

Competitors and scenarios

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Part K began by looking at Lugano from outside. In the Global Financial Centres Index of March 2026 Lugano ranked twenty-fifth with 724 points, ahead of Milan in forty-fifth place, Monaco in eighty-third and Liechtenstein in ninetieth (Chapter K.I).¹ The package of agreements between Switzerland and the European Union, whose main agreements and protocols were signed in Brussels on 2 March 2026 after the agreement on Union programmes of 10 November 2025, contains no agreement on financial services.² The Berne Financial Services Agreement with the United Kingdom, in force since 1 January 2026, shows a model of mutual recognition based on outcome-based deference. The harmonized law of the European Union makes that model difficult to replicate with Italy.³ Chapter K.I concluded that market access to Italian clients is the decisive variable for Lugano's future.

Chapter K.I distinguished two kinds of competition. For residence, Milan with its flat tax for new residents, Monaco, Dubai and the cantons of central Switzerland compete with Ticino for wealthy families. For banking and service, Zurich, Geneva, Singapore, Dubai, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein compete for the custody and management of assets whose owners may live anywhere. On the first front Lugano's assets are its quality of life, a moderate tax burden and proximity to Italy. On the second they are Swiss institutions, the Swiss franc and the density of Italian-speaking expertise. The chapter recommended partnerships where competition cannot be won alone: with Milan through Italian branches, Italian-owned banks in Lugano and cross-border family offices, with Zurich through competence centres for Italian-speaking clients within national groups, and with Luxembourg and Liechtenstein through platforms in the European Union and the European Economic Area.

Chapter K.II translated the slow trends into three scenarios to 2035. An ageing population and workforce, the transfer of Italian family wealth to a

new generation, the succession of hundreds of small asset managers and the automation of operational work determine most of the range. The capital rules for UBS, market access and the new federal licences for Kryptowerte und Digital Assets shift the probabilities between the paths. In the author's assessment niche excellence, with 30 to 34 banks and 4,600 to 5,000 bank full-time equivalents in 2035, is the most likely scenario. Gradual erosion is a real risk, while Lombard renewal is possible if political decisions in Bern, Brussels and Rome favour it.⁴ The recommendations addressed the canton, the city, the industry and the Confederation, each of which controls part of the response and none of which can secure the outcome alone.

Essentials. Parts I to K show the limits and the resources of the present. Plan B gave Lugano international visibility within the narrow frame of federal currency law. The federal regime for Kryptowerte und Digital Assets is identical in all Swiss centres, and European law governs access to Lugano's natural clients in Italy. The equality of Italian in federal law and the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona give the Italian-speaking south an institutional weight beyond its demographic share. Lugano ranked twenty-fifth in the GFCI of March 2026, and market access to Italy remains the variable that decides between niche excellence, erosion and renewal.

1 Notes

1. Z/Yen and China Development Institute, The Global Financial Centres Index 39 (Chinese edition, 26 March 2026), Table 1, https://www.longfinance.net/documents/4327/GFCL_39_Report_2026.03.26_Chinese.pdf, as cited in Chapter K.I. ↩
2. Swiss Federal Council, "Switzerland–EU package of agreements to be signed on 2 March", press release, 25 February 2026, <https://www.admin.ch/de/newsb/afSUBKNlaRs3s1tqaCebd>. See Chapter K.I. ↩
3. Darko Stefanoski, "The Berne Financial Services Agreement is now live: how it transforms UK–Swiss market access", EY Switzerland, 16 January 2026, https://www.ey.com/en_ch/insights/financial-services/the-berne-financial-services-agreement-is-now-live-how-it-transforms-uk-swiss-market-access. ↩

4. See Chapter K.II, Table 2. The scenarios and probabilities are the author's assessment, derived from USTAT, 12 Denaro e banche (above) and USTAT, Scenari demografici per il Cantone Ticino e i suoi distretti, 2024–2050 (Giubiasco, April 2025), https://m3.ti.ch/DFE/DR/USTAT/allegati/volume/d_16_documento.pdf. ↩

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