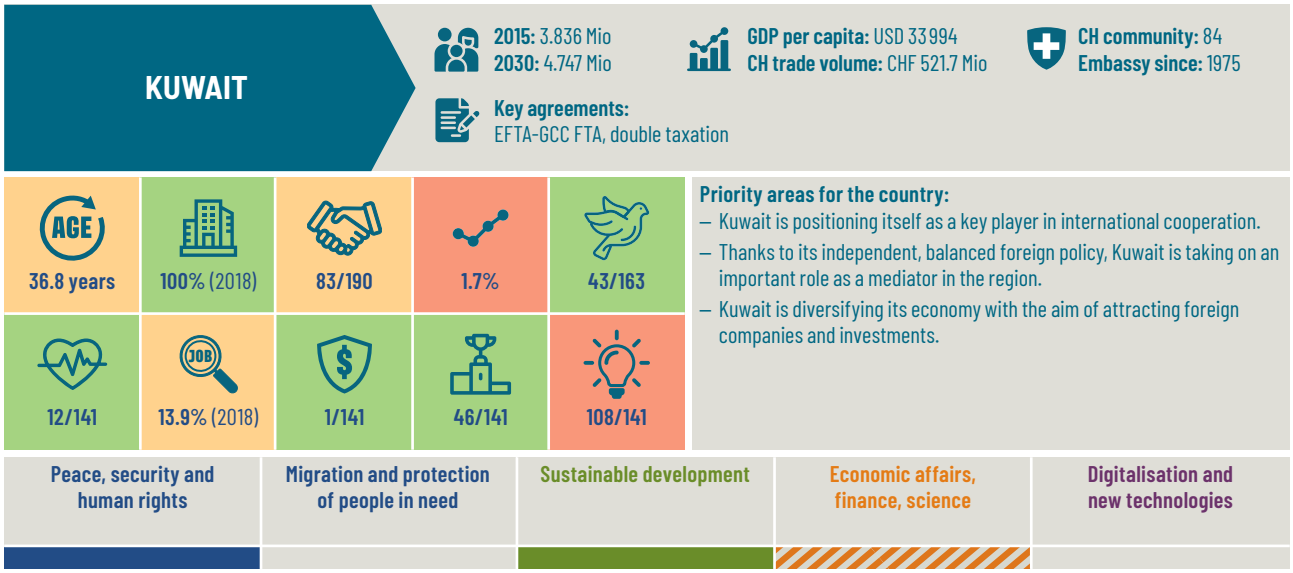
Sustainable development
Switzerland is developing bilateral cooperation in water management. It includes Iran in regional initiatives in areas such as health, food security, water management and climate protection.

Market access:
Switzerland supports its companies in a context restricted by sanctions, for example through the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA), a Swiss payment channel for trade with Iran. It supports Iran's integration into the normative framework of world trade, which also involves technical cooperation in intellectual property.

Science diplomacy:
Switzerland is using various instruments to link up interested research institutes in Switzerland and Iran to continue existing cooperation and strengthen it as part of the Federal Council's International Strategy on Education, Research and Innovation.

Migration:
Switzerland maintains a dialogue on migration with a view to curbing irregular migration. Switzerland is keen to conclude a migration agreement with Iran.

Kuwait



Switzerland's focus in Kuwait

Peace, security and human rights:
Switzerland is stepping up discussions on peace and security. It initiates discussions with the ICRC's regional office in Kuwait to promote international humanitarian law in the Gulf region.

Sustainable development:
In particular, Switzerland fosters discussion with Kuwait on donor country best practices in order to ensure that development funds are dispersed in accordance with international standards.

Market access and economic opportunities:
Switzerland works with Swiss private-sector companies to seize the opportunities opened up by Kuwait's economic reforms. Switzerland is working to promote mutual investment.

Oman

OMAN

2015: 4.267 Mio
2030: 5.573 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 16 415
CH trade volume: CHF 264.7 Mio

CH community: 106
Embassy since: 2014

Key agreements:
EFTA-GCC FTA, double taxation, investment protection

AGE 30.6 years	84.5% (2016)	68/190	3%	69/163
69/141	JOB 8.3% (2018)	119/141	53/141	57/141

Priority areas for the country:
- Thanks to its independent, balanced foreign policy, Oman is taking on an important role as a mediator in the region.
- Oman is diversifying its economy with the aim of attracting foreign companies and investments.
- Oman is investing in vocational training of young people in order to prepare them for employment in the new sectors of the economy.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Oman

Peace and security:
Switzerland is implementing the memorandum of understanding signed with Oman on mediation and peace promotion with an initiative to promote security and stability in the region.

Economic opportunities:
Switzerland is exploring opportunities for Swiss companies, especially in logistics, infrastructure and tourism.

Sustainable development:
Switzerland is strengthening existing health initiatives and is launching exchanges on vocational training. It includes Oman in regional initiatives in areas such as health, food security and water management.

Qatar

QATAR

2015: 2.566 Mio
2030: 3.327 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 68 794
CH trade volume: CHF 1.6 Mia

CH community: 259
Embassy since: 2013

Key agreements:
EFTA-GCC FTA, double taxation, investment protection

AGE 32.3 years	99.1% (2018)	77/190	5.1%	31/163
39/141	JOB 0.6% (2018)	40/141	29/141	38/141

Priority areas for the country:
- Qatar is diversifying its economy and organising major events such as the World Football Championship with the aim of attracting foreign companies and investors.
- Qatar is positioning itself as an important player in international cooperation.
- Qatar is implementing reforms aimed at improving the conditions and rights of foreign employees.

Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Qatar

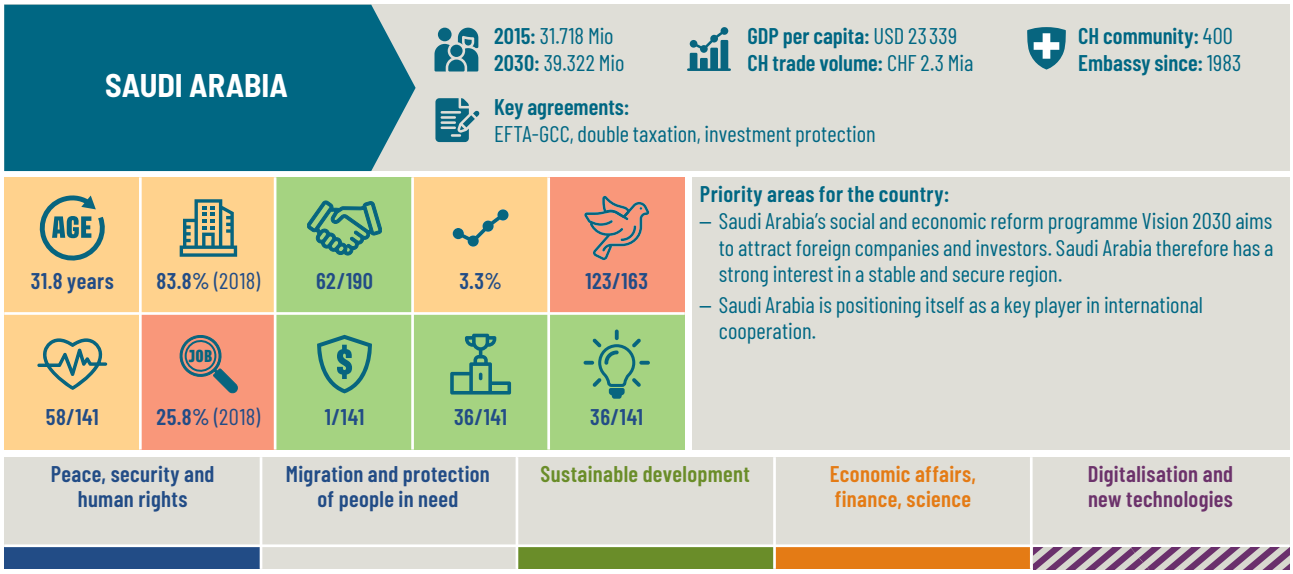
Sustainable development:
Switzerland seeks dialogue with the Qatar Fund for Development in order to bolster trilateral programmes and strengthen the partnership aimed at addressing global water issues.

Market access and economic opportunities:
Switzerland is working to secure market access for its private sector and promotes trade and mutual investment.

Peace, security and human rights:
Switzerland is translating the bilateral dialogue on human rights into concrete action with a dialogue on labour migration, and 'Sport and Human Rights', also in view of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. It is launching a bilateral dialogue on mediation and international humanitarian law.

New technologies:
The Swiss Business Hub Dubai and the Swiss representation in Doha are launching a dialogue with companies and the authorities on new technologies, for example in the area of cybersecurity.

Saudi Arabia



Switzerland's focus in Saudi Arabia

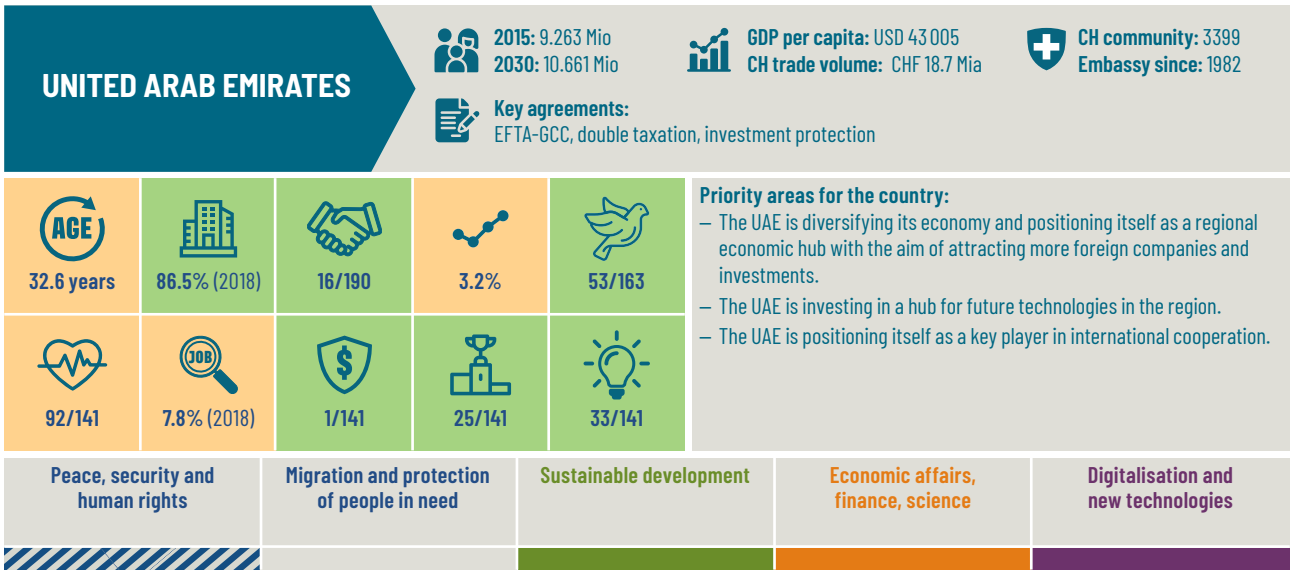
Peace, security and human rights:
Switzerland is launching a regional initiative to promote dialogue between the Arabian Peninsula states and Iran. It is stepping up bilateral discussions on international humanitarian law and human rights, with particular regard to women's rights and responsible business conduct, in the framework of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reform programme.

Sustainable development:
Switzerland is using Saudi Arabia's investments and presence in Africa and Asia to establish joint sustainable technology projects in third countries (South-South and trilateral cooperation). It supports the education of Saudi Arabians involved in international cooperation.

Science diplomacy:
Switzerland is using existing instruments to link up research institutes in Switzerland and Saudi Arabia in areas of mutual interest in order to maintain exchanges.

Market access and *digitalisation:*
Switzerland is helping its private-sector companies gain market access and is working with them to seize the opportunities opened up by the diversification of G20 member state Saudi Arabia pursued under Vision 2030, also in the field of finance (including fintech).

United Arab Emirates



Switzerland's focus in the United Arab Emirates

Sustainable development:
Switzerland promotes responsible business conduct in its private sector with a gold trade initiative.

Market access:
Switzerland is working to improve market access for Swiss companies, also in the field of finance. In particular, it is promoting itself as a tourist destination in the growth market of the Gulf states (Gulf Hub).

Innovation and new technologies:
Switzerland is using existing instruments to link up research institutes at home and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It supports start-ups and companies at home that intend to use the economic diversification of the UAE as an opportunity to introduce new technologies developed in Switzerland. It is also supporting the continuation of the EPFL postgraduate project in the UAE.

Peace, security and human rights:
Switzerland is launching a regional initiative to promote dialogue between the Arabian Peninsula states and Iran. Switzerland uses major events such as the 2020 World Expo (rescheduled for 2021) and its close cooperation with the private sector to promote human rights with initiatives in the area of labour migration.

Yemen

YEMEN

2015: 26.498 Mio
2030: 36.407 Mio

GDP per capita: USD 944
CH trade volume: CHF 21.1 Mio

CH community: 16
Embassy since: ---

20.2 years	36.6 % (2016)	187/190	- 4.1%	160/163
121/141	23.7% (2018)	138/141	140/141	---

Priority areas for the country:

- As a result of the conflict that has lasted several years, the population is in need of humanitarian aid and protection from combat operations.
- In order to end the long-standing conflict and bring peace to Yemen, a political solution is needed with which all Yemeni actors can identify.

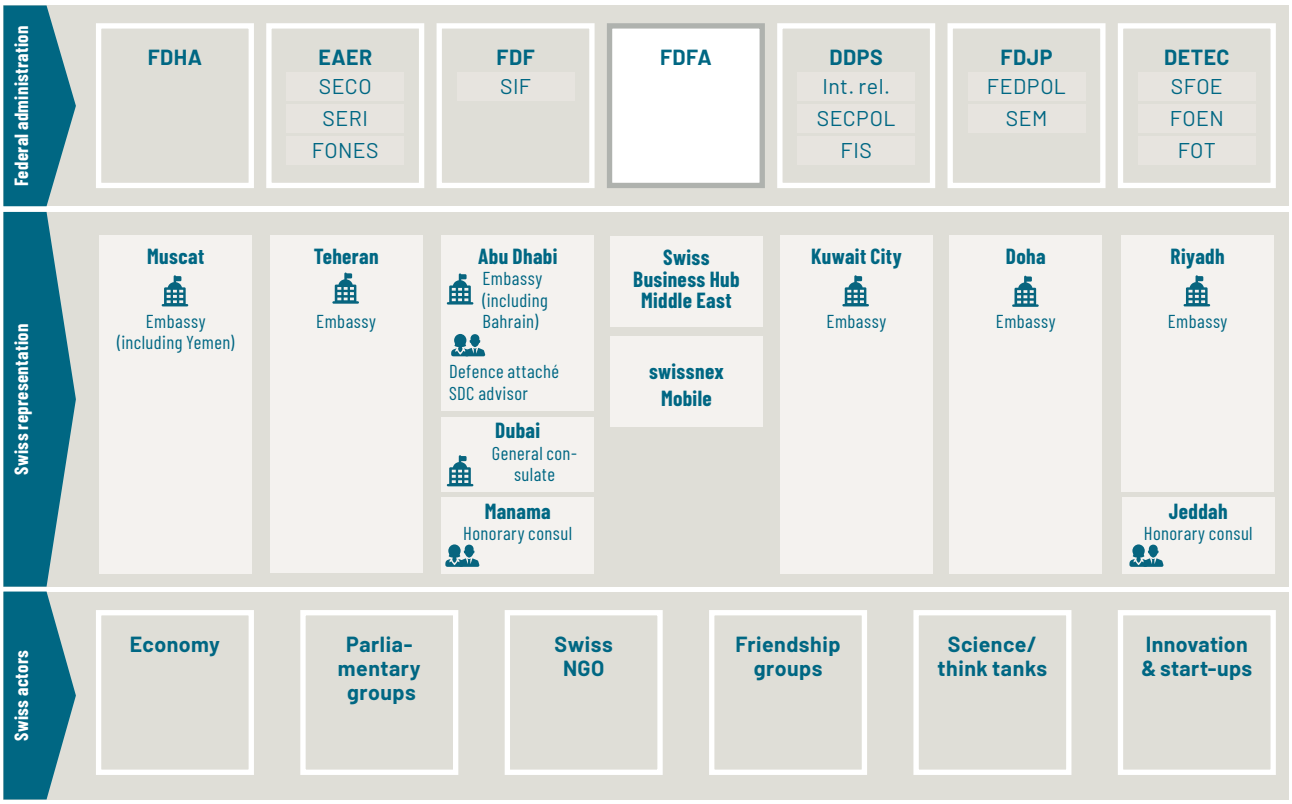
Peace, security and human rights	Migration and protection of people in need	Sustainable development	Economic affairs, finance, science	Digitalisation and new technologies

Switzerland's focus in Yemen

Peace and security:
Switzerland is expanding its network of contacts with actors relevant to the country and is actively contributing in the UN-led peace process, also in connection with Switzerland's candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council.

Protecting civilians:
Switzerland pursues its humanitarian aid efforts focusing on water, sanitation, hygiene and food security. It is committed to ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law and protection of civilians.

Swiss actors on the Arabian Peninsula and in Iran



Main lines of action

1. **Coordinated use of the various instruments available:** The aim is to step up cooperation between the FDFA, SECO, SIF, Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE) and the Swiss Business Hub in the region in order to improve the economic conditions for Swiss companies and pursue the opportunities available.

2. **Switzerland as a financial and investment centre and a tourist destination:** Switzerland is stepping up the promotion of its assets in countries with a potentially high demand.

3. **Regional initiatives:** Switzerland is launching regional initiatives to promote dialogue between disputing states and offers its good offices. To this end, the deployment of a special envoy for the MENA region is being considered.

4. **Science diplomacy:** Switzerland promotes contacts between its scientific and economic actors and corresponding organisations in the region as part of its international ERI strategy, with a view to facilitating cooperation. Opportunities for cooperation include major events and mega-projects in the region as well as the region's increased involvement in sustainable energies, artificial intelligence and new technologies.

5. **International cooperation:** It is in Switzerland's interest that financially strong donor countries in the Gulf participate in international cooperation in accordance with internationally recognised criteria. Thanks to its expertise and long tradition as a donor nation, Switzerland is regarded as a credible role model by the Gulf states. It is therefore considering extending its existing regional portfolio to include all countries in the region. South-South cooperation and regional initiatives focused on health, food security, water management and climate protection are forging ahead.

6. **Bilateral dialogue on human rights:** The focus here is on juvenile criminal law, alternative forms of punishment, prisoners' rights, the economy, women's rights and sports. Projects in these areas are being translated into concrete actions, whereby bilateral and multilateral instruments complement each other.

5 Implementation partners

With its network of representations, Switzerland is well positioned in the MENA region. It is no heavyweight in this region in terms of the resources it deploys and its geopolitical influence. It is thus important for Switzerland to identify niches and apply its knowledge and expertise in a targeted strategic manner.

Switzerland works with partners in protecting its interests and promoting its values. In a complex environment like the MENA region, these partnerships need to be placed under constant review. Switzerland is open to new forms of cooperation with state and non-state actors which enable it to fulfil its key niche functions in the MENA region.

The host state

The host state is the central partner in foreign policy cooperation. The host state bears primary responsibility for reforms or social change. Switzerland has signed a memorandum of understanding with the majority of states in the MENA region governing the priorities in its bilateral relations. Depending on the country in question, this can place the focus on economic interests, migration partnerships or development cooperation, and it defines the regular political dialogue between the countries. On development policy issues, Switzerland also takes its lead from national reform programmes, such as the Egyptian government's *Egypt Vision 2030*.

International and regional organisations

In implementing its programmes, Switzerland draws on the expertise and resources of **international organisations** including the UN organisations (UN resident coordinators, WFP, FAO, ILO, WHO, UNDP and UNRWA), the World Bank, NATO (Partnership for Peace) and the ICRC. In the case of the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen, Switzerland supports the efforts of the UN special envoys to achieve a political solution. Apart from financially supporting these organisations, Switzerland also makes experts available. Switzerland attaches importance to these organisations having clear objectives and the freedom to act, since this allows their effectiveness and efficiency to be reviewed and improved where necessary. Cooperation with the three Geneva centres GCSP, DCAF and GICHD on training modules, capacity building and joint programmes raise Switzerland's profile in the areas of peace and security.

Regional organisations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the League of Arab States and the African Union (AU) are further partners of Switzerland. In the case of both the OIC and the League of Arab States, the Swiss ambassador is accredited to the country hosting the organisation (Saudi Arabia and Egypt respectively). In the AU, Switzerland has had observer's status since 2006 and is expanding its cooperation, especially in matters of peace, security and migration in North Africa. Good cooperation between the AU and the UN is also in Switzerland's interest.

Countries with similar values and views

In selected areas, Switzerland is already working with the EU and its member states as well as with countries including Norway and Canada. The potential afforded by joint initiatives and advances is to be harnessed even more consistently in future. The planned EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, for instance, provides an opportunity to jointly address the challenges posed by migration in the Mediterranean.

Private organisations

Cooperation between states alone will not suffice to tackle the many different challenges that prevail in the MENA region. The private sector, science and NGOs all have a decisive role to play in stimulating sustainable economic growth and promoting innovation.

Private sector

A stable international and national environment is essential for private companies if they are to achieve their business objectives. Even if these objectives differ from those of public actors, there are still certain interests in common. Good governance, the rule of law, peace and security, healthy and well-trained workers, strong infrastructure and clean water are in the interests of all actors. Numerous Swiss companies are already active in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula today. With responsible company management, they can make a contribution to sustainable development. By creating jobs and contributing to local prosperity, they improve the prospects of the people in these countries. Iran has major economic potential that has not yet been fully tapped on account of the US sanctions among other things. In the Near East and North Africa, growth markets are emerging which could be of interest for Switzerland over the medium term – including through the access they offer to southern Africa.

Science

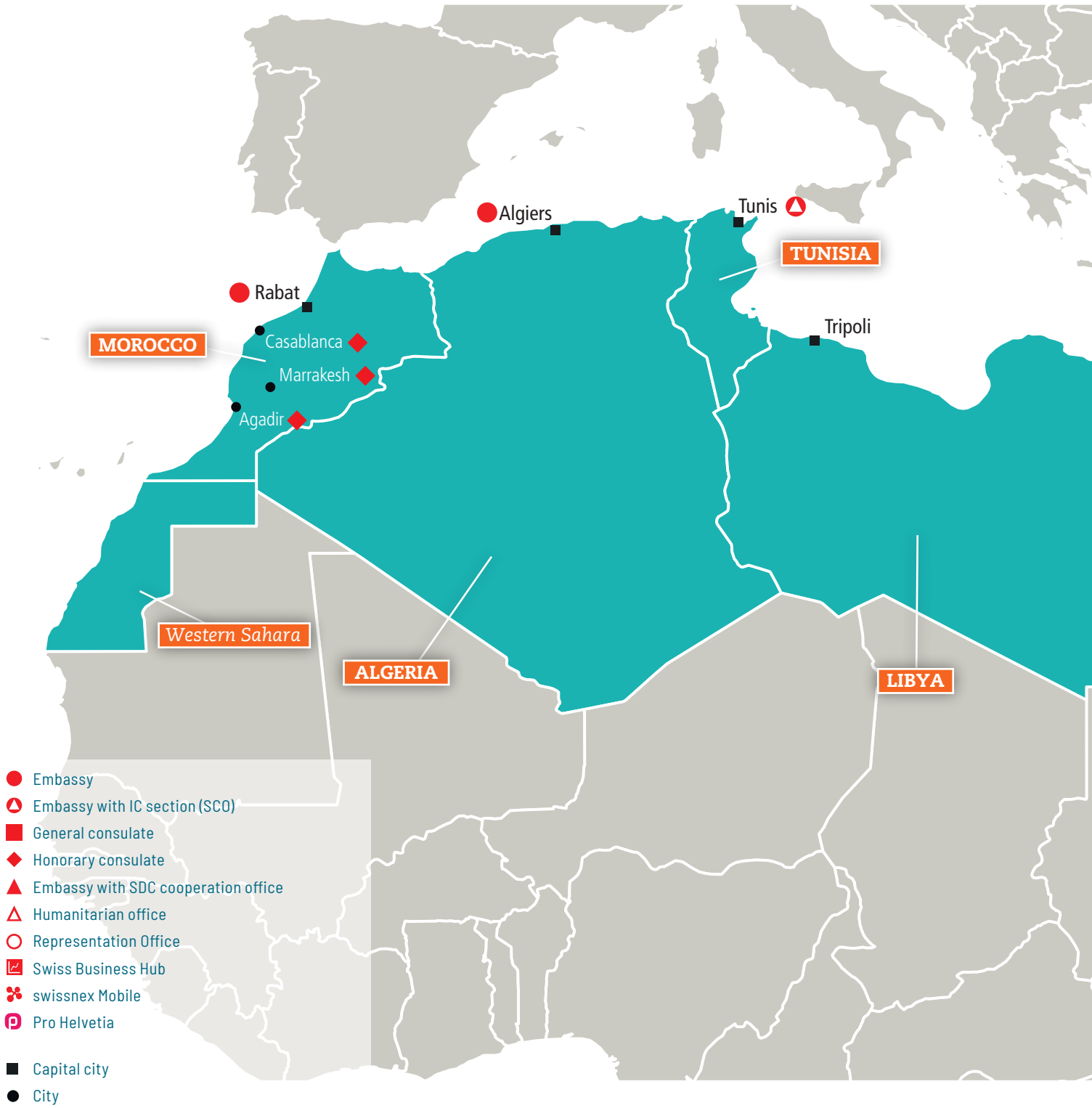
With its globally recognised universities, research institutes and universities of applied sciences for tourism and management, Switzerland ranks at the forefront when it comes to innovation, new technologies, management instruments and high-quality services. As part of Switzerland's federal bilateral cooperation programme, a Swiss institute of higher education has been given a four-year mandate to act as 'leading house' for the MENA region. Exchange between universities in Switzerland and the MENA region is currently only taking place in isolated countries and in just a few sectors, including renewable energies, natural resources, health, innovation and tourism. Transnational initiatives are to be accorded greater weight in future in a bid to address global challenges. As part of its science diplomacy, and based on its international strategy in the field of education, research and innovation, Switzerland is setting out to foster existing initiatives and also support any new bottom-up initiatives.

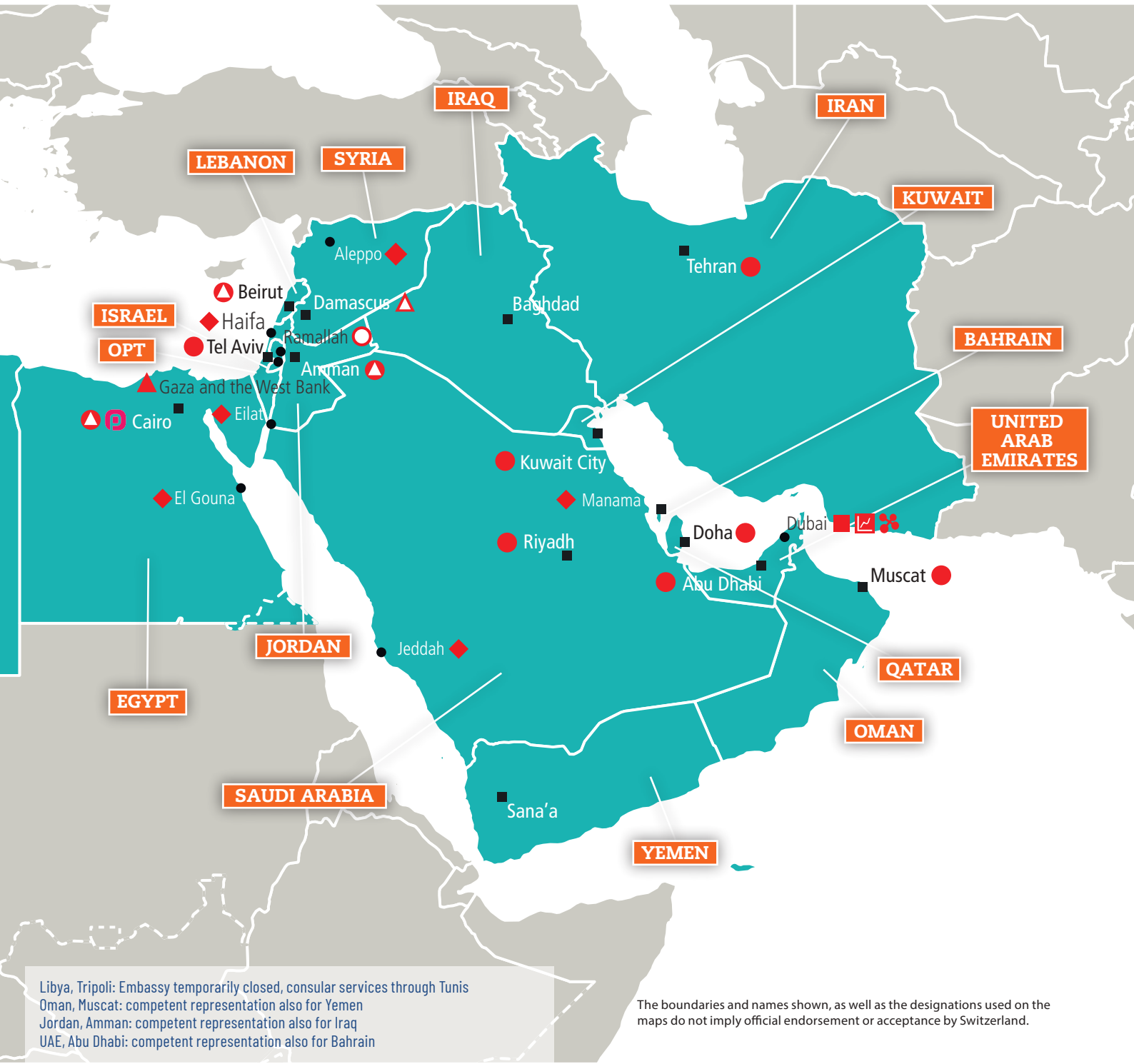
Non-governmental organisations

Switzerland works with Swiss, international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in all countries. In war zones, these organisations chiefly provide services to cover basic needs, such as food, health and housing. In other regions, they address topics including the promotion of dialogue, human rights, security, vocational training and water management.

In order to ensure effectiveness, the choice of organisation is key. Switzerland checks the deployment of resources and the attainment of objectives through internal and external control mechanisms. Since 2017, an additional clause has been included in the contracts for partner organisations prohibiting all forms of discrimination, including racism, antisemitism, incitement to violence and racial hatred. Any violation of this clause entitles the FDFA, for example, to terminate the external partner's contract with immediate effect and demand repayment of the funds already disbursed. The partners supported by Switzerland are subject to constant evaluation. Hence, in 2019, the Federal Council committed itself to reducing the number of NGOs financed by Switzerland in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

APPENDIX
Map with network of representations





Libya, Tripoli: Embassy temporarily closed, consular services through Tunis
Oman, Muscat: competent representation also for Yemen
Jordan, Amman: competent representation also for Iraq
UAE, Abu Dhabi: competent representation also for Bahrain

The boundaries and names shown, as well as the designations used on the maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by Switzerland.

List of abbreviations

AU	African Union
AVIS28	Switzerland's 2028 Foreign Policy Vision
Cst.	Federal Constitution
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DDPS	Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport
DETEC	Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications
EAER	Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FC	Federal Council
FDF	Federal Department of Finance
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
FDHA	Federal Department of Home Affairs
FDJP	Federal Department of Justice and Police
FEDPOL	Federal Office of Police
FIS	Federal Intelligence Service
FOAG	Federal Office for Agriculture
FOEN	Federal Office for the Environment
FOT	Federal Office of Transport
FPS	Foreign policy strategy
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
G20	Group of Twenty
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GCSP	Geneva Centre for Security Policy
GDP	Gross domestic product
GICHD	Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining
HSA	Human Security Advisor
HSD	Human Security Division within the FDFA
IC	International cooperation
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OPT	Occupied Palestinian territory
S-GE	Switzerland Global Enterprise
SCO	Swiss cooperation office
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation within the FDFA
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SECPOL	Security Policy sector of the DDPS
SEM	State Secretariat for Migration
SERI	State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation
SESAME	Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East
SFOE	Swiss Federal Office of Energy
SHTA	Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement
SIF	State Secretariat for International Finance
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
US	United States
WEF	World Economic Forum
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Glossary

Agenda 2030: The 2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals forms a global frame of reference regarding the three inextricably-linked dimensions of the economy, the environment and society. Switzerland recognises the 2030 Agenda as an important orientation framework. While it is not a legally binding framework, it is a means of setting policy objectives and forming opinions, both for domestic and for foreign policy.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): The main aspect of the BRI lies in the creation of infrastructure (transport, energy, communication) in third countries which is predominantly financed and built by China. The BRI is China's first own, globally-oriented development model with which it seeks to substantiate its growing economic – but above all geopolitical – presence on the international stage. The Federal Council's policy involves making the most of the opportunities of the BRI for Swiss interests and the economy, and at the same time calling for compliance with universal values and rules to ensure that the BRI can be implemented in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner for the benefit of target countries.

Blue Peace: Blue Peace supports water cooperation across borders, sectors and generations with the aim of fostering peace, stability and sustainable development. This can take the form of shared institutions and legal frameworks, bringing countries together in a commitment to resolve differences peacefully – and to use their shared water as a basis for wider economic and diplomatic cooperation. Blue Peace turns competition for limited freshwater resources into cooperation, resulting in more peaceful, cohesive and sustainable societies

Civil society: This comprises the parts of society that are distinct from the government and private sector. It is made up of groups who have common interests, goals or values. These include NGOs, associations and foundations, citizen groups, religious organisations, political parties, professional associations, unions, social movements and interest groups.

Coherence: This term denotes the greatest possible consistency and coordination between a country's different policy areas.

Cybersecurity: Cybersecurity concerns all aspects of security in information and communications technology. This includes all information technology associated with the internet and comparable networks, and incorporates communication, applications, processes and information processed on this basis. International cooperation between state and non-state actors in the area of cybersecurity aims to develop and protect an open, free and stable cyberspace. It can also reduce the risks of cyberattacks between states.

Digitalisation: Digitalisation involves the integration of digital technologies in society, government and business. It covers a wide range of digital applications, including new communication technologies, robotics, cloud computing, big data analysis, artificial intelligence and the internet of things.

E-3 countries: These are the European countries France, Germany and the United Kingdom, which, together with China, Russia and the United States, have shaped the negotiations with Iran regarding its nuclear development programme

Embargo Act: Switzerland is implementing sanctions against a number of states in the MENA region on the basis of the Embargo Act (SR 946.231). Upholding sanctions that are based on broad international support is in the interests of Switzerland's foreign policy, which is geared to compliance with international law and humanitarian values. Switzerland is obliged by international law to support sanctions decided on by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. If the EU imposes sanctions, the Federal Council decides in the individual case whether Switzerland will adopt the measures introduced by the EU in their entirety, in part or not at all. The Federal Council has various foreign policy, foreign economic policy and legal criteria on which to base its decision.

Equal opportunities: An equal opportunity society guarantees all members – particularly at the beginning of their lives – unobstructed access to life opportunities, in particular the same educational and career opportunities, and the opportunity to reach their full potential. No person may be discriminated against, in particular on grounds of origin, race, gender, age, language, social position, way of life, religious, ideological, or political convictions, or because of a physical, mental or psychological disability (Cst. Art. 8 para. 2).

Facilitation and mediation: A third party who mediates between parties to a conflict is known as a facilitator or mediator. A facilitator is a third party who supports, facilitates and promotes contact between parties to a conflict without substantively contributing to the negotiations. As in mediation, a facilitator is freely chosen by the parties to a conflict and allows them to meet at a suitable location, discuss possible ways of resolving the conflict, conduct negotiations and sign an agreement. A mediator is a third party who also substantively supports the negotiating parties in finding solutions, without, however, imposing them. Facilitation and mediation are part of Switzerland's good offices.

Fintech: Fintech is a term derived from 'financial technology' and relates to innovations in the financial services sector that result in new financial instruments, services or business models, such as blockchain.

Foodtech: This term is derived from 'food technology' and describes technological solutions for the production or processing of food.

Foreign policy: Foreign policy shapes the relations of a state with other states and international organisations, and safeguards the state's interests abroad. It comprises various policy areas, such as trade policy, environment policy, security policy, development policy and cultural policy. In Switzerland, the entire Federal Council is responsible for foreign policy. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is responsible for coordinating foreign policy and ensuring coherence with other departments (see 'Coherence').

Geneva Conventions: The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Additional Protocols of 1977, as well as the Additional Protocol of 2005, form the core of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts (see 'International humanitarian law'). Among other things, they protect people who are not or no longer taking part in hostilities and govern the conduct of war.

Good offices: This is an umbrella term to describe the efforts of a third party to peacefully settle a conflict between two or more states. Switzerland's good offices consist of three areas: protecting power mandates (see 'Protecting power'), Switzerland as host state for peace negotiations, and Switzerland as mediator and facilitator and as supporter of mediation and negotiation processes (see 'Facilitation and mediation'). Good offices range from technical and organisational support (e.g. providing a conference venue) to mediation services and participation in international peace processes.

Governance (good governance): Democratic, efficient and effective governing processes for the benefit of all citizens. This includes political decision-making in transparent, participative processes; clearly allocated responsibilities; effective public services; an accessible, professional, independent legal system based on the rule of law and political control through a critical public.

G20: The Group of Twenty is an informal association of 19 countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States) and the EU, representing the main industrialised and emerging economies. It addresses financial and economic cooperation and can set international standards.

Host state: This term describes a country that hosts foreign representations (embassies, missions, consulates) or international organisations. Switzerland – and Geneva in particular (see 'International Geneva') – hosts a multitude of international organisations.

Human rights: Human rights are inherent and inalienable rights that all people enjoy without distinction by virtue of their being human. They are crucial to the protection of human dignity, physical and psychological integrity and are an important foundation for the development of every individual. They are the basis of the peaceful coexistence of nations. They are guarantors of a society based on the obligation to respect the rights of the individual. They apply both in international relations and domestic policy, but also at the place of residence of every individual. Human rights are universal, indivisible and interrelated. Every state is obliged to respect, protect and implement human rights.

Humanitarian principles: Humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are key values and principles of humanitarian action. They were laid down in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, and by the UN General Assembly.

Interdepartmental structure for international cooperation on migration (ICM): In the area of migration, the ICM structure is intended to strengthen cooperation between actors in the federal administration and ensure coherence in Switzerland's migration foreign policy. This coordination is aimed at achieving a stronger strategic link between international cooperation (IC) and migration policy so as to alleviate the causes of irregular and forced migration. The flexibly deployable IC funds provide additional support here.

Interests and values: The core mission of Switzerland's foreign policy is to promote Switzerland's interests and values, which are two inextricably-linked sides of the same coin and are based on the Federal Constitution.

International cooperation (IC): International cooperation comprises the activities of humanitarian aid, development cooperation, peacebuilding (see 'Peacebuilding') and human security.

International Geneva: Geneva is the heart of the multilateral system and the location of the UN's European headquarters. Thirty-eight international organisations, programmes and funds, as well as 177 states and 750 NGOs are represented there. International Geneva provides some 45,000 jobs and contributes more than 11% to the GDP of the canton (1% of Swiss GDP). Around 3,300 international conferences are held in Geneva every year, the main themes of which are: 1) peace, security, disarmament; 2) humanitarian aid and international humanitarian law, human rights, migration; 3) labour, economy, trade, science, telecommunications; 4) health; 5) the environment and sustainable development.

International humanitarian law: International humanitarian law governs the conduct of war and protects the civilian population and people who are no longer taking part in hostilities. It applies in all international and non-international armed conflicts, regardless of the legitimacy or cause of the use of force.

International law: International law is the result of collaboration between states and regulates how they coexist. It underpins peace and security and aims to ensure the protection and well-being of persons. International law comprises highly different areas, such as the prohibition of the use of force, human rights, protection of individuals during wars and conflicts (see also 'International humanitarian law'), prevention and prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, transnational organised crime and terrorism. It also regulates other areas, such as the environment, trade, development, telecommunications and transport. On account of the sovereignty of states, international law only applies for each state insofar as it has agreed to adopt certain international obligations. This excludes mandatory international law, which comprises basic standards that no state may override, such as the prohibition of genocide.

Irregular migration: Movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into a transit or destination country or exit from the state of origin.

Jihadism: This term is used to denote a violent, extremist ideology that abuses the religious concept of jihad and legitimises itself in this way. 'Jihad-motivated travellers' refers to people who leave their country of origin or residence to join or support a jihadist group in an area of conflict.

Medtech: Derived from 'medicine' and 'technology', this term describes endeavours to develop technological products for use in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illnesses.

Multilateralism: Multilateralism is when issues of public interest are discussed and negotiated between more than two states (cf. contrast with bilateralism). International organisations and bodies such as the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe are platforms for such discussions. Multilateralism allows Switzerland to achieve leverage through alliances and thereby increase its influence.

Neutrality: Switzerland's rights and obligations as a neutral state are derived from international law (see 'International law'). The core of these obligations involves Switzerland not being allowed to offer military support in the event of a conflict between states. At national level, neutrality is mentioned in the Federal Constitution as an instrument to safeguard Switzerland's independence. Switzerland's policy of neutrality thereby safeguards the effectiveness and credibility of its neutrality.

Non-governmental organisation: Any private, non-profit organisation that operates at local, national or international level to pursue common goals and ideals with no significant state-controlled participation or representation. NGOs are part of civil society (see 'Civil society').

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW): The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPWC) is an independent institution based in The Hague which has monitored implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention since 1997, the year in which it entered into force. The OPCW supports and monitors those states that have ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention in matters of demilitarisation, non-proliferation, cooperation and the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Convention has been ratified by 193 states to date.

Peacebuilding: Civilian peacebuilding includes contributions to the prevention, mitigation and resolution of violent conflicts, in particular through confidence-building, mediation and the promotion of international humanitarian law and human rights (see 'facilitation and mediation', 'International humanitarian law' and 'Human rights'). Peacebuilding activities after the end of violent conflicts comprise a range of activities, including dealing with the past, contributions to promoting democratic processes and elections, and strengthening human rights. Peacebuilding creates and reinforces the framework conditions necessary for sustainable development. It comprises both civilian and military measures.

Private sector: The private sector encompasses firms in the economic sector that are financed and controlled by individuals or private institutions, such as companies, shareholders or groups of investors. This is in contrast to companies that are financed and controlled completely or in part by the state.

Protecting power: A protecting power starts to function when a state breaks off diplomatic and/or consular relations with another state. If all the parties involved agree, the protecting power takes on the functions agreed with the sending state, grants protection to citizens of that state on the ground, and/or represents its interests in the host state. Protecting power mandates allow states to maintain low-level relations. At the end of 2019, Switzerland was performing seven protecting power mandates, representing Iran in Egypt, the United States in Iran, Georgia in Russia, Russia in Georgia, Iran in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia in Iran and Iran in Canada.

Refugees: A refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol regulate the status of refugees. The principle of non-refoulement is particularly important. It forbids a country receiving refugees to return them to a country in which they would be in likely danger of persecution. Internally displaced persons, by contrast, are people fleeing a catastrophe or conflict within their own country without crossing national borders

Rule of law: The rule of law refers to the supremacy of law over the rule of might. At national level, the fundamental objective of the rule of law is to safeguard the primacy of the law at all levels of government and to protect the associated freedom of citizens. In terms of foreign policy, the rule of law is crucial to international peace and security, economic and social progress, development and the protection of rights and human freedoms. It is primarily achieved by strengthening international law, which guarantees political stability and the reliability of international relations (see 'International law').

Science diplomacy: This term refers among other things to the use of scientific collaboration between states to address common problems and develop international partnerships. At the interface between science, technology and foreign policy, articulating issues and objectives from a scientific perspective can support confidence-building and stimulate both bilateral and multilateral discussions.

Sustainability: Switzerland promotes sustainable development on the basis of the Federal Constitution. It uses the definition formulated by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The principle was substantiated in the 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda in 2015 (see '2030 Agenda').

Swissnex: The Swissnex network is the Swiss global network for education, research and innovation. As an initiative of the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, it forms part of the Confederation's external network and is overseen by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The network supports partners in their international networking and in their commitment to the global exchange of knowledge, ideas and talent. The five Swissnex locations and their outposts are located in the world's most innovative hubs. The network is also temporarily presented at selected major events, such as World Expos (e.g. Expo Dubai), by means of a so-called **swissnex Mobile** presence.

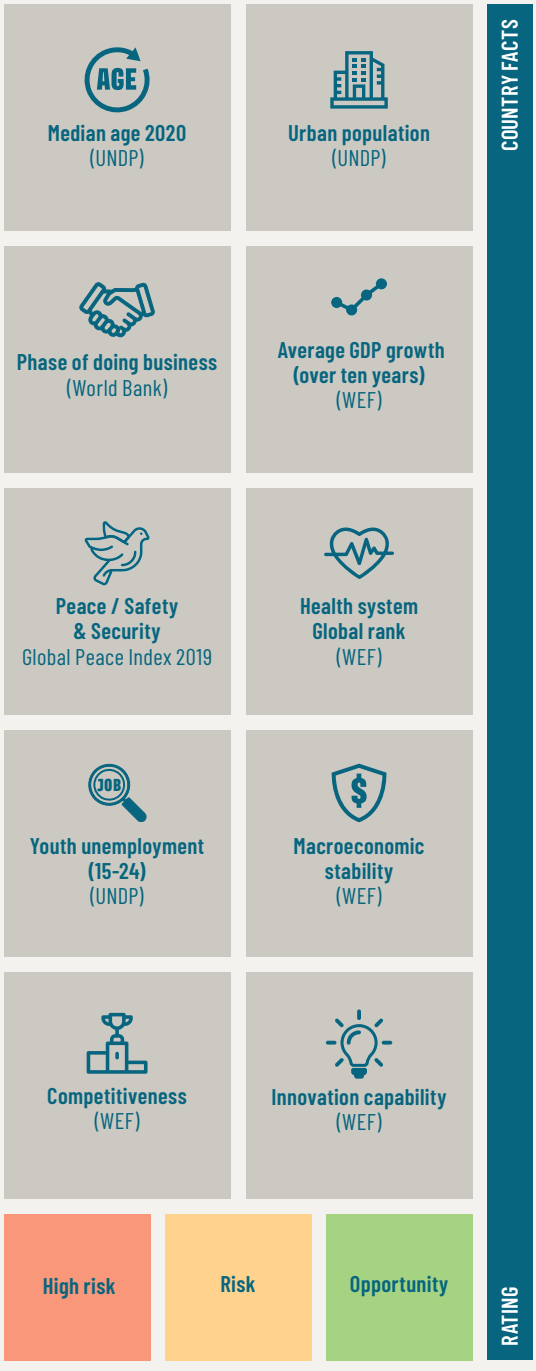
Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE): Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE) supports Swiss and Liechtenstein companies in developing their foreign activities, on behalf of the Confederation. S-GE coordinates a comprehensive network of specialist service partners in Switzerland and abroad to this end. Its core services include advising companies on developing or expanding export activities, providing these companies with information, and conducting marketing for Switzerland abroad.

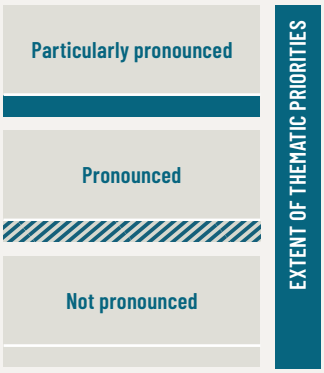
Tech4Good: This term relates to the use of digital technologies in the framework of international cooperation (see 'International cooperation'). Digital technologies and technical innovations offer many opportunities to improve living conditions worldwide. Switzerland promotes their use in international cooperation in order to deliver on the sustainable development goals more quickly or in a more broad-based and cost-effective manner. For example, new technologies can help alleviate need and poverty, tackle global challenges such as climate change, and contribute to better governance. New technologies also involve risks, which is why Switzerland combines its innovation transfer with training measures, for example.

Terrorism: Terrorism denotes violent criminal acts that seek to intimidate the public or a state, or to coerce an international organisation. International agreements and UN resolutions outline various universal measures designed to support countries in the prevention and prosecution of terrorist acts. It is recognised that such counter-terrorism measures must respect international law, in particular human rights, international humanitarian law and the international law on refugees.

War Material Act: The War Material Act (WMA) makes the export and transit of war material and the transfer of production licences subject to licensing. Applications must be submitted to SECO, which issues export licences in accordance with the related War Material Ordinance (WMO). The FDFA reviews the applications in accordance with Article 5 of the WMO and ensures that Switzerland fulfils its international obligations, applies its foreign policy principles, and complies with international law. It takes into account the following criteria: the upholding of peace and international security, regional stability, respect for human rights, the principles and objectives of Swiss development cooperation and the stance of other states.

Legend country facts





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