

Press release

The Life Sciences sector: a major economic driver for the canton of Fribourg

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Life Sciences is a major sector of Fribourg's economy, generating a value added of more than CHF 1.5 billion in 2023 and employing 3,300 full-time equivalents (FTEs). Numerous companies in other sectors of the economy also benefit from the activities of the Life Sciences sector. A total value added of CHF 1.96 billion, representing 10% of Fribourg's economy, is generated directly and indirectly by Life Sciences activities. These are the main findings of a study by BAK Economics on the importance of the Life Sciences sector for the economy of the canton of Fribourg. The study is a joint project between the GRIP-pharma association, the Fribourg Development Agency and Life Sciences companies operating in the canton of Fribourg (CSL Vifor, Grifols, OM Pharma, UCB and Verfora).

The Life Sciences sector as an economic player and employer

Fribourg's Life Sciences sector - the pharmaceutical industry, biotech, medtech, whole-sale of pharmaceutical products, laboratory infrastructure and consulting activities - has been more dynamic than the cantonal economy as a whole over the past 10 years. Between 2013 and 2023, the value added generated by Life Sciences has more than tripled and employment is now 1.4 times higher. At CHF 467,000 per job (in FTE), productivity is 3.2 times higher than the average for Fribourg's economy. This superior performance is the result of the industry's high value added activities, which include production, research and development (R&D) - one in every 12 jobs is dedicated to R&D activities - and the sales of the goods and services produced. To carry out these activities, the Life Sciences sector has to rely on a highly skilled workforce: 60% of staff have a tertiary-level qualification, compared with only 38% for the economy as a whole.

A driving force for the regional economy

Many regional companies benefit from the procurement and investment activities of Life Sciences companies, as well as from the consumer spending of their employees. The production, R&D and sales activities of Life Sciences companies generate CHF 1.96 billion directly and indirectly, accounting for 10% of Fribourg's economy. These indirect effects amounted to CHF 420 million in value added, 3,379 full-time jobs and CHF 301 million in salaries. For every 100 francs of value added generated directly by the activities of the Life Sciences sector, a further 27 francs are produced in other industries. In addition, for every job in the Life Sciences sector, one additional full-time position is created in the cantonal economy.

Fribourg's Life Sciences ecosystem

To carry out their activities successfully, Fribourg's Life Sciences sector companies not only collaborate with each other, but also benefit from the proximity of various players outside the industry, such as those in the healthcare sector (HFR), academic institutions (Unifr, HEIA-FR) or technology campuses (Bluefactory, MIC). The canton's central

location extends the ecosystem beyond its borders, increasing interactions with players in neighboring cantons such as Bern and Vaud (EPFL, Unil, Unibe, CHUV, Inselspital, etc.).

The advantages of the canton of Fribourg for Life Sciences

A survey carried out among Fribourg Life Sciences companies has revealed the many advantages of the canton as a business location. The canton benefits from a highly qualified, multilingual workforce that meets the needs of companies operating on a national and international scale. Fribourg's accessibility has also been identified as a key factor in ensuring successful business operations. The attractiveness of the region is crucial in attracting talent and highly qualified workers. In addition, the technology campuses have contributed to the arrival and maintaining of numerous companies and start-ups, consolidating Fribourg's Life Sciences ecosystem.

Potential improvements to the quality of localisation

A reduction in the tax burden - for both highly qualified workers and companies - facilitates the establishment of companies with high value added (e.g. R&D or sales activities) and the recruitment of highly qualified workers. The strong economic and demographic growth of the canton's regions must be anticipated in the area of infrastructure planning so that accessibility remains one of the canton's strong suits. Finally, the technology campuses, which are already an asset for the canton of Fribourg, can be further developed. In particular, they promote interdisciplinarity and innovation and help companies to successfully meet future challenges as well as identify and seize future development opportunities.

	Impact on the cantonal economy, 2023					
	Direct		In other sectors		Total	
Gross value added (in millions CHF)	1,537	8.2%	420	2.3%	1,957	10.5%
Employment (in FTE)	3,293	2.6%	3,379	2.7%	6,672	5.3%
Employee income (in millions CHF)	338	2.9%	301	2.6%	639	5.4%

Notes: nominal gross value added; jobs in full-time equivalents.

Data for 2023; discrepancies may arise due to rounding.

Source : BAK Economics

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