

A woman with dark, curly hair is looking at a laptop screen in a modern office setting. She is wearing a blue sweater and has her hand near her chin, appearing thoughtful or engaged. The background is blurred, showing office lights and a window. The overall lighting is blue and professional.

**GREATER
ZURICH
AREA**

Navigating the European DeepTech talent landscape from Switzerland

How Greater Zurich leads the way as Europe's top talent hub

About the whitepaper

Geared toward international DeepTech companies eyeing European expansion, this whitepaper outlines why Greater Zurich is the ideal location for a European tech hub. It provides data-driven insights on talent availability, costs, and culture, along with practical guidance on hiring and retention within Switzerland's unique ecosystem. The goal is to help HR leaders, hiring managers, and executives understand the region's advantages versus other tech hubs and navigate local practices and regulations effectively.

Seasoned DeepTech recruiters, AI & robotics researchers, and expansion experts from ANYbotics, ETH AI Center, Rockstar Recruiting, and Greater Zurich Area Ltd co-hosted a virtual roundtable for tech leaders interested in accessing European DeepTech talent. This whitepaper is a product of the discussion.

Speaker overview



Enzo Wälchli
CCO, ANYbotics



Daniel Naeff
Head of Innovation & Entrepreneurship, ETH AI Center



Klaus Fuchs
Co-Founder and CTO,
Rockstar Recruiting



Lukas Sieber
Executive Director USA,
Greater Zurich Area Ltd

Why Greater Zurich: Switzerland's unique tech talent advantage

In today's global race for tech talent, Switzerland, and particularly the Greater Zurich Area, stands out as one of the world's most attractive destinations for DeepTech companies looking for highly skilled talent.



Lukas Sieber
Greater Zurich Area Ltd



The quality of life [here] is pretty much unbeatable, making Greater Zurich and Switzerland a recruiting tool in itself.

Key advantages of Greater Zurich's talent hub

Academic excellence & universities

- Anchored by ETH Zurich (#1 outside the U.S. and U.K.), the University of Zurich, and EPFL.
- Graduates excel in DeepTech, AI, robotics, data science, and life sciences.
- Switzerland regularly outperforms other European hubs in research and talent quality.

Business-friendly environment

- Liberal economy with moderate corporate and individual taxation.
- Stable political and economic environment providing long-term security for investors.
- Efficient, low-bureaucracy administration that supports fast and transparent processes.
- Direct access to decision-makers, fostering quick communication and collaboration.
- One of Europe's most business-friendly and reliable locations for innovation-driven companies.

International workforce

- Highly international talent base: Greater Zurich attracts skilled professionals from across Europe and beyond.
- Ranked among the most welcoming tech destinations worldwide for expats.
- Diverse population: Nearly 40% of Switzerland's residents have a foreign background.
- The tech community operates primarily in English, which eases integration.
- Seamless collaboration: Multicultural teams enable global companies to recruit and work effectively across borders.

Quality of life & infrastructure

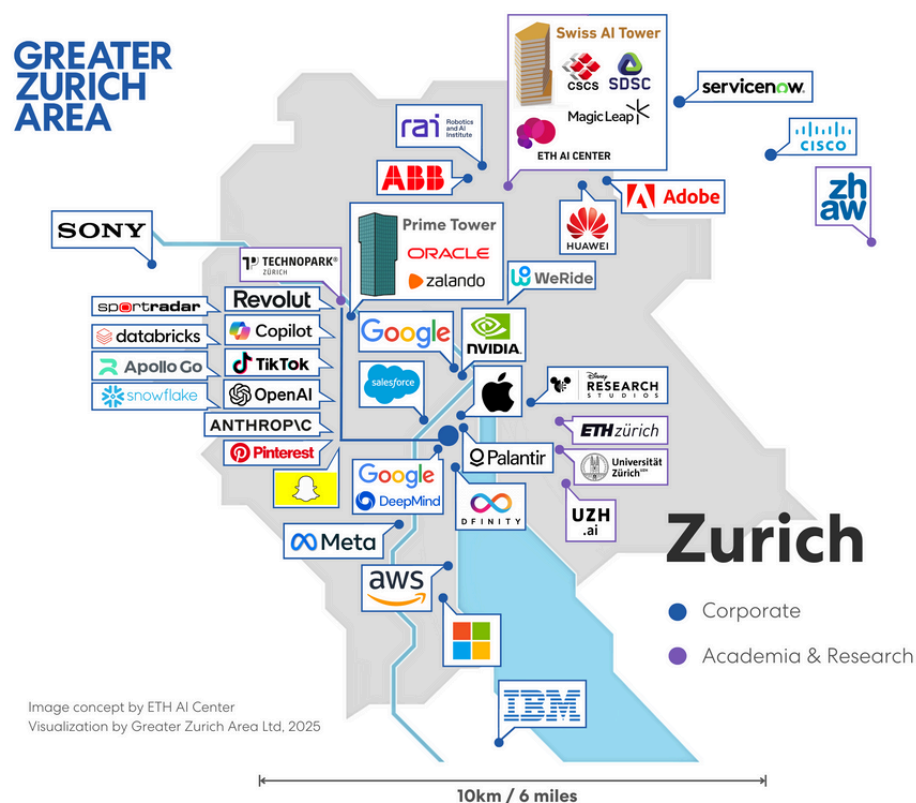
- Exceptional quality of life is a major factor in attracting and retaining top talent.
- The country consistently ranks among the world's best for livability and talent attractiveness.
- Clean, safe urban living, excellent infrastructure, and easy access to nature.

The DeepTech ecosystem in the Greater Zurich Area

Greater Zurich has emerged as a global DeepTech and AI powerhouse.

Within a compact and interconnected region, you'll find a remarkable concentration of AI research labs, robotics pioneers, fintech innovators, and biotech ventures. Global players such as Google, IBM, and Microsoft recognized Greater Zurich's potential early on, establishing major R&D centers that helped spark an ecosystem where innovation and talent continually reinforce each other.

Want access to key ecosystem insights?
Reach out to our team for free support!



Many of the world's leading tech companies run major engineering and R&D centers in the Greater Zurich Area. Google, Microsoft, IBM, Apple, and Amazon (AWS), as well as newer players like OpenAI and Anthropic collaborate closely with local universities and startups on advanced research. Google's Zurich office - its largest engineering site outside the U.S. - employs over 5,000 "Zooglers" working on core products and AI innovation.

These global players serve as talent incubators in Greater Zurich, attracting top engineers from around the world and enriching the local labor market.

Specialists trained at big tech firms frequently transition into startups, transferring expertise and strengthening the region's innovation network. For companies scaling in Greater Zurich, this means access to a deep and diverse talent pool, ranging from seasoned professionals with global experience to graduates of some of the world's best universities.



Enzo Wälchli
ANYbotics



Greater Zurich has such a high density of talent, which is also educated and brought in internationally by those tech giants... [this increases] talent density significantly.



Startup scene: Switzerland now hosts more than 1,500 DeepTech startups, many in the Greater Zurich area.

Sectors range from robotics to AI, blockchain, medtech, drones, and fintech. The presence of unicorns and high-growth ventures provides exciting opportunities for talent, which, in turn, draws more skilled people into the region.



Deep collaboration across sectors

What truly sets the Greater Zurich Area apart is its deep collaboration between academia, startups, corporates, and investors. Universities feed talent and research into the startup ecosystem, while corporates act as early adopters and pilot partners. Banks and investors provide capital through venture funds and angel networks, ensuring a continuous flow of innovation. Supported by public initiatives such as Innosuisse grants and the Switzerland Innovation Parks, this tight-knit ecosystem allows companies expanding into Greater Zurich to quickly access partners, clients, and skilled talent.



Klaus Fuchs
Rockstar Recruiting



The Zurich region punches far above its weight by combining multiple strengths: world-class academia, deep financial powerhouses, a growing corporate-tech scene, and a rising startup ecosystem. Few other regions can claim such a balance of top-tier universities, abundant funding, corporate R&D presence, and startup activity in such close proximity.

Cost and value of talent in the Greater Zurich Area

Consistently ranked first in the IMD World Talent Ranking for over a decade, Switzerland stands out for its ability to attract, educate, and retain skilled professionals.

While other European hubs compete on cost or scale, the Greater Zurich Area competes on value, offering world-class universities, close collaboration between academia and industry, and a multicultural, English-speaking workforce that drives innovation and excellence.



Daniel Naeff
ETH AI Center



At the end, if quality and skills of your employees are crucial for your business, the key question is: do you simply want lower cost or top-tier talent and productivity? Greater Zurich is expensive, but the total cost might still be lower than in London or elsewhere once you account for what you get in return.



Retention and long-term value

While Swiss salaries are among Europe's highest, the Greater Zurich Area delivers exceptional value through retention and loyalty. Professionals typically stay 5-6 years with an employer, compared to 2-3 years in London or the U.S., reducing turnover and preserving expertise. This long-term continuity turns higher salaries into a lasting investment in performance and stability.

Cost stability and competitiveness

Swiss tech salaries remain below U.S. levels and have shown minimal inflation-driven growth, ensuring cost stability. A machine learning engineer in Switzerland earns about 17% less than in the San Francisco Bay Area, while benefiting from longer tenure and predictable labor costs. The result: total employment costs in the Greater Zurich Area often match or outperform those in other global hubs.

Productivity and expertise

Swiss engineers bring exceptional depth and specialization, often with advanced research or PhD-level backgrounds. Their ability to deliver high-impact results with smaller teams drives outstanding productivity. Combined with low turnover and wage stability, this efficiency ensures a strong return on every talent investment.

While lower-cost hubs like Berlin or Lisbon offer savings on salaries and rent, they may face higher turnover or shallower talent pools. In contrast, Greater Zurich represents an investment in sustained quality that ultimately delivers better value over time.

Talent sourcing strategies for international companies

Hiring successfully in Switzerland requires local understanding. The job market is relationship-driven, and community presence matters. Companies that engage authentically with the local ecosystem, rather than relying solely on recruiters, build stronger pipelines and reputations.



Klaus Fuchs
Rockstar Recruiting



In comparison to the U.S. or other tech hubs, Switzerland is a physical market - trust is built through in-person engagement at meetups, personal referrals, conferences, and university events.

Strategies to hire in Switzerland

1

Engage in local DeepTech communities

You have to be present in the DeepTech community. The best AI researchers or blockchain engineers might not be actively job hunting on LinkedIn, but they are attending lab events, startup meetups, and open-source project groups. Don't rely solely on cold outreach. Instead, show up and contribute: sponsor a hackathon, give a tech talk, or attend meetups. Building credibility and relationships within these "bubbles" will put your company on the radar of passive candidates.

2

Leverage academic ties

Professors, researchers, and professional associations often play an important role in connecting employers with talent and graduates. To start, reach out to well-connected institutions such as the ETH AI Center.

3

Work with specialists

Partnering with specialized tech recruiters can accelerate hiring, especially in niche fields. Local experts like Rockstar Recruiting have deep networks and talent pools that save time and reduce risk. They know the Swiss market inside out, helping companies find the right candidates faster and more efficiently than by building up your own Swiss talent acquisition team and strategy.

4

Promote purpose

In Switzerland, compensation is important but it's not the sole motivation for talent. "It's not as much of a driver [here] as maybe in the U.S.," says Klaus Fuchs. Swiss tech professionals value factors such as challenging work, a meaningful mission, impact (e.g. sustainability, health, well-being, defense), and a good work-life balance. This means companies can compete by offering meaningful projects, a positive culture, and stability, rather than engaging in endless salary wars. A compelling value proposition can often attract talent even if you're not the top payer.

5

Competitive compensation

While salary isn't everything, you still need a competitive offer. For senior positions in Switzerland, a strong base salary + bonus is expected, whereas equity plays a smaller part than in Silicon Valley. Equity is appreciated (and offering stock options is a way to stand out since Swiss corporates often don't), but ensure it's meaningful – token amounts won't sway candidates. Also, be mindful of benefits: Swiss candidates will value good pension contributions, extra vacation, and perhaps subsidized lunches or transportation passes. In exchange for good compensation, you will get employees who are twice as loyal as their U.S. counterparts.

6

Optimize your hiring process

In a competitive market, fast hiring processes pay off. If you manage to decide fast, your chances of getting top talent increase significantly. Limit the interview rounds and avoid protracted timelines. A good rule of thumb shared during the roundtable was to cap at 3–4 interviews, plus one practical exercise. Top talent often has multiple options. Demonstrate to candidates that you can make decisions efficiently – this signals the company is dynamic and respects their time.



Daniel Naeff
ETH AI Center



Greater Zurich has an extremely high density of deep tech talent. Adding to that and sometimes overlooked: the consistently top rated of quality of life here – Greater Zurich combines all these value adds.

Retention of talent

Swiss professionals value trust, structure, and balance. Companies that align with these values benefit from exceptional loyalty.

Long-term growth possibilities and support

Offer clear career paths and fund ongoing education.

Studies, certificates of advanced studies, certifications, etc.

Creast trust and offer stability

Build a predictable, transparent, and reliable work environment.

Avoid unannounced changes and provide regular outlook.

Respect work-life-balance

Maintain reasonable hours, hybrid flexibility, and respect for personal time.

A good work climate will lead to better talent retention.



Swiss work culture values clarity, professionalism, and mutual respect. Employees respond with long-term commitment, high performance, and loyalty, turning good working conditions into a sustainable competitive advantage.

London

Amsterdam

Frankfurt

Stuttgart

Paris

Munich

Vienna

Zurich

Switzerland

Milan

Take a virtual tour of Greater Zurich and explore the region.

Regulatory frameworks and operational benefits of hiring in Switzerland

Switzerland's employment framework combines flexibility with security, giving companies the freedom to adapt while ensuring employees are well-protected.



Lukas Sieber
Greater Zurich Area Ltd



Switzerland has one of the more flexible labor markets in Europe, with rules that are closer to the U.S. model than most European countries.



Social security & pensions

Switzerland operates a three-pillar social security system. Employers contribute to the state pension (Pillar 1) and provide an occupational pension plan (Pillar 2) for annual salaries above CHF 22,680 (> \$28,000). Companies typically cover at least half of the pension contributions, with employees paying the rest; many go beyond the minimum by offering additional savings options.



Healthcare

A major advantage, especially for U.S. employers: in Switzerland, health insurance is mandatory but individually purchased, so companies don't provide it. This greatly reduces overhead compared to the U.S., where employer coverage is standard. A company's main obligations are to ensure a safe workplace and to cover accident insurance.



Parental leave and other benefits

Swiss law mandates at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave and 2 weeks of paternity leave. However, many employers offer more. Other common supplemental benefits include business travel insurance, meal vouchers, or commuter benefits.



Working time and vacations

The standard working week is around 40–42 hours, and by law employees get at least 4 weeks of vacation. Swiss employees will expect 25 days of vacation if possible, as many companies offer a bit above the minimum.



Notice periods and termination

Swiss labor law offers greater flexibility than most EU systems. Standard notice periods are one month in the first year, two months after two years, and three months from the third year onward. Unlike in Germany or France, there are no mandatory severance payments, no lengthy performance plans, and no works council approvals required for terminations. This allows companies to adapt staffing quickly and efficiently, without the heavy administrative or financial constraints common elsewhere in Europe.

Hiring and operating in Greater Zurich is more “plug-and-play” than in most European locations. Companies gain the benefit of a flexible hiring regime, an efficient bureaucracy, and a high-trust business environment.

Efficient administration

Switzerland is famed for its bureaucracy – but in a good way. Processes are efficient, rules are clear, and things work on time. Registering new employees or setting up social security and pension contributions is straightforward, often handled through a single online portal. Business registration in Greater Zurich typically takes only a few weeks, and work permits for non-Europeans are processed quickly when justified. Many international HR managers describe dealing with Swiss authorities as “surprisingly efficient.”

IP and data protection

Switzerland provides strong intellectual property protection and has ranked #1 in the Global Innovation Index for more than a decade. Technologies developed in Greater Zurich are well protected under Swiss law. Although not part of the EU, Switzerland enforces a data protection act closely aligned with the GDPR, simplifying compliance for companies. Its stable and predictable legal framework ensures gradual, well-consulted changes, minimizing regulatory risk.

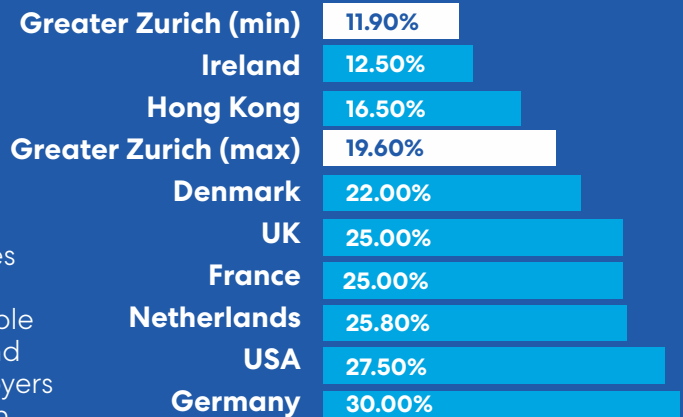
Tax environment

Switzerland’s tax regime is business-friendly. Both company and individual tax rates are moderate. Some companies negotiate tax rulings or receive incentives when setting up significant offices. Moreover, VAT is low (7.7%), which can reduce the cost of operations relative to EU countries with 20% VAT.

Employee rights and relations

While flexible, Swiss labor law still protects employees from sudden mass layoffs and unsafe conditions. Communicate changes transparently and treat people fairly, as Greater Zurich’s tech community is small, and reputation matters. Strikes are extremely rare. Employers and employees tend to have a relationship based on mutual respect and pragmatism.

Corporate tax rates:



Source: PwC International Tax Comparison 2024



Daniel Naeff
ETH AI Center



Switzerland has an attractive setup – flexibility and speed in how you can operate. Processes are extremely efficient.

If hiring the best minds in tech is a priority, Greater Zurich should be on your map. It's where cutting-edge innovation meets reliability, and where global tech companies build the teams that shape the future.

**Are you looking to expand your business into Greater Zurich?
Get in touch and access our free services.**

How we help
Discover our free services



Introductions to key contacts in industry, academia, and government agencies



Facilitating contact to potential research partners at universities and research institutes.



Support in location evaluation, introduction to service providers, and advice on regulations.

Contact us today!

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