

Initial Public Offerings 2022

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Initial Public Offerings 2022

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Lexology Getting The Deal Through is delighted to publish the seventh edition of *Initial Public Offerings*, which is available in print and online at www.lexology.com/gtdt.

Lexology Getting The Deal Through provides international expert analysis in key areas of law, practice and regulation for corporate counsel, cross-border legal practitioners, and company directors and officers.

Throughout this edition, and following the unique Lexology Getting The Deal Through format, the same key questions are answered by leading practitioners in each of the jurisdictions featured. Our coverage this year includes a new chapters on New Zealand and Turkey.

Lexology Getting The Deal Through titles are published annually in print. Please ensure you are referring to the latest edition or to the online version at www.lexology.com/gtdt.

Every effort has been made to cover all matters of concern to readers. However, specific legal advice should always be sought from experienced local advisers.

Lexology Getting The Deal Through gratefully acknowledges the efforts of all the contributors to this volume, who were chosen for their recognised expertise. We also extend special thanks to the contributing editors, Joshua Ford Bonnie and Kevin P Kennedy of Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, for their continued assistance with this volume.



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MARKET OVERVIEW

Size of market

1 | What is the size of the market for initial public offerings (IPOs) in your jurisdiction?

The Swiss IPO market recently restarted again following the successful listing of PolyPeptide Group AG on 29 April 2021 on the Swiss Exchange Ltd (SIX), with an offer size of 848 million Swiss francs (francs) and an implied market capitalisation of 2.12 billion francs. There are several IPOs in the pipeline for 2021, which hopefully signifies a more active IPO season than in 2020.

Indeed, despite several IPOs in the pipeline that were expected to launch during the course of 2020, the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic and the related volatility in the capital markets impacted the Swiss IPO market with many deals put on hold. Nevertheless, two issuers had successful listings on SIX at the beginning of the summer once market conditions improved slightly. Interestingly, both listings were spin-offs from larger Swiss publicly listed companies, specifically Ina Invest Holding AG, a new real estate company, was spun off from Implen AG, an international construction and construction services company, and V-Zug Holding AG, a developer and manufacturer of household appliances, was spun off from Metall Zug AG, a large Swiss industrial group.

The Swiss IPO market in 2019 was impacted by various global political and economic uncertainties, including the negotiations regarding Brexit, trade policy tensions between the United States, China and Europe as well as other geopolitical concerns. However, despite such mixed market conditions, there were five successful IPOs in 2019 on SIX with an aggregate issue volume of approximately 3.1 billion francs, of which the IPO of Stadler Rail with an offer size of 1.5 billion francs was the sixth largest IPO in Europe in 2019 and the IPO of SoftwareOne was the tenth largest. The other IPOs on SIX in 2019 included Medacta Group, Aluflexpack and Novavest Real Estate, accompanied by the listing of shares of Alcon (following its spin-off from Novartis) and the listing of shares of Achiko.

Issuers

2 | Who are the issuers in the IPO market? Do domestic companies tend to list at home or overseas? Do overseas companies list in your market?

Issuers listing shares on exchanges in Switzerland stem from a range of Swiss industries and include:

- major banks such as Credit Suisse and UBS, as well as several well-known private banks such as EFG, Julius Bär and Vontobel;
- large reinsurance and insurance corporations like Swiss Re and Zurich International;
- international luxury goods companies such as Richemont and Swatch;

- multinational food and beverage, pharmaceutical and biotech companies such as Alcon, Givaudan, Lindt & Sprüngli, Lonza, Nestlé, Novartis and Roche;
- large industrials such as ABB, Geberit, LafargeHolcim, OC Oerlikon and Schindler; and
- numerous real estate companies such as Allreal, HIAG, PSP Swiss Property, Swiss Prime Site and Ina Invest.

There is also a significant number of foreign companies that have opted for primary or secondary equity listings in Switzerland to gain better access to international institutional investors or because of strong representation from certain industries and the desire to be listed among attractive peers. This is especially the case with regard to the pharmaceutical and biotech industries. Selected foreign companies that have primary or secondary equity listings on exchanges in Switzerland include AMS (A), Cassiopea (I), Cosmo Pharmaceuticals (NL), Newron Pharmaceuticals (I), SHL Telemed (IL) with primary listings and the 3M Company (USA), Abbott Laboratories (USA) and Baxter International (USA) with secondary listings, respectively.

Of the 250 companies listed on SIX as of 30 April 2021, 30 have their registered offices outside Switzerland.

Primary exchanges

3 | What are the primary exchanges for IPOs? How do they differ?

SIX operates the principal securities exchange in Switzerland and is currently the third-largest exchange in Europe, with a free-float market capitalisation of 1.5 trillion francs (as per August 2020). As of 30 April 2021, SIX had 250 companies listed (of which 220 were Swiss-domiciled issuers). The only other equity exchange in Switzerland is BX Swiss AG (BX Swiss). The BX Swiss is much smaller than SIX and mainly targets small and medium-sized Swiss enterprises. As of 30 April 2021, 18 companies were listed on the BX Swiss.

REGULATION

Regulators

4 | Which bodies are responsible for rulemaking and enforcing the rules on IPOs?

Switzerland is not a member of the EU or the EEA. Accordingly, the EU Prospectus Regulation and other EU regulations relating to capital markets offerings are not applicable to offerings conducted in Switzerland.

However, the Swiss financial market regulatory framework has undergone fundamental and comprehensive reforms over the past few years. The main purpose of these reforms is to harmonise Swiss regulations with existing and new EU regulations and to ensure access of

Swiss financial institutions to the European market by fulfilling equivalence requirements. The most important parts of the reform package in terms of Swiss capital markets are set out in the new Financial Services Act (FinSA) and its implementing ordinance, the Financial Services Ordinance (FinSO), both of which entered into force on 1 January 2020 (subject to the phase-in of certain provisions as well as transition periods, some of which had already passed).

In essence, FinSA (together with FinSO) introduced a new prospectus regime, including specific statutory requirements, for Swiss capital markets applicable to all financial instruments (subject to exemptions and customizations for certain instruments) where any person in Switzerland who makes a public offer for the acquisition of securities or any person who seeks the admission of securities to trading on a trading venue in Switzerland must first publish a prospectus. Furthermore, unlike under the previous regime, any such prospectus must be submitted to a reviewing body for approval prior to publication (ex-ante review).

Below is an overview of the applicable legislative framework (including FinSA and FinSO), followed by summaries of the main regulatory and self-regulatory authorities mandated with the implementation, supervision and enforcement of the legislation.

Legislative framework

Generally, the current legislative framework with respect to IPOs and equity securities markets and exchanges in Switzerland is governed by the following legislations:

- Financial Markets Infrastructure Act of 19 June 2015 (FMIA);
- Financial Market Infrastructure Ordinance of 25 November 2015 (FMIO);
- Financial Services Act of 15 June 2018 (FinSA);
- Financial Services Ordinance of 6 November 2019 (FinSO); and
- additional ordinances issued by Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA) (FINMA).

These statutes and regulations contain rules that impose direct obligations on issuers and other market participants, such as specific content requirements for prospectuses, disclosure rules in respect of qualified shareholdings and rules on insider trading and market manipulation.

Supervisory bodies

FINMA

The main financial market regulatory body in Switzerland is FINMA. FINMA delegates certain aspects of the regulation of the Swiss financial markets to a number of private or semi-private self-regulatory bodies that it licenses and supervises. For example, the SIX Group Ltd is mandated with the issuance, monitoring and enforcement of regulations related to SIX Swiss Exchange Ltd (SIX). Furthermore, FINMA is responsible for licensing and supervising the regulatory bodies responsible for the prospectus review process (ie, the 'reviewing body') under the FinSA and FinSO.

SIX Regulatory Board

One of the most important self-regulatory bodies under FINMA's supervision with regard to equity markets and exchanges in Switzerland is the SIX Regulatory Board. This is responsible for issuing the rules and regulations that apply to issuers (eg, rules and directives) and participants (eg, SIX Rule Book and participant directives).

SIX Exchange Regulation Ltd

The SIX Exchange Regulation, an independent and autonomous entity within SIX Group Ltd, regulates and monitors participants and issuers listed on SIX. In particular, it carries out tasks prescribed under Swiss legislation and under the rules and regulations issued by the SIX

Regulatory Board and monitors compliance with these regulations. The SIX Exchange Regulation is, subject to the relevant rules, permitted to prescribe sanctions or submit sanction proposals, as well as to inform the chairman of the board of directors of SIX Group Ltd, the supervisory authorities and, where appropriate, the competent public prosecuting authorities of suspected violations of the law or other wrongdoing by market participants.

The Listing and Enforcement department of SIX Exchange Regulation is responsible for the self-regulated listing and admission to trading of companies and securities. This department also monitors compliance with information obligations for listed companies (eg, ad hoc publicity and regular reporting, corporate reporting and management transactions). On the basis of public law, this department operates as a reviewing body (see below) and receives disclosures of shareholdings.

The Surveillance and Enforcement department of SIX Exchange Regulation monitors price movement and trading on SIX's exchanges.

Reviewing body

As a general matter, under FinSA, any person in Switzerland who makes a public offer for the acquisition of securities or any person who seeks the admission of securities to trading on a trading venue in Switzerland must first publish a prospectus. Subject to certain exemptions, any such prospectus must be submitted to a reviewing body licensed by FINMA (see above) for approval prior to publication or admission to trading. The reviewing body is responsible for checking that a prospectus is complete, coherent and understandable. On 28 May 2020, the prospectus offices of SIX Exchange Regulation and BX Swiss announced the approval from FINMA to act as prospectus reviewing bodies under FinSA effective 1 June 2020.

Authorisation for listing

5 Must issuers seek authorisation for a listing? What information must issuers provide to the listing authority and how is it assessed?

Under the new prospectus regime introduced by FinSA and FinSO, the prospectus approval process and admission to trading on a Swiss trading venue in an IPO currently consists of two parallel processes:

- prospectus approval prior to publication pursuant to FinSA (ie, by a reviewing body, such as SIX Exchange Regulation or BX Swiss); and
- application for the admission to trading on the relevant trading venue (ie, by the exchange admission body, such as SIX Exchange Regulation).

Following the introduction of the new prospectus regime, the Swiss stock exchanges have also amended their listing rules so that these two processes can operate in parallel. Each is discussed in greater detail below. However, and perhaps most noteworthy, parties do not necessarily need to submit a prospectus for approval to the respective prospectus office of the trading venue that they may also be seeking admission to trading on in Switzerland. For example, the prospectus office of BX Swiss could approve a FinSA compliant prospectus for an issuer that is separately seeking an admission to trading on the SIX (via the application process with SIX Exchange Regulation) and vice versa.

Prospectus approval by a reviewing body

The reviewing body follows the administrative procedures set out in Swiss administrative law (specifically, the Federal Act on Administrative Procedure of 20 December 1968 (the APA)). The APA provides for certain rights, including the right to inspect files, the right to be heard and judicial review. Appeals against decisions of a reviewing body may

be lodged with the Federal Administrative Court (within the meaning of the APA). In addition, the calendar of the reviewing body can also follow the legal holidays stipulated in the APA, which differs from customary Swiss securities trading days. However, to meet the demands of the capital markets, both SIX Exchange Regulation and BX Swiss have decided partially to forgo the suspension of deadlines according to the legal holidays stipulated in the APA and will in large part suspend their review deadlines in line with the Swiss securities trading calendar.

Prospectus

In principle and subject to exemptions and certain easements for selected issuers and financial instruments, under FinSA, any person in Switzerland who makes a public offer for the acquisition of securities or any person who seeks the admission of securities to trading on a trading venue in Switzerland must first publish a prospectus. Furthermore, any such prospectus must be submitted to a reviewing body for approval prior to publication (ex-ante review).

As stipulated by FinSA, the reviewing body will check that applicable prospectuses are complete, coherent and understandable. According to FinSO, the review for 'completeness' will be limited to formal compliance with the content guidelines annexed to FinSO (which are largely based on the well-established content requirements (ie, schemes) previously in place under the SIX Listing Rules). With regard to 'coherence', the prospectus offices of SIX Exchange Regulation and BX Swiss will consider whether:

- any risks mentioned in the summary are also included in the risk factors section;
- the information in the summary corresponds to the information in other sections of the prospectus;
- all amounts concerning the use of issue proceeds correspond with the amount of the expected proceeds from the offering; and
- the financial figures included in the prospectus match those in the financial statements appended to the prospectus.

In addition, the prospectus offices of SIX Exchange Regulation and BX Swiss will check prospectuses for their 'understandability', considering whether:

- the prospectus includes a clear and detailed table of contents;
- the prospectus is free from unnecessary repetitions;
- related information is grouped together;
- the prospectus uses a font size that is easy to read;
- the prospectus is structured in a way that enables investors to understand the contents;
- the components of the mathematical formulas are defined in the prospectus; and
- the language in the prospectus is not deliberately misleading.

In terms of time frames, according to FinSA, the applicable reviewing body shall review prospectuses as soon as they are received. New issuers are required to submit their prospectus for approval 20 calendar days (10 for all other issuers) prior to the publication of the prospectus or admission to trading (as applicable). To the extent that the reviewing body requires amendments or revisions to the prospectus, it will notify the offeror within the applicable timeframe indicating the reasons for the requests. Following receipt of the revised prospectus, the reviewing body shall decide within the same timeframes (ie, 20 calendar days for new issuers and 10 calendar days for all other issuers) whether the revised prospectus shall be approved. Importantly, if the reviewing body does not provide a response within the specified period, this will not mean that the prospectus is deemed approved. Following approval, prospectuses are valid for 12 months for public offers or admission to trading on a trading venue of securities of the same category and the same issuer (subject to any required supplements, see below).

Once approved by a reviewing body, the offeror of securities or the person requesting their admission to trading must file the prospectus with the reviewing body that approved it and publish the prospectus no later than the beginning of the public offer or admission of the securities to trading. In the context of IPOs, the approved prospectus will also need to be published at least six business days (ie, working days) before the end of the offering period; therefore implementing a new minimum statutory requirement for the duration of IPOs. FinSA sets forth a number of permissible publication mediums, including in an electronic format on the website of the issuer or trading venue involved, so long as a paper version is available free of charge upon request.

Supplements

Generally, a duty to publish a prospectus supplement is triggered by any new facts or circumstances that arise between the time of approval of the prospectus and the completion of the public offer or opening of trading on a trading venue that could have a significant influence on the assessment of the securities. As with prospectuses, in principle, supplements will also need to be approved by the applicable reviewing body prior to publication as well as published in the same form as the approved prospectus. In addition, as a general matter, after the publication of a supplement investors must be given the opportunity to withdraw their subscriptions or acquisitions.

Pricing supplements

Importantly, events contemplated by and disclosed in the prospectus or the final terms (eg, approvals under company law or by the authorities, the stipulation of the price or volume of the securities offered or possible alternatives to a capital increase) do not trigger a duty to publish a supplement and, thus, do not require the approval of the applicable reviewing body prior to publication or affect an offering's timeline (as with prospectus supplements described in more below). Indeed, FinSA specifically states that if the final issue price and the issue volume cannot be stated in the prospectus, the prospectus must then indicate the maximum issue price and the criteria and conditions used to determine the issue volume. However, issuers need to file such information (ie, the pricing supplement) with the applicable reviewing body upon publication. In summary, relatively standard pricing supplements in IPOs, for example, do not need to be approved by a reviewing body prior to publication and, thus, do not affect an offering's timeline.

Prospectus supplements

However, for facts and circumstances not contemplated by or disclosed in the prospectus that are capable of materially influencing average market participants investment decisions, a supplement to the prospectus must be immediately prepared and reported to the applicable reviewing body. Subject to exemptions, the approval of the prospectus supplement may be required and the reviewing body shall provide such approval within a maximum of seven calendar days. If any amendments or changes to the supplement are required, the period for such revisions shall be no more than three calendar days in the case of a public offer and no more than seven calendar days in the case of an admission to trading. Once approved, the supplement must be published immediately and in the same format that the prospectus was published.

To facilitate the timely publication of supplements relating to certain events, FinSA provides that the reviewing bodies shall maintain a list of facts that, by their nature, are not subject to approval by the reviewing body. According to the rules of the respective prospectus offices of SIX Exchange Regulation and BX Swiss in the context of IPOs the publication of supplements that provide notifications to the market relating to the occurrence of new facts that (according to the rules of the respective Swiss or foreign trading venue where application for listing is sought or as applicable) are made public and are possibly

price-sensitive may be filed as a supplement not subject to review or approval by the prospectus office. In such scenarios, the supplement has to be published at the same time as the facts are reported to and filed with the applicable reviewing body.

However, the rules of the respective prospectus offices of SIX Exchange Regulation and BX Swiss have specifically excluded supplements relating to new facts that entail or result in changes to published annual, semi-annual or quarterly financial statements of the issuers concerned (despite such facts being also ad hoc relevant and possibly price sensitive). In such cases and in the case of all other supplements relating to new facts and circumstances that could have a significant influence on the assessment of the securities, the applicable reviewing body will then follow the review timelines stipulated above.

In each of the above-described scenarios (ie, other than upon publication of customary pricing supplements), following the publication of the prospectus supplement, the offer period cannot end sooner than two days after publication of the supplement or instead of extending the offer period, the issuer may, under the terms of the offer, grant investors the option to withdraw their subscriptions or acquisitions within two days of the final completion of the public offer.

Exemptions from the duty to publish a prospectus

While arguably less relevant in the context of IPOs, FinSA includes express exemptions from the duty to publish a prospectus in the context of public offerings in Switzerland or admissions to trading. The prospectus exemptions to the duty to publish a prospectus in the context of public offerings include, among others, offerings limited to investors classified as professional clients as defined in the FinSA and offerings addressed to fewer than 500 investors.

Furthermore, there are certain other exemptions from the duty to publish a prospectus depending on the type of securities or the context in which such securities are being publicly offered and certain exemptions that apply in the context of the admission to trading on a trading venue in Switzerland. Importantly, FinSA provides that in circumstances where a prospectus is not required, offerors or issuers must nevertheless treat investors equally when sharing essential information regarding the offering.

Admission to trading on SIX

General

The listing application must be submitted pursuant to article 43 of the SIX Listing Rules by a recognised representative in writing to the SIX Exchange Regulation. As a general rule, the listing application must be submitted no later than 20 trading days prior to the intended listing date for new issuers (10 trading days for all other issuers).

The listing application must contain a short description of the securities to be listed and a request regarding the planned first trading day, as well as a reference to the enclosures to the application that are required by the SIX Regulatory Board. In preparing the listing application, issuers must also indicate which regulatory standard they are applying to and demonstrate their satisfaction of the corresponding requirements (further details regarding the regulatory standards are outlined below). In addition, if certain listing requirements are not met, the listing application must contain a well-founded request for an exemption.

In summary, the following documentation must be submitted to SIX, together with the duly signed listing application:

- evidence that the issuer has a prospectus that has been approved by a reviewing body in accordance with FinSA or that is deemed to be approved in accordance with the FinSA;
- a copy of a current extract from the commercial register of the issuer;
- a copy of the valid articles of association of the issuer;

- if necessary, an original of the duly signed declaration by the issuer that any printed share certificates will comply with the SIX SIS AG (SIX SIS) printing regulations. In the case of book-entry securities, the issuer must submit an explanation of how the holders of such securities may obtain proof of their holding;
- evidence that the auditors of the issuer fulfil the requirements of auditors for public companies set out in articles 7 and 8 of the Federal Act on the Licensing and Oversight of Auditors (AOA);
- an original of the duly signed declaration by the lead manager of the issuer that the free float of relevant equity securities is sufficient;
- an official notice pursuant to articles 40a and 40b of the SIX Listing Rules;
- a duly signed declaration by the issuer in accordance with article 45 of the SIX Listing Rules stating that:
 - its responsible bodies are in agreement with the listing;
 - it has read and acknowledges the SIX Listing Rules together with any applicable Additional Rules and the corresponding implementing provisions, as well as the SIX rules of procedure and sanction regulations and recognises them expressly in the form of the declaration of consent. The issuer further recognises the board of arbitration determined by SIX and expressly agrees to be bound by any arbitration agreement. The issuer also recognises that its continued listing is conditional upon it agreeing to be bound by the version of the legal foundations that is in force at any given time; and
 - it will pay the listing fees.

To the extent possible, all documents should be submitted together with the listing application. However, if such documents are not yet in final form, draft versions may be submitted with the final versions to follow. The issuer's evidence that it has a prospectus approved by a reviewing body in accordance with FinSA must be submitted by 7.30am on the first trading day. The remaining annexes to the application must be submitted in their final forms no later than 4pm one exchange day prior to the first trading day (subject to certain exemptions, in particular in connection with offerings that involve book-building processes).

Regulatory standards

In preparing the listing application on SIX, issuers must indicate which regulatory standard they are applying to and demonstrate their satisfaction of the corresponding requirements. The following main regulatory standards are available for listings on SIX:

- International Reporting Standard. This is aimed at international investors. It has the most comprehensive transparency requirements and requires the application of international financial reporting standards (IFRS), US generally accepted accounting principles (US GAAP) or another internationally recognised accounting standard.
- Swiss Reporting Standard. This is aimed at domestic investors. Issuers may apply Swiss GAAP FER or the financial reporting standard under the Swiss Banking Act, with the other listing requirements remaining consistent with the International Reporting Standard.
- Standard for Investment Companies. This is for the listing of equity securities issued by investment companies (ie, companies whose sole purpose is to pursue collective investment schemes to generate income or capital gains, or both, without engaging in any actual entrepreneurial activity as such and that do not operate under a licence as a collective investment scheme under the Swiss Federal Act on Collective Investments).
- Standard for Real Estate Companies. This is for the listing of equity securities issued by a real estate company (ie, companies that

continually generate at least two-thirds of their revenue from real estate-related activities).

The following table outlines the key listing requirements pursuant to these SIX regulatory standards.

	International Reporting Standard	Swiss Reporting Standard	Standard for Investment Companies	Standard for Real Estate Companies
Financial track record	Three years	Three years	N/A	N/A
Minimum equity capital requirements (in million francs)	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Minimum free float in percentage	20 per cent	20 per cent	20 per cent	20 per cent
Minimum free float market capitalisation (in million francs)	25	25	25	25
Financial reporting	IFRS/US GAAP	Swiss GAAP FER/ Standard according to Banking Act	IFRS/US GAAP	Swiss GAAP FER/IFRS

Minimum equity capital requirements

Pursuant to the regulatory standards, an issuer’s consolidated equity capital, as reported on its consolidated balance sheet as at the first day of trading, must amount to at least 2.5 million francs for all the standards listed above. Collective investment schemes must hold assets of at least 100 million francs, but exchange-traded funds differ from classic investment funds in this respect and no minimum capitalisation requirements apply to them (although there is a requirement that one or two market makers commit to posting firm bids and asks, the spread between which does not exceed a predefined percentage of indicated net asset value).

Financial track record

Pursuant to the regulatory standards, an issuer must:

- have existed as a company for at least three years; and
- have produced audited annual financial statements for the three full financial years preceding the listing application.

The three-year rule does not apply to companies that are listed under the Standard for Investment Companies or the Standard for Real Estate Companies; however, companies with a shorter financial history may benefit from exemptions granted by the SIX Regulatory Board (if necessary) where it appears in the interests of the issuer or of the investors, namely in cases where the listed entity:

- is the result of a corporate reorganisation such as a merger, spin-off or other transaction in which a pre-existing company or portions thereof are continuing as commercial entities; or
- has not yet been able to present financial statements for the prescribed period of time, but nonetheless wishes to access the capital markets in order to finance its strategy for growth (‘young companies’); and
- in each case, the SIX Regulatory Board has a guarantee that investors are adequately informed and possess the information required to make a well-founded assessment of the issuer and the securities to be admitted.

Where exemptions are granted, issuers must either comply with, among other conditions, stricter transparency requirements, such as quarterly reporting until annual accounts for three complete financial years are available (in connection with young companies) or provide additional financial information, such as pro forma financials (in the case of listed entities resulting from a corporate reorganisation).

For further details, see the SIX Directive on Exemptions regarding Duration of Existence of the Issuer and the SIX Directive on the Presentation of a Complex Financial History in the Listing Prospectus.

Minimum free float

At least 20 per cent of all of the issuer’s outstanding securities of the same category must be publicly owned with capitalisation of at least 25 million francs. The definition of free float for purposes of the SIX Listing Rules is set out in the Directive on the Distribution of Equity Securities.

Special listing requirements for foreign issuers

Foreign issuers of equity securities are subject to certain additional listing requirements as set out in the SIX Directive on the Listing of Foreign Companies. Generally, these additional requirements are not very onerous and in practice they do not pose particular issues.

Prospectus

6 | What information must be made available to prospective investors and how must it be presented?

In accordance with FinSA and FinSO, prospectuses shall contain the essential information for the investor’s decision on the issuer and the shares being offered. While FinSA outlines the high-level categories of information to be included in prospectuses, FinSO sets out in a series of annexes detailed information requirements depending on the type of security being offered. These annexes largely track the previous information requirements under the SIX Listing Rules. Annex 1 to the FinSO sets out the minimum content requirements for equity prospectuses and generally requires, inter alia, the following information:

- separate detailed and clearly understandable summary of the issuer, the offering and any other essential information in a tabular format;
- the name of the reviewing body and the date of approval must prominently appear on the cover of the prospectus and in the summary;
- description of the main risks with regard to the issuer and its industry;
- information on the board of directors, management, auditors and other governing bodies of the issuer;
- description of the issuer’s business activities and prospects insofar as they are of material importance in assessing the business activities and earning power of the issuer (ie, business outlook) as well as information on material court, arbitration and administrative proceedings;
- description of past investments, current investments and investments already approved as well as a capitalisation table;
- description of capital and voting rights of the issuer’s securities as well as an overview of significant shareholders in accordance with articles 120 and 121 FMIA;
- overview of the issuer’s information policy;
- the issuer’s last two published financial reports containing the annual financial statements for the last three full financial years, drawn up in accordance with a recognised financial reporting standard as published by the applicable reviewing body and audited by the auditors (subject to exemptions and additional conditions in the event of significant structural changes (ie, the inclusion of carve-out, combined and/or pro forma financial statements));
- information on dividends and financial results;

- estimated net proceeds of the offering;
- information in the securities being offered (ie, issue price and volume; risks; legal foundation; rights; restrictions; publication; securities number, ISIN and trading currency; and information on the offer, including net proceeds); and
- responsibility for the prospectus.

The information can be in one of the official languages of Switzerland (ie, German, French or Italian) or in English. As noted above, and unlike under the previous prospectus regime, under FinSA and FinSO, prospectuses must contain a clearly understandable summary of the essential information that facilitates a comparison with similar securities. In addition, prospectuses may contain references to previously or simultaneously published documents in all sections apart from the summary.

If the final issue price and the issue volume cannot be stated in the prospectus, the prospectus must indicate the maximum issue price and the criteria and conditions used to determine the issue volume. Once available, the information on the final issue price and on the issue volume shall be filed with the applicable reviewing body and published.

The reviewing body is permitted to grant exemptions and provide that information need not be included in the prospectus where, for example, disclosure would be seriously detrimental to the issuer and omission would not mislead investors with regard to facts and circumstances that are essential to an informed investment decision. In any case, the reviewing body needs to ensure that the interests of investors remain protected.

The prospectus may consist of a standalone document or several individual documents. If it consists of two or more individual documents, it may be broken down into a registration document with information about the issuer; a securities note with information on the securities to be offered publicly admitted to trading on a trading venue; and the summary.

Publicity and marketing

7 | What restrictions on publicity and marketing apply during the IPO process?

FinSA (together with FinSO) generally provides that any advertising for financial instruments (ie, aimed at investors and serves to draw attention to specific financial instruments) must be clearly indicated as such, for example with an appropriate disclaimer. Any such advertising must also mention the prospectus for the financial instrument in question as well as where the prospectus can be obtained (ie, the contact details for the issuer, offeror or the underwriters). Furthermore, as a basic principle, any advertising and other information on such financial instruments must correspond to the details given in the prospectus.

In connection with any advertising, it is also important to bear in mind that under article 69 FinSA (Liability), whoever makes statements in prospectuses or similar communications (eg, press releases, press conferences or other marketing materials) that are inaccurate, misleading or in violation of statutory requirements, without having acted with the required care, is liable to the acquirer of a financial instrument for the damage thereby caused. Thus, the term 'similar communications' extends the application of FinSA beyond the offering prospectus and potentially attaches liability to any misleading publicity relating to a securities offering (regardless of the form of media).

In short, if the above conditions and considerations are observed and adhered to and subject to any restrictions under foreign securities laws depending on the structure of the offering, an issuer of equity securities in Switzerland may generally engage in any type of public relations or marketing activities, including promotion of its products and services and advertising a forthcoming equity offering.

Enforcement

8 | What sanctions can public enforcers impose for breach of IPO rules? On whom?

FinSA introduces criminal liability in the event of intentional violation of the prospectus rules and regulations thereunder, including where that person provides false information or withholds material facts in the prospectus or fails to publish a prospectus where required under FinSA. For instance, a fine not exceeding 500,000 francs shall be imposed on any person who wilfully fails to publish a prospectus pursuant to article 3 of FinSA by the beginning of the public offer at the latest. Notably, entities that are subject to FINMA's supervision are exempted from these provisions (whereas other applicable (and analogous) provisions would rather apply).

In the case of a breach of the SIX Listing Rules, or of any additional rules or regulations issued by SIX, the SIX Exchange Regulation and SIX Sanctions Commission can impose one or more of the following sanctions on issuers, guarantors or recognised representatives (as applicable):

- warning;
- reprimand;
- a fine of up to 1 million francs (in cases of negligence) or 10 million francs (in cases of wrongful intent);
- suspension of trading or registration;
- issue of a new registration decision under stipulations or conditions;
- delisting or reallocation to a different regulatory listing standard;
- exclusion from further listings; and
- withdrawal of recognition or registration.

The SIX Exchange Regulation is also, subject to the relevant rules, permitted to inform the chairman of the board of directors of SIX Group Ltd, the supervisory authorities and, where appropriate, the competent public prosecuting authorities of suspected violations of the law or other wrongdoing by market participants.

TIMETABLE AND COSTS

Timetable

9 | Describe the timetable of a typical IPO and stock exchange listing in your jurisdiction.

In general, the timetable of an equity offering depends on both the type and the size of the offering. In addition, certain offerings may require a greater amount of preparation on the part of the issuer, particularly with respect to corporate governance and corporate structure, as well as accounting and reporting requirements. In addition, when considering the timetable of IPOs in Switzerland, the timeline requirements of the prospectus approval process under new Financial Services Act (FinSA) and application process to the trading venue must be considered.

In relation to the prospectus approval process, according to FinSA, the applicable reviewing body shall review prospectuses as soon as they are received. First-time issuers are required to submit their prospectus for approval 20 calendar days (10 for all other issuers) prior to the publication or admission to trading. To the extent that the reviewing body requires amendments to the prospectus, it will notify the issuer within these timeframes indicating the reasons for the revisions. Following receipt of the revised prospectus, the reviewing body shall decide within the same timeframes (ie, within an additional 20 calendar days or 10 calendar days for all other issuers) whether the revised prospectus shall be approved. For IPOs, once approved by the reviewing body, the approved prospectus will also need to be published at least six business days before the end of the offering period. In the event that the duty to publish a prospectus supplement arises (other

than, for example, customary pricing supplements), the approval of the supplement by the applicable reviewing body shall be provided within a maximum of seven calendar days (if required). If any amendments or changes to the supplement are required, the period for such revisions shall be no more than three calendar days in the case of a public offer and no more than seven calendar days in the case of an admission to trading. Following the publication of the prospectus supplement (other than, for example, customary pricing supplements), the offer period cannot end sooner than two days after publication of the supplement or instead of extending the offer period, the issuer may, under the terms of the offer, grant investors the option to withdraw their subscriptions or acquisitions within two days after the final completion of the public offer.

In parallel to the prospectus approval process, the listing application to SIX Exchange Regulation, for example, will also need to be submitted at least 20 trading days for new issuers (10 for all other issuer) prior to the start of the book-building period.

In principle, though, IPOs in Switzerland generally take between four and six months, and an indicative IPO can generally be organised into the following five phases.

IPO planning and preparation phase

During the IPO planning and preparation phase, there are likely to be many workstreams operating in parallel and which may overlap. During this phase, these workstreams generally address the following tasks:

- discussion and development of the issuer's strategy, business plan, equity story (ie, investment case) and offering structure;
- establishing a timetable and holding kick-off meetings;
- selection of the responsible team both internally at the issuer and externally, including the bookrunners and any other managers (ie, the banking syndicate) and legal and financial advisers;
- making any necessary changes in respect of the company's corporate structure to meet legal or operational requirements (the length of this phase depends on, among other factors, any required restructurings);
- consideration of matters concerning capital, financial and accounting or tax structures; and
- beginning due diligence exercises (which includes business, financial and legal due diligence and will continue throughout the offering process).

Drafting phase

During the drafting phase, the issuer along with its advisers will:

- draft the prospectus and other key legal documents;
- develop marketing and presentation materials, such as early look, analyst and pilot-fishing presentations (notably, in the event that an issuer has publicly listed debt securities on an EU securities exchange, the requirements under the European Market Abuse Regulation (MAR) need to be taken into account);
- engage with the issuer's auditors regarding presentation of financial information in the prospectus and delivery of comfort letters; and
- attend courtesy meetings at SIX Swiss Exchange Ltd (SIX) to discuss the contemplated offering structure and content of the prospectus.

Negotiating and investor education phase

During the negotiating and investor education phase, the IPO workstreams generally address the following tasks:

- shareholders' resolutions in respect of the offering and capital increase (if applicable);
- negotiation of underwriting agreement and any sub-underwriting agreements (if applicable);
- delivery of the analyst presentation and review of research reports;

- submission of the draft prospectus to the reviewing body;
- submission of the SIX listing application and available annexes;
- draft of roadshow presentation and other materials for analysts, press and investors;
- responding to any comments or requests for additional information from the reviewing body and/or SIX Exchange Regulation/Disclosure Office (as applicable);
- inclusion of interim financial statements into offering documents and update analysts (if applicable); and
- issuance of a press release regarding the issuer's intention to float, followed by the publication of analysts' research reports.

Pre-trading and marketing phase

During the period from approximately two weeks prior to the first day of trading, the IPO workstreams generally address the following tasks:

- approval of the prospectus and underwriting agreement by the board of directors of the issuer;
- final price discussions with the board of directors of the issuer and setting of price range;
- approval of the prospectus from the reviewing body and SIX Exchange Regulation for the listing of the equity securities;
- execution of the underwriting agreement; and
- beginning the offer period, publication of the prospectus, start of the price-fixing process (eg, book-building process) and beginning roadshow presentations.

During the period from approximately one to two trading days prior to the first day of trading, the IPO workstreams generally address the following tasks:

- subscription and payment of the nominal value of the equity securities to be offered (if applicable);
- registration of capital increase in the commercial register of the issuer (if applicable);
- establishment of the final offer size and price and execution of the pricing agreement to the underwriting agreement and pricing supplement to the prospectus (if applicable), along with any required filings with the reviewing body and SIX Exchange Regulation (as applicable); and
- allocation of shares to investors.

First day of trading and aftermarket phase

Following the first day of trading, the IPO workstreams generally address the following tasks:

- stabilisation of the shares along with the disclosure of stabilisation measures (within five trading days);
- settlement and payment of net proceeds (usually within two trading days of the first trading day); and
- exercise of the over-allotment option (within 30 calendar days after first trading day) and disclosure of exercise of over-allotment option (within five trading days after exercise).

Costs

10 | What are the usual costs and fees for conducting an IPO?

The costs and fees associated with IPOs in Switzerland can vary greatly depending on the size and nature of the offering. The typical costs and fees associated with a Swiss issuer conducting an IPO exclusively on SIX can generally be allocated as follows:

- reviewing body fees (including deposit of the prospectus): 5,400–15,000 francs (depending on the type of prospectus and any additional review requirements or preliminary ruling or enquiry requests, which may be charged at an hourly rate of between 100–500 francs);

- SIX listing fees: depending on size and other factors, between 20,000 and 100,000 francs;
- underwriters' fees: depending on size, type of issuer and other factors, typically between 2 and 5 per cent of the gross proceeds of the sale of the shares (reflecting various possible fee appropriations, including base fee, selling fee, management fee and incentive fees);
- issuer's counsel fees: depending on type of offering (eg, regulation S as opposed to rule 144A) and other factors, typically between 600,000 and 1.5 million francs;
- underwriters' counsel fees: depending on type of offering (eg, regulation S as opposed to rule 144A) and other factors, typically between 300,000 and 650,000 francs;
- financial printer fees: typically, between 20,000 and 40,000 francs;
- Swiss federal stamp duty (if shares are newly issued): 1 per cent on the issue price of the new shares placed in the offering; and
- Swiss federal securities transfer taxes (if shares are already in existence): up to 0.15 or 0.3 per cent of the offer price for the existing shares sold in the offering.

In addition to the above, miscellaneous fees and expenses, such as auditor fees, roadshow fees or the fees of the commercial registry and the notary public (in the event that the IPO involves a capital increase or other changes to the articles of association of the issuer), must also be taken into consideration.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Typical requirements

- 11 | What corporate governance requirements are typical or required of issuers conducting an IPO and obtaining a stock exchange listing in your jurisdiction?

Prior to becoming a public company, there are no specific corporate governance requirements that issuers have to satisfy ahead of their shares being admitted to trading. Nevertheless, during the IPO planning process, issuers typically evaluate the structure of their board and corporate governance strategy and consult authoritative industry standards for best practices that can and should be adopted prior to becoming a publicly listed company. The four main sources of rules on corporate governance that issuers should bear in mind ahead of conducting an IPO in Switzerland are as follows.

Swiss Code of Obligations

The Swiss Code of Obligations requires, inter alia, that listed companies appoint recognised auditors and disclose significant shareholders in their annual report.

On 19 June 2020, the Swiss Parliament approved legislation that will modernise certain aspects of Swiss corporate law. Most relevantly for IPOs, the legislative reform addresses, among other topics, corporate governance and executive compensation matters. Certain aspects of the revised CO partially entered into force in 2021, with the relevant OAC statutes (see below) likely entering into force in 2022 (with certain transitional periods as provided for therein).

Swiss Ordinance against Excessive Compensation in Listed Companies (OAC)

The popular referendum on 'say on pay' in Switzerland, known as the Minder Initiative, resulted in an amendment to the Swiss constitution and implemented rules currently codified in the OAC that apply from the first day Swiss issuers are listed on an exchange in Switzerland or abroad. Among other requirements, shareholders need to separately approve the annual fixed and variable aggregate compensation

of the board of directors and the executive management at the annual general meeting. In addition, directors, including the chairman, must be elected annually and the board of directors must prepare a separate compensation report. An issuer's articles of association must also include provisions for members of the board of directors and executive management regarding, among others, loans, retirement benefits, incentive and participations plans and the number of additional board and senior management positions such individuals are permitted to participate in outside of the issuer and related companies. Furthermore, certain categories of compensation are prohibited, including severance payments; thus, employment contracts of an issuer must be reviewed and brought in line with current Swiss law prior to becoming a public company. Notably, these provisions apply only to Swiss companies listed on an exchange in Switzerland or abroad. Foreign issuers with a registered address outside of Switzerland would not need to comply with these requirements.

The OAC came into effect on 1 January 2014 and remains valid for a transitional period until a formal statute is adopted. On 19 June 2020, the Swiss National Council and the Council of States voted in favour of the revision of the Swiss Code of Obligations implementing the OAC as a formal statute. Certain aspects of the revised CO partially entered into force in 2021, with the relevant OAC statutes likely entering into force in 2022 (with certain transitional periods as provided for therein; see also Swiss Code of Obligations above).

SIX Swiss Exchange Directive on Information relating to Corporate Governance

The SIX Regulatory Board has issued the Directive on Information relating to Corporate Governance (DCG), which outlines certain corporate governance information issuers are required to publish annually so that investors are able to evaluate the characteristics of securities and the quality of issuers, including details on the issuer's management and control mechanisms. The categories of information that issuers are required to publish include descriptions on the group structure and shareholders, capital structure, board of directors, executive committee, compensation, shareholdings and loans, shareholders' participation rights, change of control and defence measures, the issuer's auditors and information policy and, as from 1 July 2021, information on general quiet periods (ie, blackout periods). Notably, this directive applies to all issuers whose equity securities have their primary or main listing on SIX once their shares have been admitted to trading. The DCG follows a 'comply or explain' approach, permitting an issuer to deviate from the disclosure obligations set out therein to the extent that the annual report contains substantiated justifications for such deviation or non-disclosure.

Swiss Code of Best Practice for Corporate Governance

This publication is a best practice industry standard in Switzerland that contains recommendations for the organisation of the board of directors, including the formation of committees and the recommended composition of such committees, and the compensation of the board of directors.

New issuers

- 12 | Are there special allowances for certain types of new issuers?

Under FinSA and the Financial Services Ordinance (FinSO), there are no specific limitations or requirements in relation to newly incorporated issuers. Rather, according to the FinSO Annex 1 (which stipulates the content requirements for equity prospectuses), specific derogations are provided for newly incorporated issuers. For example, while the last two published financial reports containing the annual financial statements

for the last three full financial years, drawn up in accordance with a recognised financial reporting standard and audited by the auditors must be included in the prospectus, for companies that have existed commercially for a shorter length of time, the corresponding reduction in the period that the annual financial statements must cover is permitted to be included instead. In addition, for newly founded companies an audited opening balance sheet or audited balance sheet after any contribution in kind has been made needs to be included.

In addition, upon application to the SIX Regulatory Board, issuers who do not satisfy the minimum duration listing requirement (ie, three years) can apply for an exemption from this requirement pursuant to the SIX Directive on Exemptions regarding Duration of Existence of the Issuer.

Anti-takeover devices

13 | What types of anti-takeover devices are typically implemented by IPO issuers in your jurisdiction? Are there generally applicable rules relevant to takeovers that are relevant?

Anti-takeover measures

Issuers in Switzerland can include certain anti-takeover measures in their articles of association. These measures may include:

- share transfer restrictions;
- limitations on the voting rights per shareholder;
- qualified quorum for the cancellation of certain provisions of the articles of association, such as share transfer restrictions;
- shares with enhanced voting rights;
- provisions requiring a certain percentage of voting rights represented in the shareholders' meeting in order to pass resolutions; and
- authorised or conditional share capital with exclusion of preemptive rights that the board of directors may use in the event of a tender offer.

Notably, as in the EU, Swiss law restricts the board of directors' ability to take defensive measures once a public tender offer has been announced.

Mandatory tender offers

Pursuant to article 135 of the FMIA, anyone acquiring shares of a Swiss listed company, whether directly or indirectly or acting in concert with third parties, which, when added to the shares already held by such person, exceed 33.33 per cent of the voting rights (whether exercisable or not) of such company, must submit a public tender offer for all listed equity securities of the company. Mandatory tender offers may not be subject to conditions except for important reasons, such as where official authorisation is required for an acquisition, or the equity securities in question do not include any voting entitlement, or the provider wants the specific nature of the target company's economic substance to remain unchanged.

The articles of association of companies may, however, provide for a higher threshold of up to 49 per cent (opting-up) or may declare the mandatory tender offer obligations to be inapplicable at all (opting-out). Such provisions are often put in place where there are large shareholders who may risk accidentally triggering the threshold if their shareholdings change or if they, perhaps along with other family member shareholders, are viewed as a group acting in concert.

If an opting-up or opting-out clause is included following the listing of the company, strict transparency and majority requirements in the shareholders' meeting must be observed; thus, many issuers contemplating an IPO consider whether such opting-up or opting-out provisions are important aspects of their corporate strategy.

FOREIGN ISSUERS

Special requirements

14 | What are the main considerations for foreign issuers looking to list in your jurisdiction? Are there special requirements for foreign issuer IPOs?

Regulatory overview

As a basic principle, the same rules apply to the public offering and listing of securities by domestic and foreign issuers in Switzerland. In addition, even though Switzerland is not part of the EU and cannot benefit from EU passporting rules, pursuant to FinSA and FinSO, certain prospectuses produced under foreign legislation may be approved by a reviewing body in Switzerland if they are drafted in accordance with international standards established by international organisations of securities regulators and the disclosure obligations are equivalent to the requirements under FinSA (in essence the information in the prospectus must comply in substance with the content of the applicable annexes pursuant to FinSO).

The reviewing body is also permitted to provide that prospectuses approved in certain jurisdictions are considered automatically approved in Switzerland. In such cases, the reviewing body shall publish a list of countries whose prospectus approval is automatically recognised in Switzerland. The reviewing body may also stipulate by which authority the approval needs to be issued. Notably, the prospectuses (and any accompanying supplement to such prospectuses) need to be in an official language of Switzerland or English. As of 1 June 2020, the respective lists of the prospectus offices of SIX Exchange Regulation and BX Swiss include most major European countries, the United States and Australia. Nevertheless, no later than the beginning of the public offer or admission of the securities in question to trading, the prospectus must be registered and filed with a reviewing body, published and made available on request free of charge in paper form.

It is also worth noting that, subject to certain conditions, Swiss law allows Swiss companies to prepare their accounts and to report in a foreign currency. Hence, if an EU or US-domiciled company decides to list in Switzerland it can either list the shares of the foreign entity on SIX or re-domicile to Switzerland by setting up a new Swiss holding company and list the shares of the new holding company on SIX. In either scenario, the issuer can continue to report in euros or US dollars. In addition, depending on the regulatory standard applied for, financials can be prepared in accordance with either IFRS, US GAAP or Swiss GAAP FER and securities can be traded in Swiss francs, euros and US dollars.

In summary, while foreign issuers of equity securities are subject to certain additional listing requirements as set out in the SIX Directive on the Listing of Foreign Companies (and described in greater detail below), generally these additional requirements are not onerous and, in practice, they do not pose particular issues or result in delays.

Primary listing requirements on SIX

If a foreign issuer does not have its equity securities listed on another exchange recognised by the SIX Regulatory Board, it may only submit an application for a primary listing. For a primary listing, the foreign issuer must demonstrate that it has not been refused listing in its home country pursuant to investor protection legislations. This requirement is usually satisfied by an opinion delivered from an independent law firm or a relevant extract from the rejection decision issued by the competent authority in the issuer's home country in connection with the registration process in question that clearly indicates that the company was not refused listing because it failed to comply with investor protection regulations.

In addition to the issuer declarations required under article 45 of the SIX Listing Rules, the foreign issuer must recognise the Swiss courts as having jurisdiction over claims arising out of or in connection

with the listing on SIX. The SIX Regulatory Board further reserves the right to modify the listing procedure as appropriate if, under the foreign issuer's home country's company law, the time at which the equity securities are legally created is not the same as that under Swiss law (ie, by entry in the commercial register).

Secondary listing requirements on SIX

A foreign issuer whose equity securities are listed on another exchange recognised by the SIX Regulatory Board may, however, choose between a primary and a secondary listing on SIX. The same applies if a company is planning on listing simultaneously on another primary exchange and on SIX (a 'dual listing'). In principle, exchanges that are members of the Federation of European Securities Exchange and the World Federation of Exchanges are recognised by the SIX Regulatory Board as having equivalent listing provisions.

In connection with secondary listings, the applicable issuer requirements are deemed fulfilled if its equity securities are listed in its home country or in a third country on an exchange recognised by the SIX Regulatory Board. When submitting the listing application, the applicant must, among other things, declare that the equity securities have an adequate free float (ie, capitalisation of the shares circulating in Switzerland is at least 10 million francs or if the applicant can otherwise demonstrate that there is a genuine market for the equity securities concerned).

Selling foreign issues to domestic investors

15 | Where a foreign issuer is conducting an IPO outside your jurisdiction but not conducting a public offering within your jurisdiction, are there exemptions available to permit sales to investors within your jurisdiction?

If the offering of equity securities does not qualify as a public offering in the sense of FinSA and no admission to trading of equity securities on a Swiss trading venue is sought (ie, a non-public offering of equity securities in or into Switzerland that are not admitted to trading on any Swiss trading venue), no prospectus duty under FinSA arises. The process for carrying out a private placement is, therefore, not regulated in the same way as public offerings. The drafting of the offering documentation (if any) for private placements is determined by Swiss market standard in a manner designed to minimise potential civil liability issues.

In addition, FinSA includes certain exemptions from the duty to publish a prospectus, inter alia, depending on the type of offer, type of securities as well as certain exemptions that apply in the context of the admission to trading on a trading venue in Switzerland.

TAX

Tax issues

16 | Are there any unique tax issues that are relevant to IPOs in your jurisdiction?

The issuance of new shares by, and capital contributions to, a company resident in Switzerland are subject to a one-off capital duty of 1 per cent, with issuances of up to 1 million francs being exempt. Exemptions also apply for certain restructurings.

The transfer of Swiss equity securities is subject to securities transfer tax at a rate of 0.15 per cent, whereas the transfer of foreign equity securities is taxed at a rate of 0.3 per cent, in each case if at least one of the parties or intermediaries involved qualifies as a Swiss securities dealer (as defined in the Swiss Federal Stamp Duty Act). Certain types of transactions or parties are exempt; for example, group restructurings and Swiss and foreign funds.

INVESTOR CLAIMS

Fora

17 | In which fora can IPO investors seek redress? Is non-judicial resolution of complaints a possibility?

IPO investors can seek redress for their claims via the Swiss judicial system with prospectus liability being their main cause of action.

Class actions

18 | Are class actions possible in IPO-related claims?

IPO-related class action claims are not provided for under the current laws of Switzerland.

Claims, defendants and remedies

19 | What are the causes of action? Whom can investors sue? And what remedies may investors seek?

Under article 69 FinSA, whoever makes statements in prospectuses or similar communications that are inaccurate, misleading or in violation of statutory requirements, without having acted with the required care, is liable to the acquirer of a financial instrument for the damage thereby caused. Separately, for information contained in the summary of a prospectus, liability is limited to matters where such information is misleading, incorrect or inconsistent when read together with the other parts of the prospectus. For incorrect or misleading information about the main prospects (ie, forward-looking statements) regarding the issuer, liability is limited to cases where such information was provided against better knowledge or without an appropriate disclaimer about the uncertainty regarding future developments. It should also be noted that FinSO requires prospectuses to include information about the companies or persons that are assuming responsibility for the content of the prospectus as well as a declaration by these companies or persons that the information is correct to the best of their knowledge and that no material facts or circumstances have been omitted.

In order to establish a prospectus liability claim under article 69 FinSA, the following conditions must be met (each of which to be proven by the claimant):

- the prospectus was inaccurate, misleading or otherwise in violation of statutory requirements;
- the defendant was intentionally or negligently responsible for such statements;
- the claimant suffered damages; and
- the damages were proximately caused by such inaccurate, misleading or legally noncompliant information.

Thus, prospectus liability claims in relation to prospectuses or similar communications (eg, press releases and roadshows materials) may be brought in Switzerland against whoever has been involved in producing the prospectus or similar communications. While this potentially casts a rather large net, the legislative history around the new article 69 FinSA suggests that that it was the legislator's intention to limit prospectus liability to the entity making the offering and assuming responsibility for the prospectus or similar communication (ie, the issuer or, if applicable, the shareholder offering the offered shares). In addition, generally under Swiss law the hurdles for a successful prospectus liability claim are very high.

The FinSA also introduces criminal liability in the event of intentional violation of the Swiss prospectus rules and regulations, including where any person willfully provides false information or withholds material facts in the prospectus or fails to publish a prospectus where required under FinSA by the beginning of the public offer at the latest.

In connection with a prospectus liability claim, potential defendants (ie, lawyers, banks and other advisors) can often mitigate and defend themselves against claims of wilful or negligent conduct by evoking a 'due diligence defence'. Switzerland does not have official due diligence guidelines and, thus, the essence of this defence will be based on standard market practice and the adherence to these established due diligence undertakings, which demonstrate that they acted with due care and diligence in the preparation of the prospectus or similar communications. Recognised due diligence undertakings include, inter alia, comprehensive documentary due diligence, meetings with management, review of the issuer's business plan, review of financial statements and meetings with the issuer's accounting personnel and auditors, interviews with third parties (such as customers and suppliers), site visits, directors' and officers' questionnaires, negotiation of representations and warranties in the underwriting agreement, legal opinions and disclosure letters from legal counsel, comfort letters from auditors, officers' certificates and bring-down diligence calls.

In addition to initiating a prospectus liability claims under FinSA, a plaintiff may also try to invoke general remedies under Swiss contract or tort law. Furthermore, a person liable for a false or misleading prospectus may also become subject to criminal prosecution under the Swiss Criminal Code (eg, in the case of fraud (article 146) or forgery of documents (article 251)).

UPDATE AND TRENDS

Key developments

20 | Are there any other current developments or emerging trends that should be noted?

New prospectus regime

Switzerland's financial market regulatory framework has undergone fundamental and comprehensive reforms over the past few years. The most important parts of the reform package in terms of Swiss capital markets (mainly through the introduction of a new prospectus regime) are set out in the new Financial Services Act (FinSA) and its implementing ordinance, the Financial Services Ordinance (FinSO), both of which entered into force on 1 January 2020 (subject to the phase-in of certain provisions as well as transition periods, some of which has already passed). Notably, according to FinSO, the duty to publish an approved prospectus took effect as of 1 December 2020.

While we believe that the new prospectus regime will positively impact Swiss IPOs in the long-run, it remains to be seen how the prospectus approval process under FinSA and application process to the trading venue will work in practice.

Equivalency of Swiss stock exchanges

On 30 June 2019, the recognition by the European Commission of Swiss stock exchanges under MiFIR article 23 expired. In essence, without such equivalence, EU investment firms (subject to limited exemptions) are no longer permitted to trade applicable equity securities of Swiss companies on Swiss stock exchanges and trading venues.

However, the Swiss government has implemented certain protective measures intended to remove potential legal barriers under MiFIR article 23 for EU investment firms to trading Swiss equity securities on Swiss stock exchanges and trading venues (where liquidity for Swiss equity securities is typically greatest). In short, these protective measures introduced a recognition obligation for foreign trading venues that admit equity securities of certain Swiss companies to trading or facilitate such trading. While the measures adopted by the Swiss government will likely serve to protect the Swiss stock exchange infrastructure in the short-term, they remain in effect only until 31

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December 2021. Thus, the long-term impact for Swiss issuers and Swiss capital markets, as well whether a solution can be reached with the EU Commission on this topic, remain open.

SPAC IPOs

Recently, global markets have seen a re-emergence in the IPOs of special purpose acquisition companies (SPACs). By design, SPACs are essentially shell companies that subsequently acquire and merge with existing operating companies, in lieu of such operating companies conducting their own IPO.

SIX Exchange Regulation is responding to this global trend and is currently drafting regulations for the listing of SPACs on SIX. These regulations are expected to be published during the second half of 2021. Thereafter, we expect that Switzerland may become an attractive market for the listing of SPACs, inter alia, because of the greater flexibility of Swiss corporate law (compared to corporate law in other DACH jurisdictions), which will allow for the main features of US-listed SPACs to be replicated in a Swiss listed entity.

Coronavirus

21 | What emergency legislation, relief programmes and other initiatives specific to your practice area has your state implemented to address the pandemic? Have any existing government programmes, laws or regulations been amended to address these concerns? What best practices are advisable for clients?

The Swiss government implemented a number of measures in response to the coronavirus pandemic; however, there were no noteworthy measures introduced in relation to IPOs.

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Complex Commercial Litigation	Government Relations	Ports & Terminals	Tax Controversy
Construction	Healthcare Enforcement & Litigation	Private Antitrust Litigation	Tax on Inbound Investment
Copyright	Healthcare M&A	Private Banking & Wealth Management	Technology M&A
Corporate Governance	High-Yield Debt	Private Client	Telecoms & Media
Corporate Immigration	Initial Public Offerings	Private Equity	Trade & Customs
Corporate Reorganisations	Insurance & Reinsurance	Private M&A	Trademarks
Cybersecurity	Insurance Litigation	Product Liability	Transfer Pricing
Data Protection & Privacy	Intellectual Property & Antitrust	Product Recall	Vertical Agreements
Debt Capital Markets		Project Finance	
Defence & Security Procurement			
Dispute Resolution			

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