

Maintaining the language as an asset

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The chapters of this part converge on one proposition: French is, for the Geneva financial centre, an asset in the same way as its legal stability, its international network or its expertise in wealth management, and this asset must be maintained. An asset that is not maintained depreciates. The signs of depreciation are visible: the decline of French as the principal language in the canton, the anglicisation of training courses and internal documents, the impoverishment of the professional French of young graduates, the word-for-word translation of Anglo-Saxon templates. Although none of these signs is alarming in isolation, their accumulation over a generation would cause the financial centre to lose an advantage that its competitors cannot acquire.

The maintenance of this asset is first of all a matter for the institutions. They can set an explicit language policy, as Chapter III has suggested; keep their client documentation in French of good quality; require of their legal drafters a command of Swiss legal French; fund training in French in the fields where the precision of the language is the substance of the profession; and give weight, in recruitment and careers, to skills in French, in German and in the languages of the clientele. These measures cost little in relation to what they preserve.

Maintenance is next a matter for the institutions of the financial centre. The umbrella organisations can publish their work in French and in English, support legal and financial scholarship in French, encourage bilingual training courses and document, through regular surveys, the language of relationships with clients. The cantonal authorities, charged by the Constitution with promoting the learning and use of French and with ensuring its defence, can support professional training in French and ensure the quality of the language in their own financial and tax publications. They can also accompany the creation of an international

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commercial court that combines English for international disputes with French for the French-speaking clientele.¹

Maintenance is finally a matter of the relationship with the French-speaking world. The Francophonie is a growing market, whose centre of gravity is shifting towards Africa and in which Geneva occupies a position that Part I and Chapter II of this part have described. Maintaining the language also means maintaining this relationship: taking part in French-speaking business forums, training African and Maghrebi professionals, publishing in French on the questions of finance, compliance and governance that concern these markets, and making Geneva a French-speaking reference in responsible finance. For the Geneva financial centre, French, which is anything but a relic, is one of the rare pieces of infrastructure that it owns outright and that its competitors cannot build.

Actor	Measures for maintaining the linguistic asset
Institutions	explicit language policy; client documentation in French of good quality; training in French in fields requiring precision; recognition of language skills
Umbrella organisations	bilingual publications; support for scholarship in French; surveys on the language of client relationships
Cantonal authorities	professional training in French; linguistic quality of official publications; bilingual international commercial court
Universities and institutes	maintenance of law and finance programmes in French; training of legal and financial translators and interpreters
The financial centre as a whole	relations with the Francophonie; reference publications in French; training of professionals from French-speaking markets

1 Notes

1. Art. 5 para. 2 Cst-GE (Constitution of the Republic and Canton of Geneva), silgeneve.ch (accessed September 2026). ↩

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