



# Swiss Better Gold

Twelve Years of Promoting Responsible  
Small-Scale Gold Mining in  
Latin America

## REPORT



**SBG** SWISSBETTERGOLD



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,  
Education and Research EAER  
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO





### Reader's Guide

Welcome to this interactive publication, designed to help you explore a variety of content with ease. Through direct links to publications and video testimonials, you can take a closer look at the work of Swiss Better Gold.

[PUBLICATIONS](#)

[VIDEOS](#)

Enjoy the journey!



As a global leader in gold refining and trade, Switzerland recognizes its responsibility to promote more responsible and sustainable practices in the sector.

**Monica Rubiolo**, Head of Trade Promotion Division, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs – SECO

For more than a decade, Switzerland -through the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)- has supported the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector through the Swiss Better Gold Initiative, implemented in close collaboration with the Swiss Better Gold Association. As the Initiative draws to a close, the Swiss Better Gold Association will now take the lead in carrying this important work forward.

This partnership reflects the Swiss government's commitment to making the gold value chain more responsible, while also enhancing the living and working conditions of miners and their communities. The Swiss Better Gold approach has successfully combined market-based incentives with policy dialogue and technical assistance, demonstrating that sustainability, inclusion, and economic opportunity can go hand in hand.

While we are proud to have contributed to tangible progress in a sector that is both economically significant and socially complex, it is important to clarify that we do not promote artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) as a long-term pathway to development. Rather, our goal is to support efforts that foster economic diversification and generate more stable, higher-value employment opportunities in mining regions. Nonetheless, as long as small-scale mining remains a source of livelihood for millions -and international demand for gold continues- we recognize the urgent need to improve the conditions under which this gold is produced.

As a global leader in gold refining and trade, Switzerland recognizes its responsibility to promote more responsible and sustainable practices in the sector. A key aspect of this commitment has been the strengthening of national regulatory frameworks and the fostering of constructive policy dialogue with partner governments. Numerous studies -from academic research to evaluations by international organizations and development agencies- consistently highlight that lasting progress in the sector depends largely on the commitment and capacity of national governments. Establishing an enabling environment through clear regulations, strong institutional coordination, and effective support services is essential. For this reason, supporting public institutions and stakeholders in the design and implementation of sound policies has been a cornerstone of the Swiss Better Gold Initiative.

Although this chapter is drawing to a close, our commitment to the responsible transformation of small-scale mining remains firm. Building on the experience and partnerships developed through Swiss Better Gold, we intend to remain engaged on this issue and expand our efforts to other regions facing similar challenges. In particular, we will continue to invest in policy dialogue, recognizing its critical role in achieving long-term impact and systemic change.

We are deeply grateful to all our partners for their trust, dedication, and shared vision. The lessons from this journey will continue to inform and guide our path toward more responsible gold value chains in the artisanal and small-scale mining sector.



Swiss Better Gold has worked closely with government authorities to inform policy recommendations for the small-scale gold mining sector.

**Thomas Hentschel**, Global Program Manager, Swiss Better Gold

Swiss Better Gold has been working with the small-scale gold mining sector in Peru since 2013, and in Bolivia and Colombia since 2017. Its core mission is to foster responsible gold value chains while contributing to better living conditions for miners and their communities.

The sector holds significant socioeconomic importance in these countries, providing direct and indirect livelihoods to hundreds of thousands of people. In recent years, its relevance has grown steadily, largely driven by rising gold prices. However, informality and illegality remain pervasive throughout the value chain, with the nature and extent of these challenges varying considerably between the three countries.

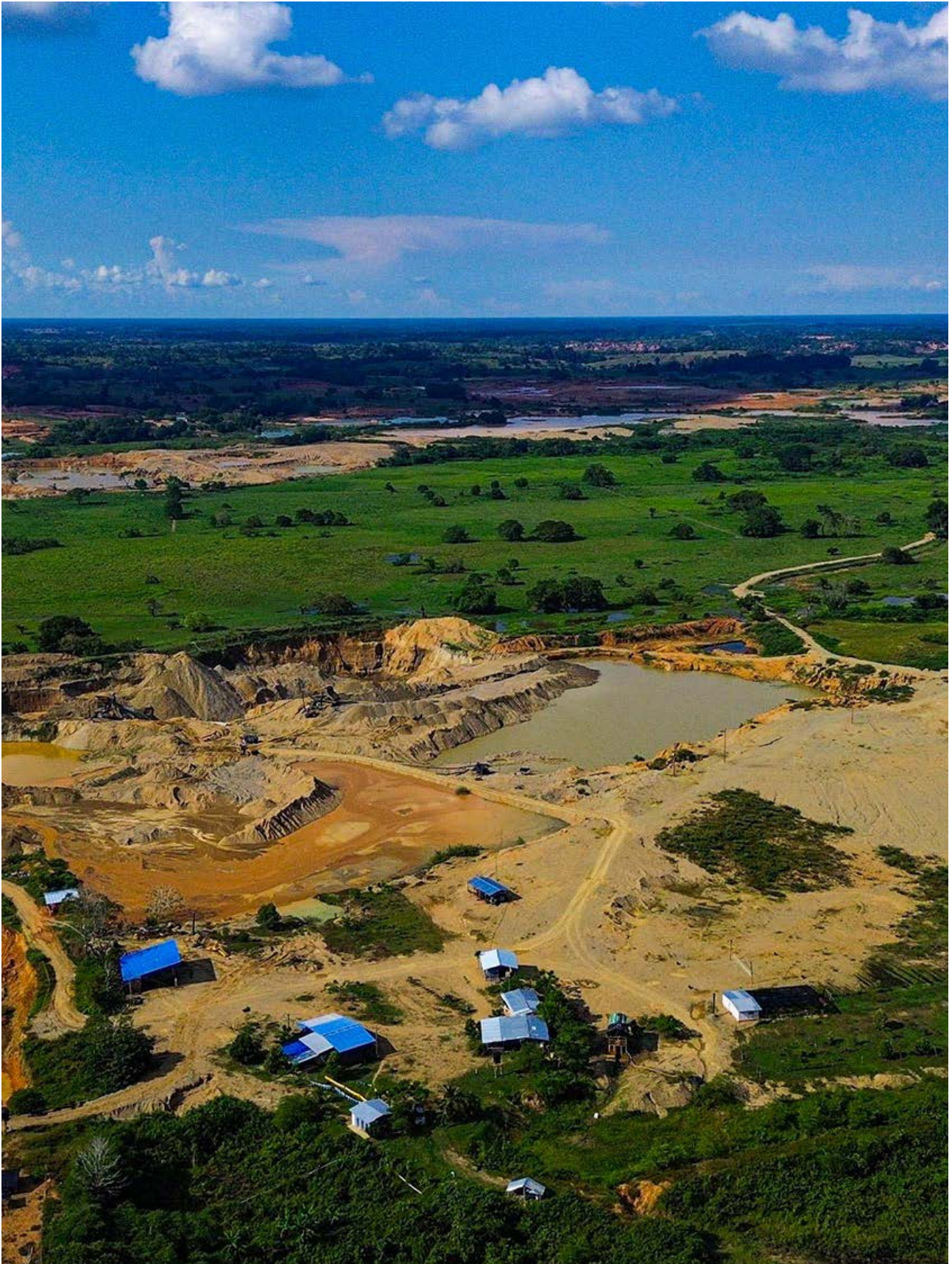
Swiss Better Gold emerged from decades of Swiss development cooperation with the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector in the Andean region, dating back to the 1990s. These efforts, carried out through bilateral cooperation agreements with national

governments, have helped establish Switzerland's strong reputation in the region and within the sector. Swiss Better Gold has also drawn on a broad and well-established network of key stakeholders an asset that has been essential to its successful implementation.

Since its inception, Swiss Better Gold has worked closely with government authorities to inform policy recommendations for the small-scale gold mining sector. We believe that this collaboration and sustained dialogue have contributed to improvements in legal and institutional frameworks positively impacting the lives of miners and their communities.

At the same time, we are witnessing growing demand from the Swiss gold industry for a reliable supply of responsibly produced gold. Meeting this demand requires continued progress in formalization across all participating countries. With over 12 years of experience, we are confident that Swiss Better Gold has played a valuable role in advancing this process.





---

## SUSTAINED DIALOGUE

This Report, which spans the years 2013 to 2025, highlights a critical dimension of small- and medium-scale mining: policy dialogue. By this, we mean the broad set of actions undertaken by Swiss Better Gold to help strengthen the sector's legal and regulatory frameworks, while also advancing the recognition and value of mining as a source of livelihood.

In many of the countries where we operate, mining -and more importantly, the miners themselves- have long been neglected by public authorities and governments. Our experience has shown that technical support at the operational level is only one part of the equation. Just as vital is sustained and proactive engagement with local, regional, and national institutions to improve conditions for vulnerable communities people who, despite difficult circumstances, work tirelessly to secure better futures for their families.

In recent years, the gold mining sector has

experienced steady growth, primarily fueled by rising gold prices. However, informality remains pervasive across the entire value chain, with distinct challenges emerging in each of the three participating countries. As the sector continues to expand, governments are placing greater emphasis on the need to integrate artisanal and small-scale miners into the formal economy.

A common concern shared by miners, traders, and regulatory authorities is the increasing demand from international markets for gold that is legal, formally sourced, and responsibly produced.

Small- and medium-scale mining provides livelihoods for millions of people in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru. It is a centuries-old activity that remains vital to both family incomes and national economies. But how can we make mining more responsible? The Swiss Better Gold Initiative, a public-private





partnership between the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the Swiss Better Gold Association, offers one answer. Its strategy can be described as a virtuous cycle: miners receive technical support to improve their production practices and are incentivized to adopt responsible standards through a premium given for each gram of gold that meets the Swiss Better Gold criteria.

The Initiative connects miners directly with buyers in Switzerland through a network of refiners and end users who are willing to pay a fair price for responsibly sourced gold. It also ensures traceability, certifying that the gold reaches the market with a verified origin.

### What exactly are these criteria?

Organizationally, producers must comply with both national and international laws and operate under responsible management practices. Full traceability of gold from the mine to the point of sale is required. The financing of conflict is strictly prohibited, and human rights must be upheld at every stage of production.

Socially, the criteria emphasize respect for labor rights, the payment of fair wages, and a zero-tolerance policy for forced and child labor. Promoting gender equality and fostering positive relationships with local communities are also fundamental principles.

Environmentally, Swiss Better Gold requires producers to minimize their environmental impact by phasing out harmful chemicals such as mercury, protecting biodiversity, water sources, and other natural resources, and actively rehabilitating areas affected by mining activities.

#### VIDEOS



What is the Swiss Better Gold Initiative and how does it work?



## A GROWING INITIATIVE

Swiss Better Gold has been supporting the artisanal and small- and medium-scale gold mining sector in Peru since 2013, and in Bolivia and Colombia since 2017. Its primary goal is to establish and strengthen responsible gold value chains -from mine to market- while contributing to the improvement of living conditions for miners and their communities.

In all three countries, artisanal and small-scale mining holds significant socioeconomic importance, with hundreds of thousands of people directly or indirectly involved. Swiss Better Gold engages with a diverse range of miners, from individual gold panners without mechanization such as the “barequeros” in Colombia to artisanal miners, small-scale miners, and semi-industrialized medium-scale operations. Swiss Better Gold value chains to Switzerland have been developed for producers across this spectrum of mining scales.



---

## INNOVATIVE APPROACH

Swiss Better Gold adopts a comprehensive strategy by working directly with private sector actors (miners and traders) providing technical assistance through dedicated teams in each country. The objective is to help miners comply with the responsibility criteria set by Swiss Better Gold for responsible gold production, thereby enabling the development of value chains that connect to the Swiss market.

Miners often encounter significant challenges in navigating legal processes, formalization, permits, and authorizations due to complex administrative and bureaucratic barriers at national, regional, and local levels. In other words, the legal and administrative framework is intricate, making it difficult to establish and sustain formal mining operations.

To improve conditions for small-scale miners in key areas such as legality, environmental management, technology, labor rights, organizational capacity, and finance, Swiss Better Gold works closely with sectoral authorities across all levels of government. This collaborative effort aims to facilitate the formalization process, a core activity referred to as “Policy Dialogue”. SECO offices, together with Swiss Embassies in partner countries, play a vital role in advancing this advocacy work.

These activities are essential not only to ensure that existing mining operations remain within the formal framework but also to foster the development and consolidation of new formal mining ventures capable of meeting the increasing demand for responsibly produced gold.

# This is how Swiss Better Gold works

**Responsible Mining: Swiss Better Gold operates across the value chain and its ecosystem**









---

## ENGAGING THE STAKEHOLDERS



Swiss Better Gold is working at the regional level in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru, enabling the exchange of successful experiences between miners and the authorities of the participating countries and effectively supporting the implementation of new policies in favor of a growing sector that has been neglected for a long time.



Swiss Better Gold operates on a demand-driven basis. When a government or sector stakeholder expresses interest, Swiss Better Gold leverages its team of professionals and consultants -both nationally and internationally- to identify challenges and propose tailored solutions. The Initiative supports authorities in implementing agreed-upon measures by providing training workshops for public officials, facilitating participation in trade fairs, delivering educational materials, conducting studies, and offering targeted consultancies that aid in domestic policy execution and inform future policy decisions.



Swiss Better Gold advocates for government measures that foster a supportive environment for the small-scale and artisanal gold mining sector. Drawing on extensive field experience, it contributes with its know-how to the development and implementation of national laws and regulations aligned with international standards.





To address challenges such as poor coordination within the public sector and limited communication between small-scale miners and government authorities at local and national levels, Swiss Better Gold has established institutionalized dialogue platforms involving a broad range of stakeholders on multiple occasions.



Swiss Better Gold has taken on the role of an “agenda setter”, introducing key concepts such as the importance of traceability and the development of global value chains into public policy. A central focus of its approach has been promoting the formalization of a predominantly informal sector, alongside efforts to reduce or eliminate the use of mercury in artisanal and small-scale gold mining.



Swiss Better Gold has consistently prioritized coordination and collaboration with other international cooperation initiatives. Notable examples of this synergy are its close partnerships and joint funding arrangements with PlanetGold+ in Bolivia and Oro Legal in Colombia.



These Swiss Better Gold efforts across governmental bodies, development agencies, and the mining sector have significantly raised the visibility of artisanal and small-scale gold mining, resulting in greater empowerment for miners.

# MAIN APPROACHES



Contribute to enhancing the labor conditions and socioeconomic well-being of artisanal and small-scale miners.



Amplify the visibility and representation of artisanal and small-scale mining within the political sphere.



Foster a shift in attitudes among key stakeholders.



Provide validated international experiences.



Introduce the market- and value chain-oriented approach.



Advocate for a vision centered on responsible exports.



Implement traceability systems to curb informal and illegal production, trade, and gold smuggling.





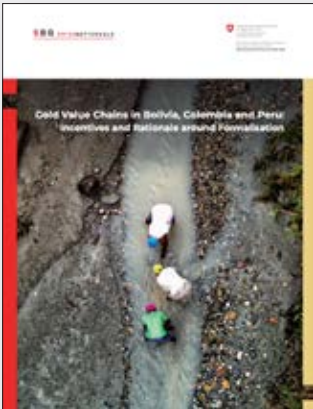
---

## MERCURY-FREE VALUE CHAINS

Swiss Better Gold has prioritized efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of mercury, aiming to mitigate its harmful effects on human health and the environment. Authorities in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru have been supported in implementing the Minamata Convention. In partnership with these governments, Swiss Better Gold helped develop strategies to combat mercury use, mapped the mercury value chain, and introduced alternative, mercury-free techniques to miners. Through targeted technical assistance, the Initiative has promoted technologies such as gravimetric tables, enabling the successful phase-out of mercury in mining operations. Today, Swiss Better Gold takes pride in the fact that no gold within its value chains is processed using mercury.

[VIDEOS](#)

Promoting responsible mining in Bolivia



PUBLICATIONS

Gold Value Chains in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru: Incentives and Rationale around Formalization



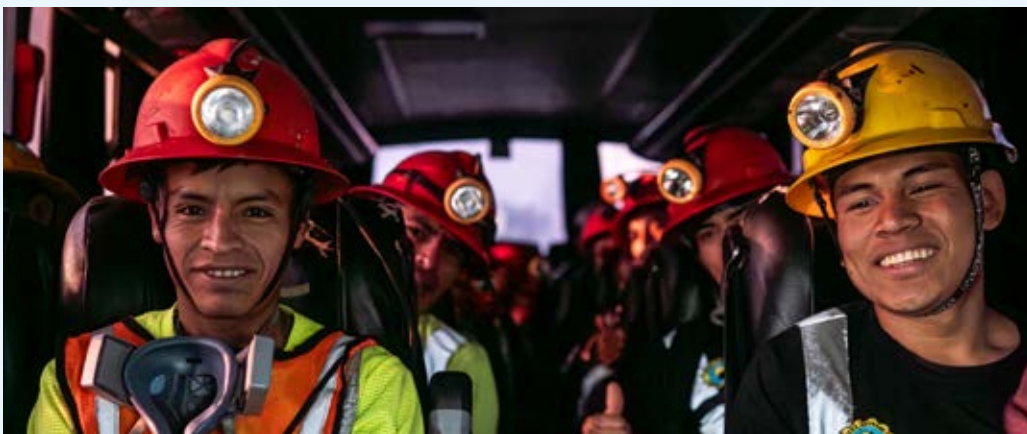
PUBLICATIONS

Report of the International Mining Forum in Bolivia



---

## INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH



Gold, particularly that sourced from artisanal and small-scale mining, is a significant topic in Switzerland. Swiss Better Gold has been instrumental in fostering dialogue among key stakeholders, including government bodies, the private sector, academia, and NGOs. Through the formation of working groups, coordinated activities, and presentations, the Initiative has helped deepen mutual understanding and build trust across

these diverse stakeholders and groups. Additionally, Swiss Better Gold has actively engaged in major international forums, such as those organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA), the Minamata Convention Conference of the Parties (COP), and the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development (IGF).



---

# PERU

Advancing Toward Formal Mining





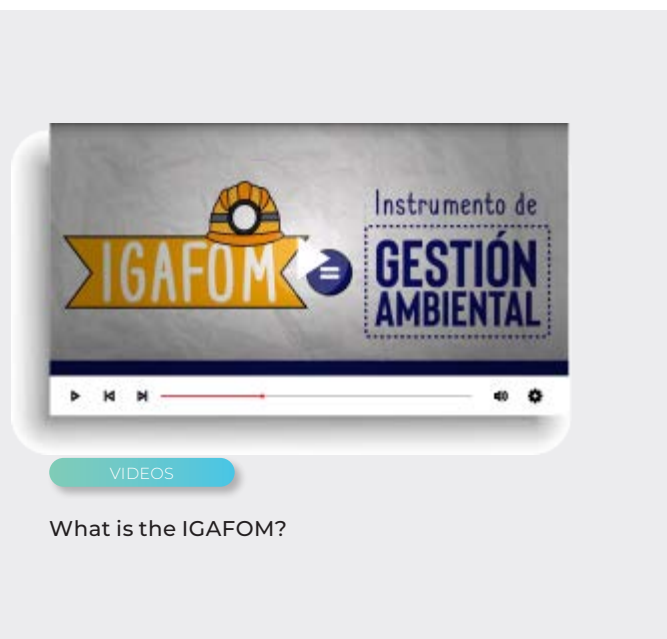
VIDEOS

Being formal is worth gold

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining plays a crucial role in Peru's economic and social development. According to estimates by Peruvian authorities, around 200,000 people work directly in the sector, with nearly 500,000 more employed indirectly across the country. However, this activity often takes place within a context marked by high levels of informality and illegality. Institutional weaknesses and limited capacity for coordination, control, and enforcement of the government have created conditions that enable the proliferation of informal and illegal mining operations.

One of the primary challenges to advancing formalization in Peru is the prevalence of illegal mining. Numerous criminal networks, both domestic and international, facilitate the smuggling of illegally sourced gold into and out of the country, making this a widespread and persistent issue. Gold value chains are especially vulnerable to the infiltration of illicit gold at multiple stages: production, processing, transportation, and trade.

While public attention and analysis often focus on large- and medium-scale mining, it is important to recognize the diversity of Peru's mining sector and the significant role played by artisanal and small-scale mining. This segment is predominantly concentrated on gold mining, which has accounted for an average of 17% of the country's total gold



production over the past decade. Driven by rising gold prices, the contribution of artisanal and small-scale mining has grown substantially.

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining is a significant source of employment, particularly in rural areas of Peru, where barriers to entry are low and educational requirements minimal. In other words, gold mining offers a promising economic opportunity for communities and individuals often excluded from other sectors, including women, who play an important role in this activity. Beyond employment, the sector generates positive spillover effects for local, regional, and national economies—not only due to the large number of people involved but also because of its multiplier effect on related industries. This contributes to private income generation and the potential for increased public revenue through taxation of legally formalized operations.

However, persistent challenges remain, including environmental issues such as deforestation, landscape degradation, mercury use, water pollution, and inadequate waste management. Social problems—such as human trafficking, prostitution, and health concerns—

alongside mining safety and legal issues, also continue to affect the sector.

Peru has two distinct formalization processes for artisanal and small-scale mining: the standard process, launched in 2002, and the non-standard process, introduced in 2012. According to analysis by Swiss Better Gold, both processes face significant challenges: they are costly, burdened by bureaucratic complexity, and hindered by a shortage of personnel within government agencies. As a result, they have proven inefficient and have failed to deliver the anticipated progress.

The non-standard process, which has seen the most widespread use, is particularly problematic. It permits miners to legally produce and market gold while still undergoing formalization, called “in the process of formalization”. Between 2012 and 2025, deadlines for the Comprehensive Mining Formalization Registry (Registro Integral de Formalización Minera - REINFO) have been repeatedly extended. This has fostered a culture of non-compliance, where miners delay meeting requirements in anticipation of further extensions, impeding genuine advancement in the formalization process.



Switzerland's continued engagement in Peru's small-scale gold mining sector remains key, particularly in light of the ongoing surge in illegal mining. As a major importer of Peruvian gold, Switzerland plays a key role. It is estimated that 20% of the legally produced gold from Peru's small-scale mining sector is exported to Switzerland as responsibly-sourced gold through the Swiss Better Gold system. To increase this share, there is strong Swiss interest in advancing formalization, strengthening traceability, and supporting related public policies through a multi-stakeholder approach.





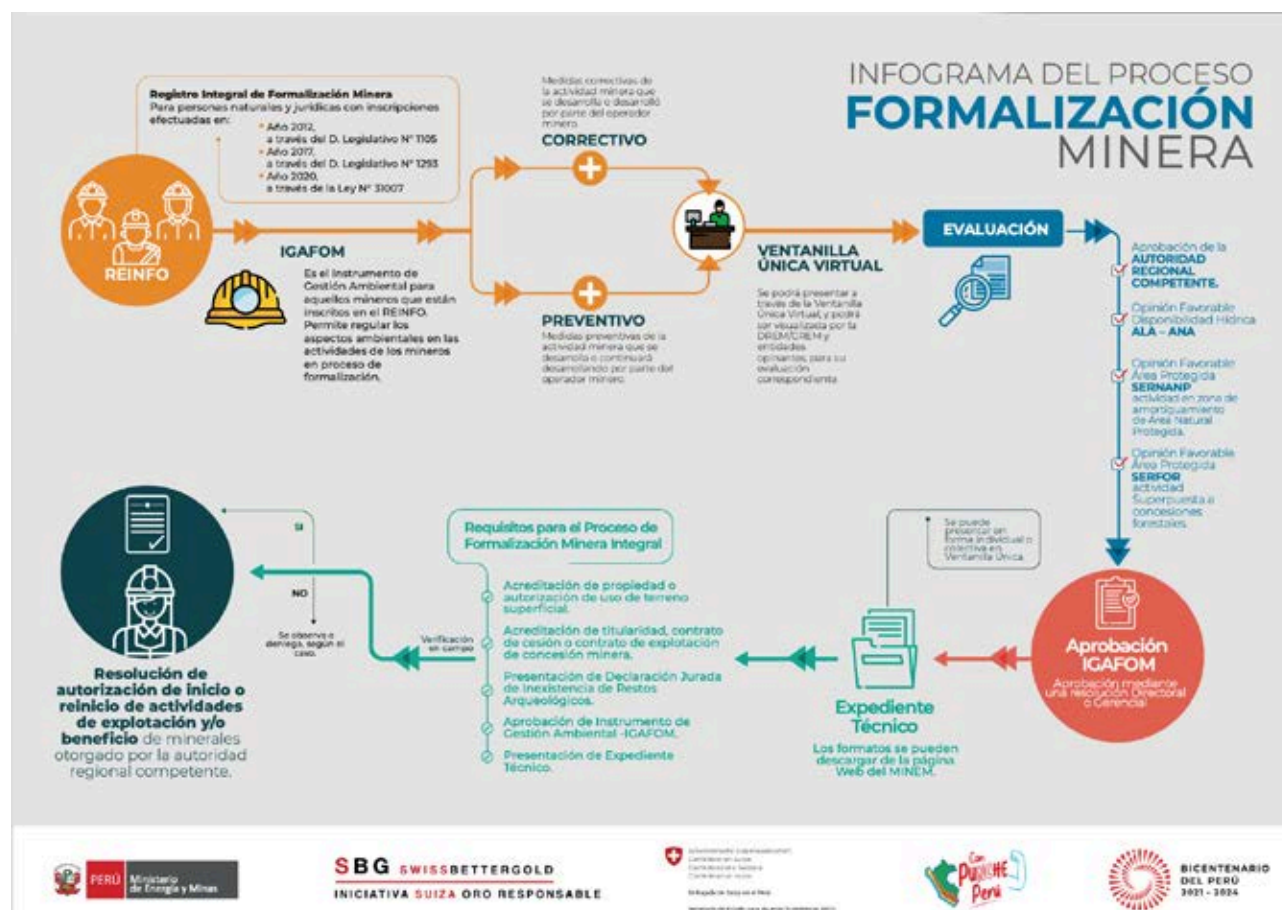
## Peru: Swiss Better Gold's Approach

At a pivotal moment for Peru's mining sector, Swiss Better Gold played a key role in supporting the government's development of the country's first-ever sector policy for artisanal and small-scale mining. Through a complex and inclusive process involving key stakeholders and institutions, Swiss Better Gold contributed international best practices and experiences drawn from its technical assistance work on the ground. It also provided expert consultants to support the Ministry of Energy and Mines in drafting the policy. As a result, innovative concepts -such as traceability, supply and demand dynamics, and responsible trading- were incorporated into the policy framework. These contributions were formally reflected in the Multisectoral Policy for Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining, launched by the Ministry in 2022.



## PUBLICATIONS

## Infographics on formalization



In Peru, the formalization of the mining sector receives significant political attention. Despite the existence of a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for the formalization of artisanal and small-scale mining, progress has been slow. This sluggish pace is primarily due to overly complex bureaucratic and administrative procedures, limited incentives from the central government, high compliance costs for miners, and insufficient financial and human resources within the regional governments responsible for supporting the process. Additionally, longstanding tensions between artisanal miners and concession holders further hinder progress.

The significant challenges surrounding informality, illegality, and formalization cannot be

resolved within a single four-year government term. Instead, these are long-term structural issues that require sustained commitment across successive administrations, regardless of political affiliation. In this context, the creation of a sectoral policy through National Center for Strategic Planning - CEPLAN is key, as it establishes a long-term vision and framework that transcends political cycles.

Swiss Better Gold has supported Peruvian authorities in their efforts to formalize artisanal and small-scale gold mining organizations. Through technical workshops, public officials received training on the steps required to navigate and implement the formalization process. Among other initiatives, educational brochures were developed to help simplify and visualize the often-





VIDEOS

Voices from the Mine in Peru, from mercury to clean technologies

complex procedures involved. These efforts focused particularly on the Regional Governments, which hold the primary responsibility for overseeing the artisanal and small-scale mining sector.

The implementation of the Minamata Convention through the National Plan for the Elimination of Mercury Use received significant support from Swiss Better Gold. Among other actions, the organization collaborated with the Ministry of Environment in the design of a draft law for the environmental management of mercury, within the framework of the Minamata National Plan. In addition, a specialist contracted by Swiss Better Gold developed the first Manual for the environmentally responsible storage of elemental mercury and its waste. The main objective of these initiatives is to promote the necessary changes in the use of mercury and its progressive elimination. The target audience for these activities are artisanal and small-scale gold mining operators.



Swiss Better Gold has developed a series of guides addressing key topics relevant to artisanal and small-scale gold mining operations, including mining safety, environmental protection, traceability, export procedures, money laundering among others. In addition, simplified infographics have been created to make the information more accessible to miners. Several of these guides were formally recognized by the authorities through ministerial decisions in 2021. With Swiss Better Gold's support, pilot audits were conducted in 2022 to assist regional governments in implementing new tools for environmental control and monitoring.

Swiss Better Gold engaged national and international consultants and academic institutions, to conduct a series of studies on key aspects of artisanal and small-scale gold mining in Peru. These studies provide critical insights to support evidence-based decision-making by the authorities. Notable examples include the 2022 Geoforensic Study conducted by the University of Lausanne and the Study on the Scope of ASM and Formalization Incentives (2024), which examines the barriers to formalization within the gold value chain.



## PUBLICATIONS

Traceability Guide



## PUBLICATIONS

Geoforensic  
Study factsheet


## PUBLICATIONS

Study on the  
Scope of ASM and  
Formalization  
Incentives



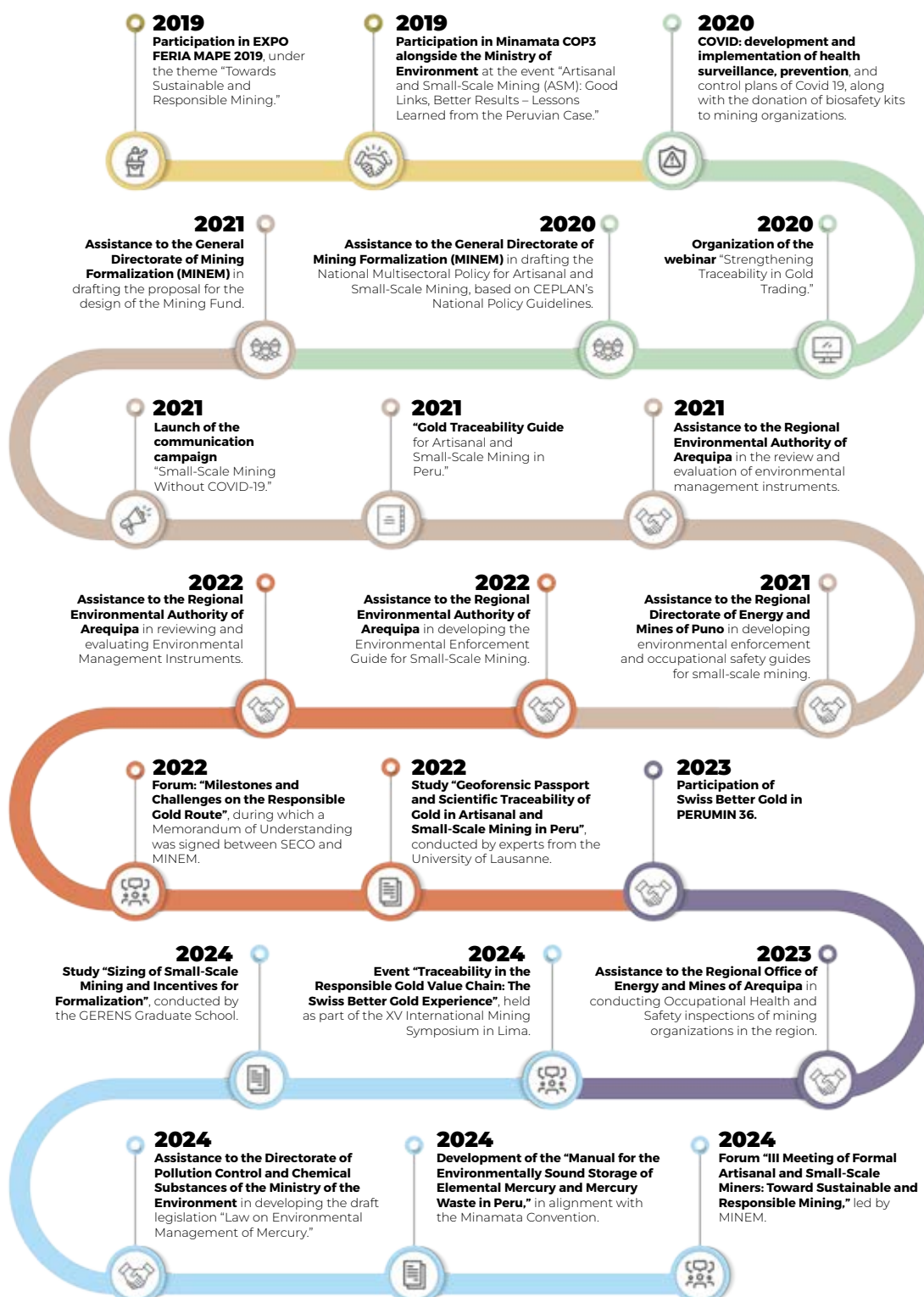



Swiss Better Gold actively participated in key events within the mining sector. Notably, its presence at the Perumin Mining Fair contributed to elevating the visibility of artisanal and small-scale gold mining in public discourse. In 2023, Swiss Better Gold presented its field experiences at the Neomin Mining Fair, a platform dedicated to dialogue, debate, and the search for solutions

for small-scale mining activities. In 2024, during the International Mining Symposium organized by the National Society of Mining, Petroleum and Energy, the Embassy of Switzerland in Peru and the Swiss Economic Cooperation (SECO) hosted a side event titled: “Traceability in the Responsible Gold Value Chain: The Swiss Better Gold Experience.”



## PERU- TIMELINE





---

# COLOMBIA

A Complex Landscape Marked  
by Informality and Illegality



Gold mining is one of Colombia's principal extractive industries. According to estimates by Colombian authorities, of the approximately 14,000 registered mining production units, over 4,000 are dedicated to gold extraction. However, despite the scale of this activity, only 13% of these gold mining operations hold a formal mining title.

Gold mining in Colombia is defined by the heterogeneity of the stakeholders involved:

- At the production level, a wide range of actors coexist -including barequeros (subsistence miners), small-scale and medium-sized mining operations, as well as large-scale enterprises- both legal and illegal.
- The trade chain includes local, national, and international buyers, some of whom do not comply with legal standards and regulatory frameworks for this activity.
- Services, such as transportation and security, are frequently characterized by high levels of informality and are often intertwined with illicit practices, compromising various stages of the value chain.
- Furthermore, illegal armed groups and criminal networks have become increasingly involved in the gold business. This growing interest is driven by the rising price of gold, the relatively lower risks compared to drug trafficking, and the sector's potential for money laundering.

Mining formalization policies play a critical role in strategies to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism, enhance mineral traceability, reduce the socio-environmental impacts of mining activities, and increase tax revenues for both local mining regions and the national government.





However, it is worth noting that the majority of officially exported gold does not originate from formal production sources. In fact, export volumes consistently exceed reported production figures, indicating that illegally mined gold is being “laundered” during domestic commercialization- between the mine and the export point- before entering legal export channels.

Although a royalty is levied at the point of export (4% or 6%, depending on the type of mining), this

measure has proven to create a perverse incentive as it discourages efforts to implement rigorous traceability mechanisms that would prevent the laundering of illicit gold.

Formalization efforts in Colombia's gold sector have largely focused on small-scale producers and subsistence miners. However, studies supported by Swiss Better Gold have identified six key barriers that hinder formalization at the production stage:

- Limited administrative and organizational capacity among small-scale gold producers to comply with formal requirements, coupled with insufficient or no access to technical and administrative support from the State throughout the formalization process.
- Lack of coordination among authorities involved in the formalization process, as well as the absence of a differential approach tailored to the specific contexts of different territories and mining populations in the formalization process.
- Inadequate, outdated, and unreliable information provided by authorities, along with a shortage of designated areas where permits can be granted as part of formalization efforts.
- Conflicts with other mining regimes, particularly when artisanal and small-scale mining occurs in areas already given to other operators. This is compounded by frequent legislative changes, gaps in regulation for specific regimes, and contradictions between environmental and mining laws.
- Barriers to financial inclusion, including limited access to banking services, credit, and financial products for miners either formalized or with the potential to formalize.
- Persistence of armed conflict, presence of illegal actors, and the remoteness of extractive territories. These areas often suffer from a lack of access to mining and environmental authorities, as well as a scarcity of formal gold buyers and commercial channels.

## PUBLICATIONS

## Barriers to formalization



## VIDEOS

Expert Voices in Colombia  
– Arroyave Mine


## VIDEOS

Expert Voices in Colombia  
– Arenoso Mine





## Colombia: The Swiss Better Gold approach

Swiss Better Gold, in collaboration with the Oro Legal Project, played a pivotal role in the development of Colombia's current legislation on small-scale mining (Law 2250 of 2022). This collaborative effort of the two projects led to the creation of a proposal for a Unified National Formalization Plan, which outlines key recommendations based on an inclusive

consultation process. These recommendations emerged from a series of meetings and workshops with a wide range of stakeholders, including mining communities, miners engaged or interested in formalization, civil society organizations, academics, gold mining companies, and various representatives from the government.



The proposal aimed to address one of the fundamental needs for the sustainable development of the mining sector: the successful formalization of small-scale mining, particularly in the gold sector. To this end, Swiss Better Gold and Oro Legal Project joined forces to provide public policy recommendations for the incoming government in 2018. The Ambassadors of Switzerland and the United States formally presented this proposal to the Colombian authorities. After a period of consideration, the sitting government and Congress enacted legislation that incorporated many of the recommendations from Swiss Better Gold and the Oro Legal Project. Implementation of the law is currently ongoing.

Promoting the financial inclusion of small-scale gold mining operators was essential to advancing the formalization of a sector historically excluded by the financial system. To this end, awareness-raising efforts and sustained dialogue with financial institutions were carried out. Practical guides were developed for both the financial sector (now in its second, updated edition) and for miners, outlining the requirements of financial institutions. The support and active engagement of SECO and the Embassy of Switzerland played a crucial role in driving progress in this area.

Support for the implementation of small-scale mining priorities aligned with the National Government's Development Plan. This includes promoting associativity and financial inclusion in selected mining regions, strengthening measures to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism, analyzing viable economic alternatives at the local level, and advancing the development of an environmental label for gold.

## PUBLICATIONS

### Knowing the Mining Customer Guide



## PUBLICATIONS

### Implementation Guide for Due Diligence in Colombia's Small and Medium Gold Mining Sector





VIDEOS

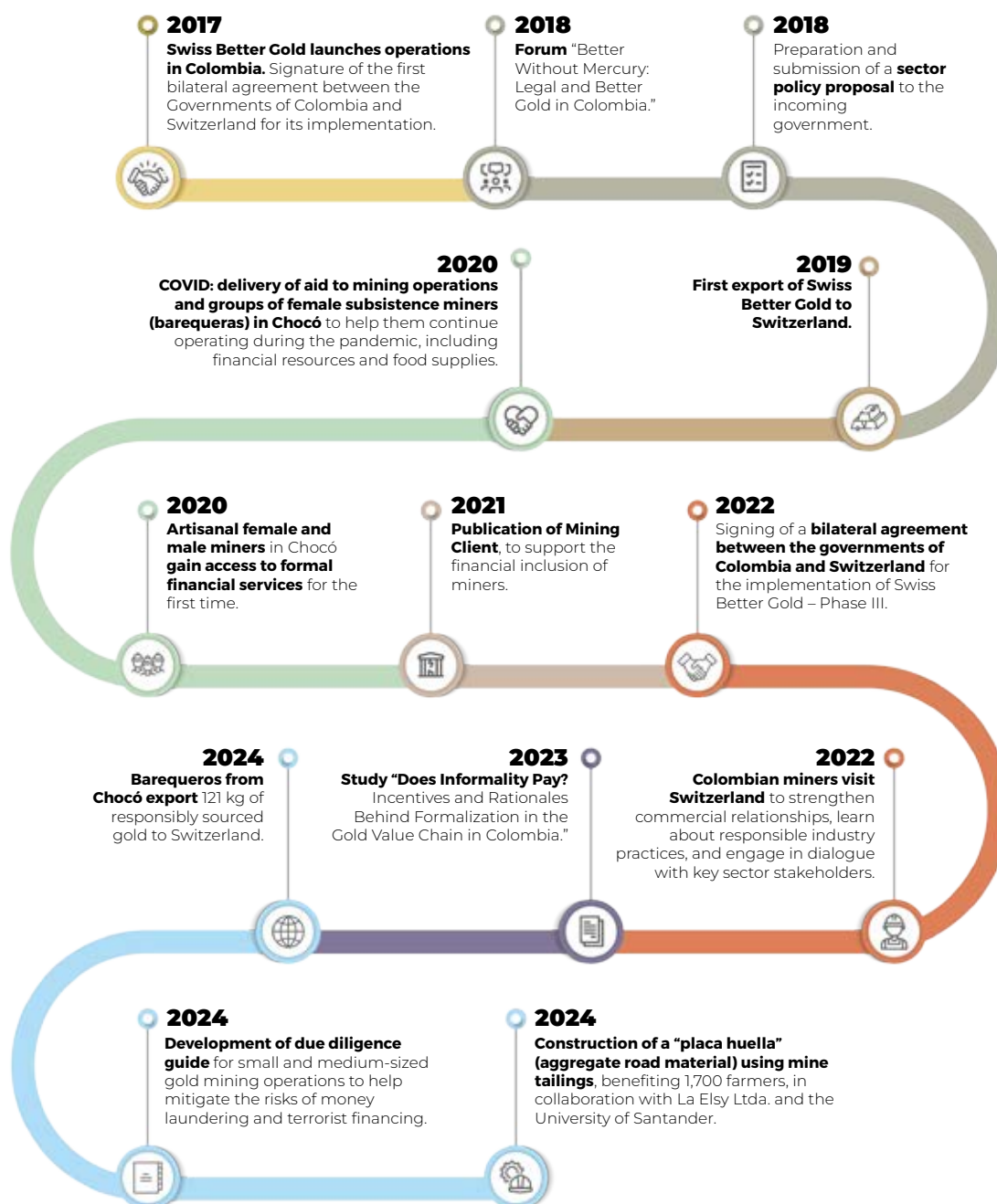
Miner's Voices  
– Mining's Impact on the Environment

Support for the development of a strategic plan for three key mining municipalities in collaboration with the Government of Santander and the municipal administrations of California, Vetás, and Suratá.

Support to academic institutions for the development of studies on key issues affecting the small-scale mining sector, including barriers to formalization, the potential use of mine tailings for rural road construction, and the “ecomining” model exemplified by Hacienda Río Rayo.



## COLOMBIA - TIMELINE





# BOLIVIA

The Gold Rush: A Changing Landscape





In just a few years, Bolivia has witnessed a dramatic surge in gold export volumes. The global gold price boom of 2022 and 2023 triggered an unprecedented expansion in Bolivian production. This growth, combined with the smuggling of gold from neighboring countries into Bolivia, propelled gold to become the nation's top export surpassing natural gas, which had long held the leading position in Bolivia's export portfolio.

Since 2024, Bolivia's gold exports have declined sharply as a result of the ongoing economic crisis, characterized in particular by a shortage of U.S. dollars and the emergence of a parallel exchange market for the Bolivian currency. Beginning in mid-2024, a significant portion of gold produced in Bolivia has been smuggled into neighboring countries, where it is sold as illegal gold. The proceeds -whether in U.S. dollars, Peruvian soles, or Brazilian reais- are then brought back into Bolivia through the parallel currency market. This trend highlights the pervasive influence of smuggling and illegality in the gold sector, not only within Bolivia but also across the neighboring countries.

For many people, gold mining serves as a subsistence strategy. A distinctive characteristic of the sector is that more than 99% of the country's gold is produced by approximately 2,000 mining cooperatives. For years, regulatory reforms have stalled, and little progress has been made in formalizing the gold value chain or enforcing existing regulations. A study commissioned by Swiss Better Gold concluded that Bolivia's gold sector -largely dominated by cooperatives- and its domestic gold marketing system remain entrenched in informality and, in many cases, illegality. The sector is marked by low administrative and managerial capacity and continues to rely on outdated, inefficient, and environmentally harmful production methods.



PUBLICATIONS

Understanding the Persistence of Informality



PUBLICATIONS

Clean Technology Manual for Bolivia's Gold Sector



As a result, the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector in Bolivia faces a number of serious challenges, notably:

- Lack of transparency and uncontrolled use of mercury throughout the supply chain.
- Encroachment by miners and mining cooperatives into protected areas.
- Abuse and infiltration of indigenous communities by mining actors.
- Extensive destruction of Amazonian ecosystems and river systems.
- Unregulated use of cyanidation processes.

The sector's reputation is further damaged by media reports and NGO publications highlighting the alarming environmental and social issues it faces.





## Bolivia: Swiss Better Gold's Approach

In recent years, Swiss Better Gold has established itself in Bolivia as a leading entity on responsible gold mining. In close collaboration with various national and international partners, Swiss Better Gold actively promotes the principles of responsible gold mining. Its work engages the gold sector both with government authorities and mining operators, and a particular focus on gold cooperatives and their affiliated organizations.

This has fostered a relationship of trust between miners and Swiss Better Gold, enabling direct dialogue, training workshops, and awareness-raising events to introduce the concept of responsible gold mining and encourage the adoption of better practices. Additionally, an emphasis on "clean" technologies has supported the promotion of gold recovery methods that reduce or eliminate the use of mercury and are more environmentally friendly.



### VIDEOS

#### Building an Enabling Environment for the Mining Sector in Bolivia



### PUBLICATIONS

#### Mercury in Small-scale Gold Mining in Bolivia

In 2018 and 2022, Swiss Better Gold and the Ministry of Mining and Metallurgy formalized their collaboration through bilateral cooperation agreements. Since then, a series of joint initiatives have contributed to the institutional strengthening of the Ministry and the entities it oversees.

Swiss Better Gold provided assistance to the National Service for the Registration and Control of the Commercialization of Minerals and Metals (SENARECOM). In collaboration with the Ministry of Mining, Swiss Better Gold supported the modernization of the mineral trading system, with a particular focus on enhancing trade efficiency during the export phase. This effort culminated in the design, development, and implementation of SINACOM 2.0 in 2024.

Thanks to the new software, funded by Swiss Better Gold, the export process has become more transparent and streamlined for both mining operators and regulatory institutions. Additionally, the system has improved the collection and payment of royalties to the State. Its implementation demonstrates the Bolivian authorities' commitment to enhancing public services for a sector of critical economic importance like mining.

Moreover, the new system serves as a powerful tool to combat corruption, promote good governance, and strengthen Bolivia's international reputation as a responsible exporter of gold and other minerals.

As a result of intensive dialogue among Swiss Better Gold experts, diplomats from the Swiss Embassy in La Paz, and ministry authorities, several key issues were addressed. These included the regulation of mining activities related to watershed management and the update of the Environmental Regulations for Mining Activities. Of particular significance for Bolivia were the initiatives led by Swiss Better Gold aimed at reducing -and ultimately eliminating- the use of mercury in gold mining. This effort is especially critical given Bolivia's role as a regional hub for unregulated mercury trade.



Supporting the authorities in developing a regulatory proposal for mercury use in gold mining was an important initial step. However, its effective implementation in mining operations remains an ongoing challenge that requires the collaboration of all sector actors. Overall, Swiss Better Gold successfully facilitated and energized a productive dialogue among international organizations, national authorities, mining stakeholders, civil society, and academia to tackle the challenges associated with mercury use.

Given the slow progress in strengthening regulations on mercury use within the cooperative mining sector, and recognizing that public opinion has been the primary driver for change in artisanal

and small-scale gold mining, Swiss Better Gold initiated the creation of the “Inter-institutional Working Group on Responsible Gold” (GIT-OR) in 2017. This voluntary partnership of civil society and academic organizations aims to promote responsible gold mining as a strategy to mitigate the social, health, and environmental impacts associated with gold mining activities. Currently, the Working Group comprises 15 member organizations. A major milestone for GIT-OR and Swiss Better Gold was supporting the 2023 International Forum, organized by the Senate, which brought together around 300 participants to discuss the state of gold mining and to develop concrete proposals for advancing legal, responsible, and mercury-free mining in Bolivia.





VIDEOS

Capacity-building of Professionals and Knowledge Generation Among Small-scale Mining Operators in Bolivia

In collaboration with leading higher education institutions in Bolivia, including the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA) and the Plurinational School of Public Administration (EGPP), Swiss Better Gold contributed to the design and development of curricula focused on responsible gold mining. These initiatives resulted in innovative postgraduate programs delivered virtually and complemented by practical sessions. Many public officials responsible for enforcing mining laws and regulations lack the specialized knowledge required for effective oversight. The university diploma program offered by UMSA's Metallurgy and Materials Research Institute, alongside courses at EGPP, plays a crucial role in filling this gap.

To support the launch of the initial study cycles, Swiss Better Gold awarded scholarships to professionals seeking specialization. Thanks to the technical studies, practical manuals, and teaching guidelines developed by Swiss Better Gold experts in recent years, students have access to bibliographic materials that are closely aligned with the realities of the Bolivian mining sector.

Despite some progress in specific areas, the overall environment for small-scale gold mining in Bolivia remains complex. Government actions alone have not been sufficient to transform the challenging sector and foster truly responsible mining practices aligned with the criteria established by Swiss Better Gold. The establishment of responsible gold value chains to Switzerland, the primary objective, has yet to be realized in Bolivia.

With Swiss Better Gold's exit, it is important to highlight that many of its activities have been coordinated and co-financed alongside the PlanetGold+ project, a GEF initiative in Bolivia. Since the inception of PlanetGold+, Swiss Better Gold has maintained close collaboration with the project, a partnership that has been highly valuable for the sector. Consequently, Swiss Better Gold's efforts to promote responsible gold mining will continue into the future through PlanetGold+.



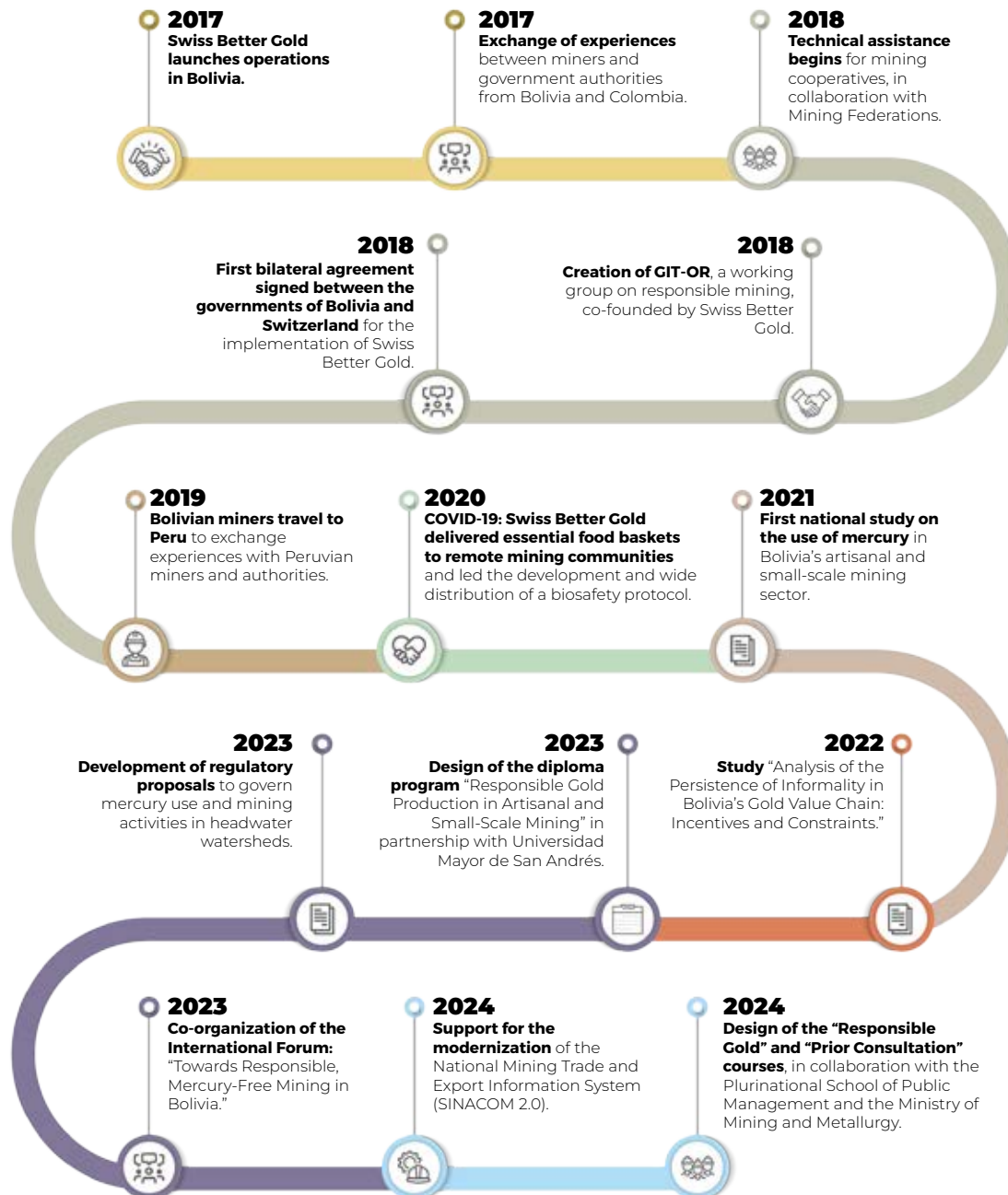
PUBLICATIONS



Inter-institutional coordination is essential to achieve responsible mining it is a shared responsibility. Equally important is the commitment of mining stakeholders to drive these changes forward. Bolivia is a mining country, and we must work to ensure that mining becomes a source of pride and a driver of national development, not a cause for concern.

**Ilse Beltrán**, Former National Coordinator, Swiss Better Gold – Bolivia

## BOLIVIA - TIMELINE









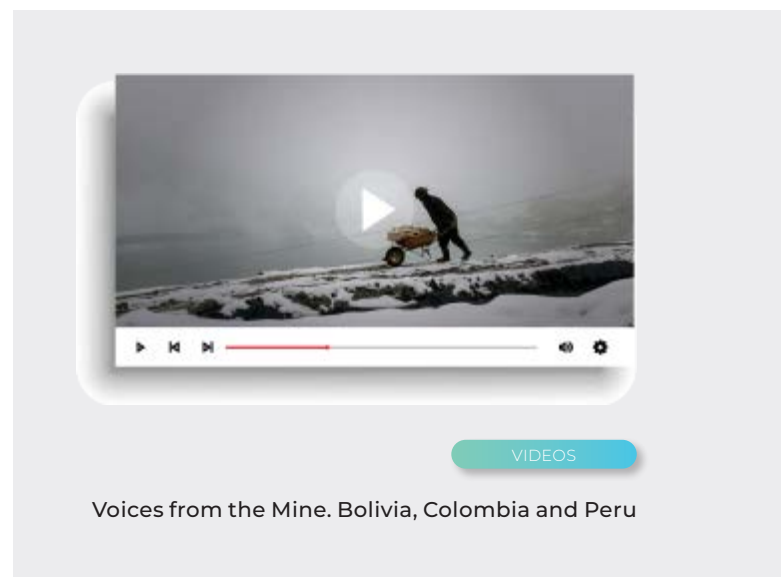
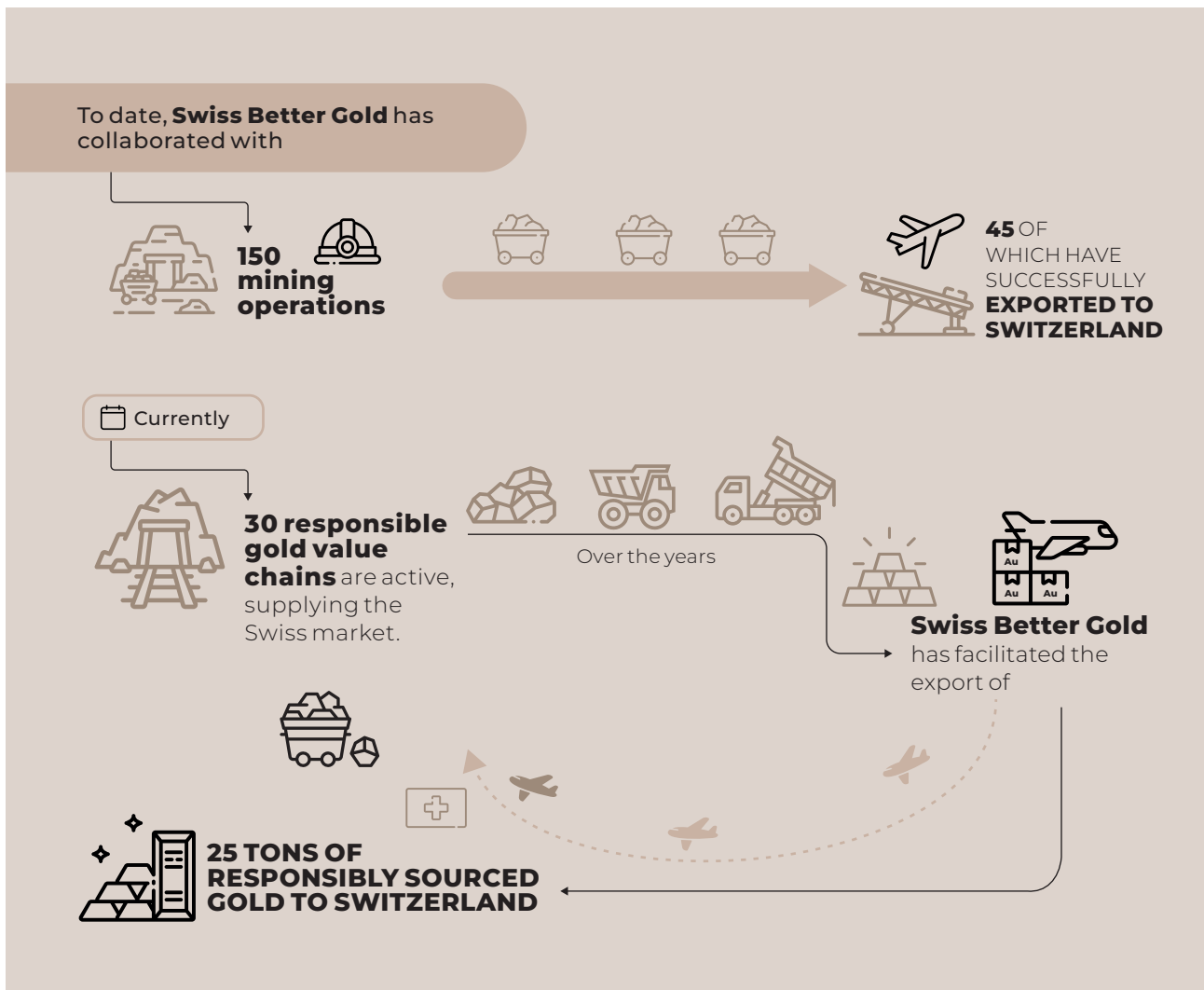
---

## WHAT IS SWISS BETTER GOLD?

Established in 2013, Swiss Better Gold is an Initiative dedicated to improving the working and living conditions of small-scale gold mining communities in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru. It is a development Initiative and builds on the experience of earlier Swiss cooperation projects in the Andean region's artisanal and small-scale mining sector.

Swiss Better Gold is the product of a public-private partnership between the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the Swiss Better Gold Association. Through this collaboration, SECO represents the public interest in international cooperation and development, helping amplify the voices of small-scale miners through policy dialogue and advocacy.







### Key Features of Swiss Better Gold

**Continuous Improvement:** Swiss Better Gold promotes continuous improvement as a core strategy for achieving responsible gold production. To enhance social and environmental practices, the Initiative has developed a tailored continuous improvement mechanism. In practice, the Swiss Better Gold team works closely with producers through a step-by-step process of technical, social, and environmental advancement, guiding them toward compliance with Swiss Better Gold criteria.

Swiss Better Gold accreditation is granted following a structured process that includes regular on-site technical assistance, ongoing supervision, and complemented by independent verifications.

**Local Presence:** A team of experts works directly with mining operations in the field. This interdisciplinary team includes mining engineers, geologists, metallurgists, social workers, occupational health and safety specialists, environmental experts, and business managers. Their continuous, on-site technical assistance plays a key role in supporting mining operations on their path toward responsible gold production.

**Collaboration:** Swiss Better Gold promotes cooperation and knowledge exchange among key actors in each country to support the integration of small-scale mining operations into responsible gold value chains linked to Switzerland. A cornerstone of this effort is sustained dialogue between Swiss Better Gold and government authorities at all levels from municipal to national. Swiss Embassies play a vital role in facilitating these collaborations. Through this work, Swiss Better Gold has established itself as a credible, committed, and trusted partner for public institutions, mining associations/federations, and miners alike.





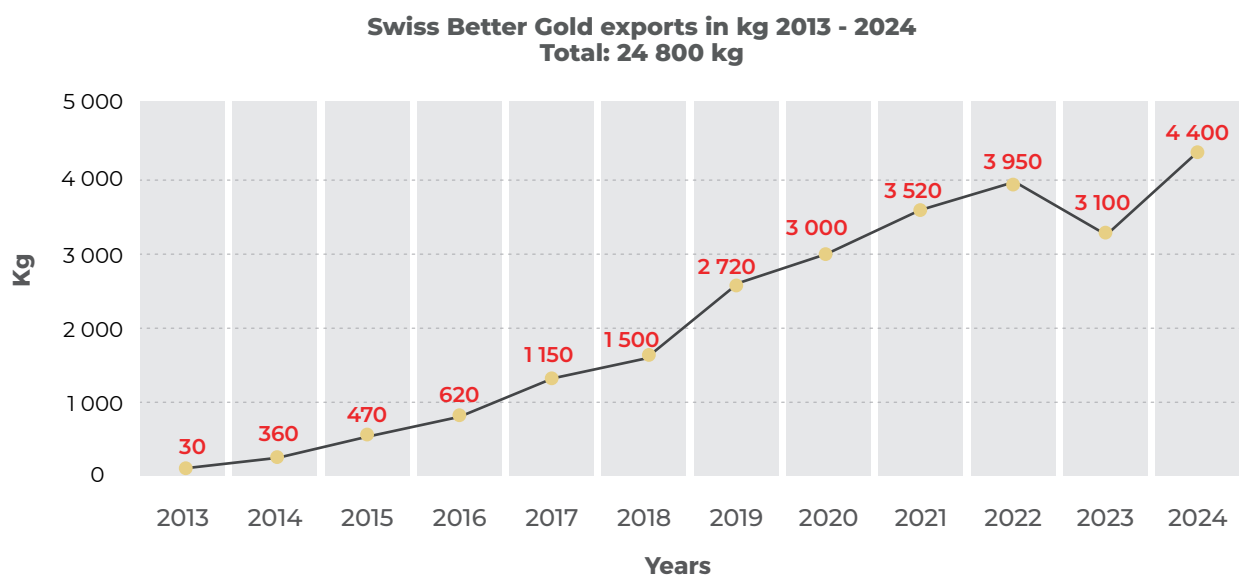
### **The Future of Swiss Better Gold**

In the years ahead, Swiss Better Gold remains committed to advancing responsible small-scale gold mining by building on the experiences and lessons of the past decade. Under a renewed approach, the Swiss Better Gold Association will take the lead in providing technical assistance to mining operations, supporting ongoing exports and the development of new responsible gold value chains for the Swiss market. SECO will continue to play a key role in fostering policy dialogue, recognizing its critical importance in achieving long-term, systemic change for the gold mining sector. These new activities will not only continue in the current focus countries but also expand to other selected countries where small-scale gold producers face similar challenges.

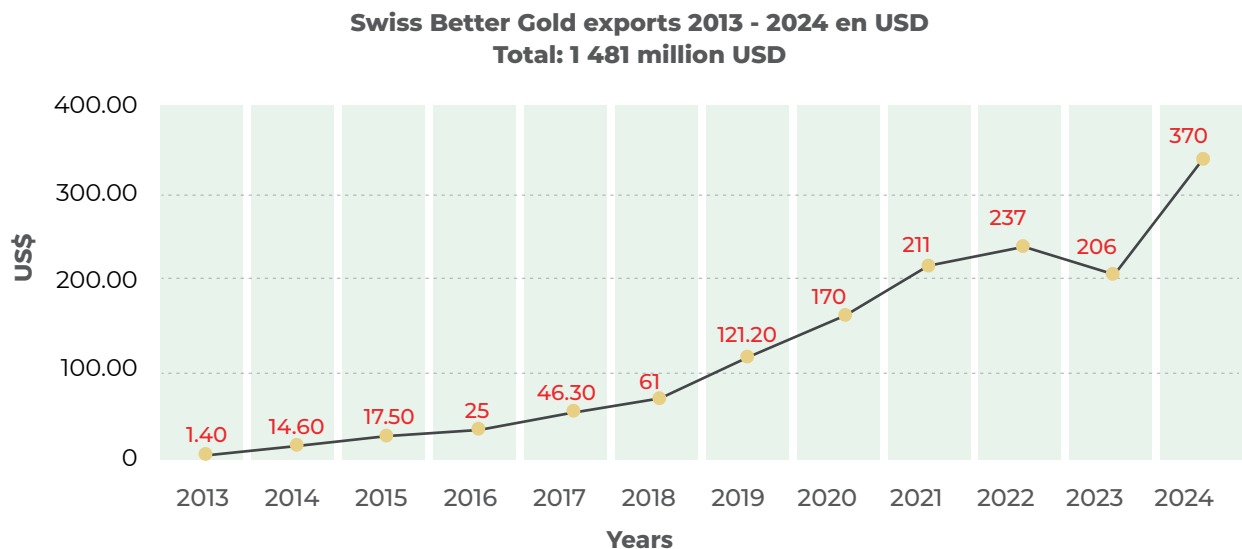


# GRAPHS

Graph 1. **Responsible gold exports have shown steady growth. We started with just 30 kg in 2013 and closed 2024 with 4 400 kg.**

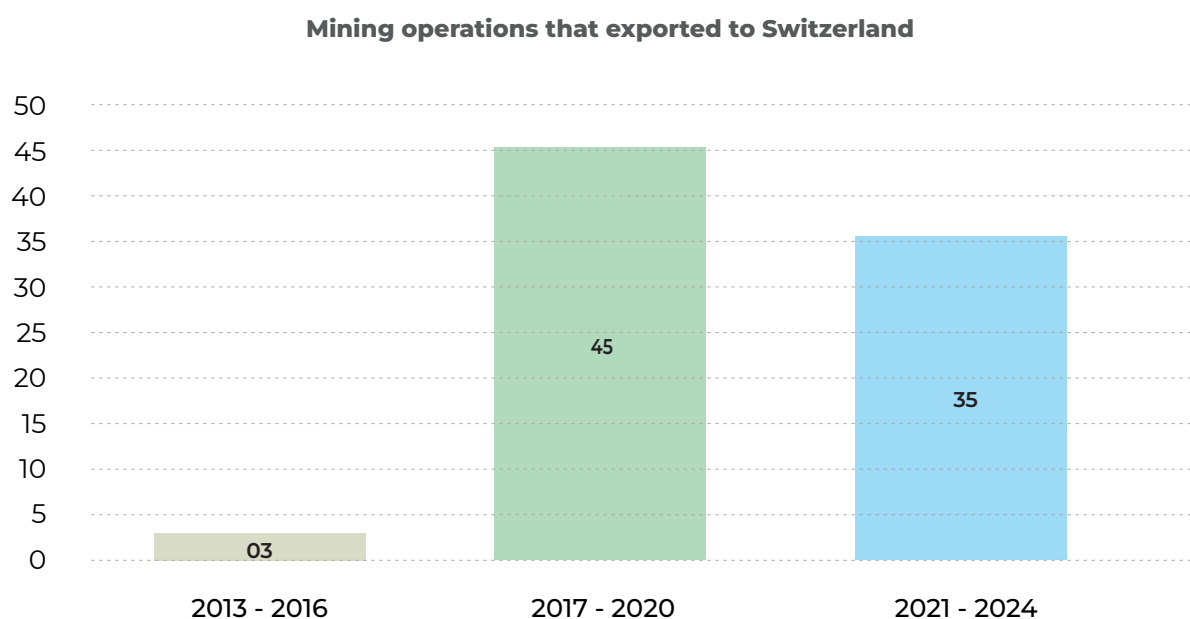


Graph 2. **Sustained growth in export value. The value of Swiss Better Gold exports 2013-2024 in USD to Switzerland through Swiss Better Gold has grown annually, from USD 1.4 million in 2013 to USD 370 million in 2024.**

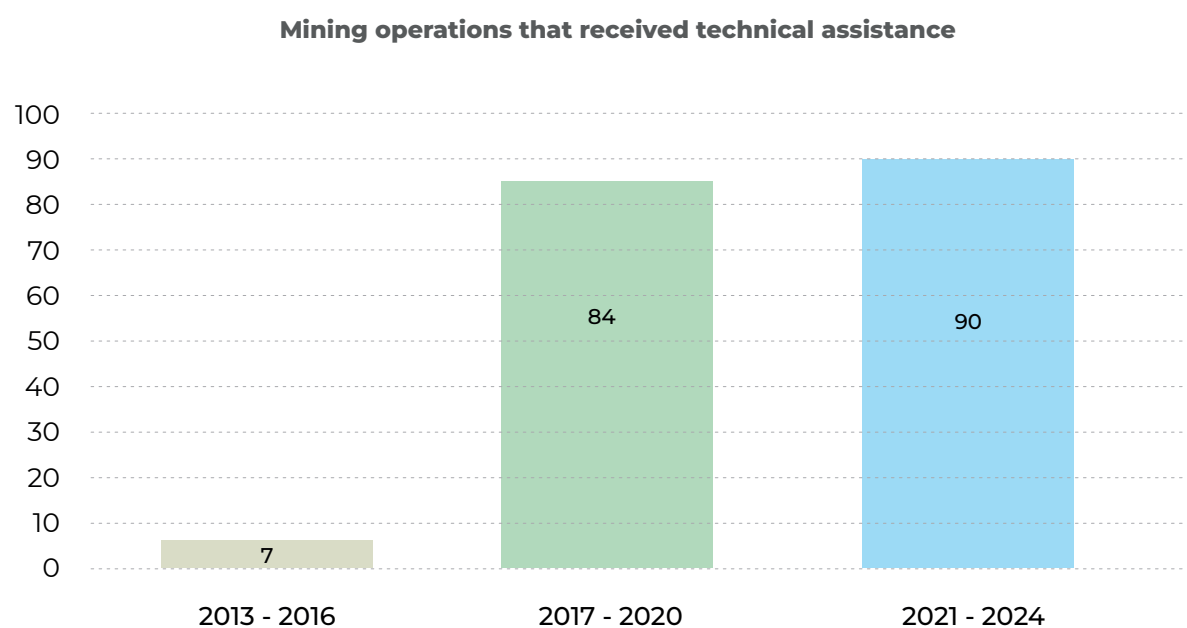




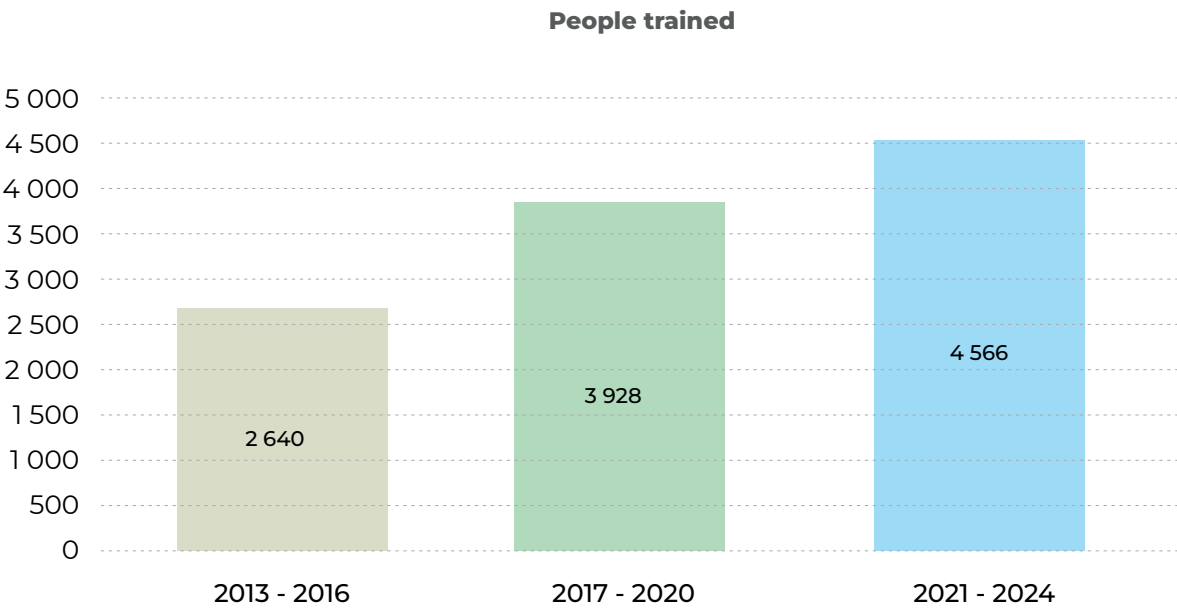
Graph 3. **Mining operations that exported to Switzerland through Swiss Better Gold.**



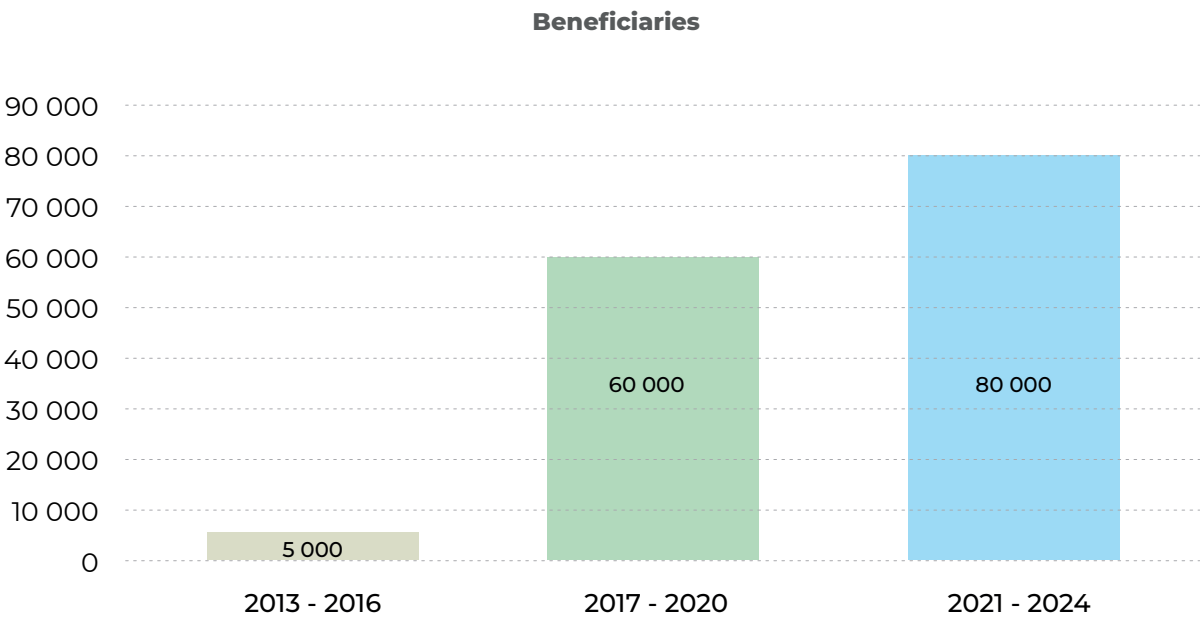
Graph 4. **Mining operations that benefited from technical assistance by Swiss Better Gold in the different participating countries.**



Graph 5. **Individuals trained by the Swiss Better Gold technical teams in the different participating countries.**



Graph 6. **Direct and indirect beneficiaries of mining operations participating in Swiss Better Gold.**







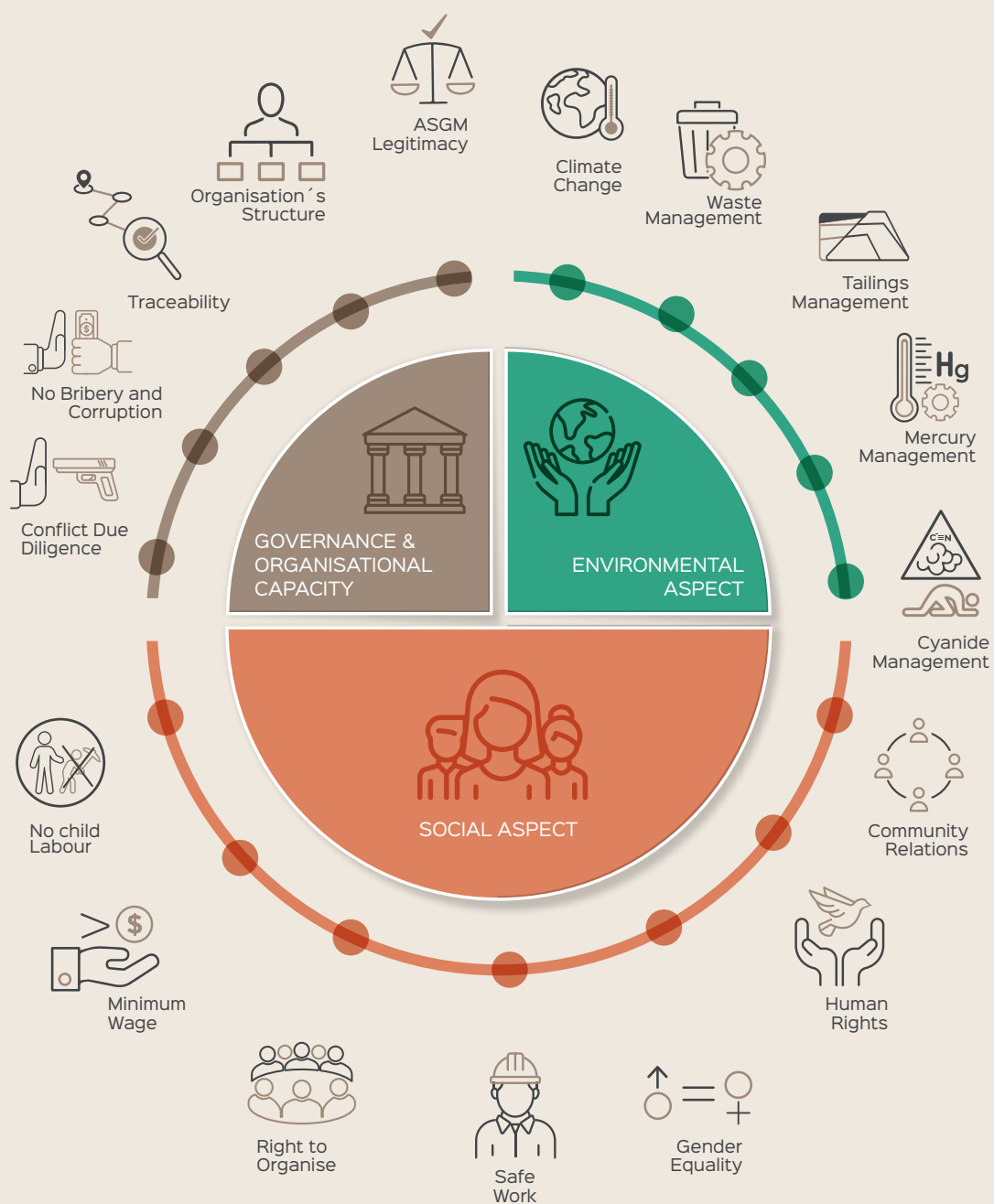
### **Credits**

Editor  
Swiss Better Gold  
[www.ororesponsable.org](http://www.ororesponsable.org)

Design and layout: Fernando Pano.  
Photographs: Rocío Farfán, Lenin Quevedo, Omar Torrico, Jonathan Zuluaga.  
Lima, June 2025




## SWISS BETTER GOLD CRITERIA FOR RESPONSIBLE GOLD






 <https://ororesponsable.org>

 [www.swissbettergold.ch](http://www.swissbettergold.ch)

 @IniciativaSuizaOroResponsable

 Swiss Better Gold

**SBG** **SWISSBETTERGOLD**

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,  
Education and Research EAER  
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

