

French in the international organisations of Geneva

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French is, together with English, one of the two working languages of the United Nations Secretariat and one of the official languages of most of the organisations established in Geneva.¹ This position, inherited from the era when French was the language of diplomacy, as Part F recalled, has been eroded in favour of English, to the point where the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie has set up a mechanism of monitoring, alerts and action to halt the decline of French in international organisations.²

For the Geneva financial centre, the status of French in the international organisations has an indirect but real significance. French-speaking international civil servants, diplomats from French-speaking countries and delegations working in French constitute a clientele and a network for the financial centre. The organisations' texts, available in French, feed the practice of Geneva lawyers. And the presence of French in International Geneva strengthens the francophone identity of the city in the face of anglicisation.

Switzerland, a member of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, supports multilingualism in international organisations. Geneva also hosts institutions linked to the Francophonie.³ This commitment coincides with the interest of the financial centre, which benefits from an International Geneva in which French retains a place.

1 Notes

1. Dag Hammarskjöld Library, "Quelles sont les langues officielles des Nations Unies ?", ask.un.org (accessed September 2026): "English and French are the working languages of the Secretariat"; World Trade Organization, wto.org: English, French and Spanish are the official languages. ↩

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2. Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, La langue française dans le monde, 2022 edition, summary, francophonie.org. ↩
3. FDFA, page “La Suisse au sein de l’Organisation internationale de la Francophonie” (eda.admin.ch, as at 1 February 2026): Switzerland has been a member of the OIF since 1996 and is its third-largest contributor; its priorities are democracy, peace and human rights, the French language, International Geneva and digital governance; the OIF brings together 90 states and governments; ten federal parliamentarians and some thirty cantonal parliamentarians represent Switzerland in the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie; most recent summit in Paris on 4 and 5 October 2024. ↩

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