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Instruction sheet on admission to the SIC system and sight deposit accounts

1. Introduction

The Swiss National Bank may maintain sight deposit accounts in performing its monetary policy mandate. Its statutory tasks also include facilitating and securing the operation of cashless payment systems. The Swiss Interbank Clearing payment system (SIC system) is a real-time gross settlement system (RTGS system) and serves to process cashless payment transactions in Swiss francs. The SIC system comprises two services – the RTGS service and the instant payments (IP) service¹ – and is operated by SIX Interbank Clearing Ltd on behalf of the SNB.

This SNB Instruction Sheet provides information on the types of admission to the SIC system and sight deposit accounts (section 2); it also defines the corresponding admission criteria (sections 3, 4 and 5) and specifies the circumstances under which a participant may be suspended/excluded from the SIC system (section 6). Lastly, it sets out the administrative procedure for submitting an application for admission (section 7).

As a general rule, to be admitted participants must make a significant contribution to the fulfilment of the SNB's tasks, and their admission must not pose any major risks. Decisions on admission to the SIC system and on the opening of sight deposit accounts lie with the SNB. The SNB is not bound by this Instruction Sheet and may, for monetary policy reasons in particular, expand or restrict admission, either entirely or for specific categories of participant.

¹ The IP service allows the settlement of instant payments, i.e. retail payments that are processed around the clock with the amount being made available for use by the final recipient within seconds. The RTGS service allows the settlement of interbank and retail payments. These may be subject to delay.



2. Admission types

The SNB offers two types of admission to the SIC system (sections 2.1 and 2.2) and one for sight deposit accounts (section 2.3).

2.1. SIC participation with a sight deposit account

SIC participation with a sight deposit account is the primary type of admission to the SIC system for *SIC participants*. It requires the opening of a sight deposit account. This form of SIC participation must be effected directly, i.e. without another SIC participant acting as intermediary. As a general rule, the SNB offers only one sight deposit account per participant and one SIC settlement account per participant and service. Participants using the RTGS service to settle retail payments must also be able to receive payments via the IP service.² The sight deposit account and settlement accounts in the SIC system constitute a single legal entity.

SIC participation with a sight deposit account is governed by contracts between the SIC participant, the SNB and SIX Interbank Clearing Ltd, as well as the SIC handbook and the SNB's Terms of Business.

2.2. SIC participation without a sight deposit account

SIC participation without a sight deposit account refers to admission to the RTGS service of the SIC system for *third-party system operators*. This type of admission allows third-party system operators to effect debits and credits to the settlement accounts of SIC participants, provided the said third-party system operator has received one-off authorisation in this respect from the SIC participant in question. Operators using this form of SIC participation do not have their own sight deposit account or settlement account.³

SIC participation without a sight deposit account is governed by contracts between the third-party system operator, the SNB and SIX Interbank Clearing Ltd, as well as the SIC handbook and the SNB's Terms of Business.

2.3. Sight deposit account without SIC participation

This type of admission allows a sight deposit account to be held without the *sight deposit account holder* being admitted as a participant in the SIC system. As a general rule, the SNB offers only one sight deposit account per account holder.

Holding a sight deposit account without SIC participation is governed by a contract between the sight deposit account holder and the SNB as well as the SNB's Terms of Business.

² All participants with retail payments in the RTGS service must comply with this obligation by November 2026 at the latest.

³ It is possible for an institution participating in the SIC system with a sight deposit account pursuant to section 3 to take on the function of a third-party system within the SIC system, provided it also meets the criteria for SIC participation without a sight deposit account pursuant to section 4.

3. Criteria for SIC participation with a sight deposit account

Subject to the specific criteria in each case, the following *domestic financial market participants* are eligible to participate in the SIC system with a sight deposit account:⁴

- *banks and branches of foreign banks;*
- *securities firms*, provided they participate in the securities settlement system SECOM, and correspondingly use the SIC system for processing payments in Swiss francs arising from securities transactions via their own settlement account;
- *central mortgage bond institutions;*
- *compenswiss (compensation funds for OASI/DI/IC);*
- *cash processing operators*, which process cash for third parties on a commercial basis and/or supply them with cash and regularly pay in and withdraw cash at the SNB in their own name, and which also perform an appropriate clearing function. Furthermore, they must be regulated directly or indirectly in respect of compliance with the duty of due diligence with regard to combating money laundering;
- *fintech companies pursuant to art. 1b of the Banking Act* whose business model focuses on services in the area of payment transactions in Swiss francs;
- *insurance companies, branch offices of foreign insurance companies, fund management companies, investment companies with variable capital (SICAVs), investment companies with fixed capital (SICAFs) and limited partnerships for collective investment (LPs)*, provided they contribute to liquidity on the secured Swiss franc money market;
- *financial market infrastructures*, specifically *central counterparties; central security depositories and DLT trading facilities* that operate a securities settlement system; and *payment systems* authorised in accordance with the Financial Market Infrastructure Act; provided these financial market infrastructures process payments in Swiss francs via the SIC system.

The SNB may permit *foreign financial market participants* to participate in the SIC system with a sight deposit account.

4. Criteria for SIC participation without a sight deposit account

Third-party system operators that meet all of the following criteria are eligible for SIC participation without a sight deposit account:

- The third-party system operator is domiciled in Switzerland.

⁴ Financial market participants domiciled in Liechtenstein are deemed equivalent to domestic financial market participants provided they make a significant contribution to the fulfilment of the SNB's tasks and their admission does not pose any major risks.

- There is a demonstrable market requirement for the service underlying the payment processing effected by the third-party system operator.
- The participation of the third-party system operator facilitates the processing of payments and significantly reduces systemic or specific payment processing risks.

5. Criteria for holding a sight deposit account without SIC participation

The following⁵ are eligible to hold a sight deposit account without SIC participation:

- *domestic banks and domestic branches of foreign banks*, provided they do not engage in transaction activity. SIC participation with a sight deposit account (section 2.1) is required in cases where there is transaction activity;
- *the central federal administration of the Swiss Confederation and units of the Swiss federal administration that are not a separate legal entity in their own right*, as well as *Switzerland's federal courts*;
- *institutions pursuant to the Coinage Ordinance*;
- *depositor protection schemes pursuant to the Banking Act*.

The SNB may also permit *central banks*, as well as *international organisations* that contribute to international monetary cooperation, to hold a sight deposit account without SIC participation.

6. Suspension and exclusion from the SIC system

In accordance with the corresponding contractual agreements, the SNB may terminate SIC participation (sections 2.1 and 2.2) with immediate effect (exclusion) or may temporarily exclude a SIC participant/third-party system operator (suspension) under the following circumstances: (a) if they no longer fulfil the admission criteria; (b) if insolvency law measures have been imposed against them; (c) if they are in breach of either the contractual provisions or the associated SIC handbook; or (d) if a case arises that the SNB assesses as posing a particular risk for the SIC system or the reputation of the SNB.

7. Administrative process and contact details

The following documents are to be submitted for the assessment of admission applications:

- a written application stating the type and purpose of admission;
- for admission type 'SIC participation with a sight deposit account': information on which type of payments (retail or interbank) are to be settled;

⁵ Financial market participants domiciled in Liechtenstein are deemed equivalent to domestic financial market participants provided they make a significant contribution to the fulfilment of the SNB's tasks and their admission does not pose any major risks.

- a valid Commercial Register extract;
- a list of authorised signatories;
- for authorised financial market participants: authorisation (licence) from the competent supervisory authority;
- for securities firms: confirmation of participation in the securities settlement system SECOM.

Applications and enquiries are to be sent to: Swiss National Bank, Department III, Middle Office, Börsenstrasse 15, CH-8022 Zurich or by email to customer@snb.ch.

This is an English translation of a German original. Only the German original text is authoritative.