

Non-governmental organisations: a sector in their own right

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In Geneva the non-governmental organisations form a sector in their own right. The cantonal statistical office counted 461 of them in 2023, employing 3,276 people.¹ They cover every field of international cooperation: human rights, humanitarian action, health, the environment, development, fair trade, disarmament and migration. Some are large global organisations whose headquarters or a major office is in Geneva, whereas others are small specialised structures.

Their presence is explained by the proximity of the intergovernmental organisations, before which they carry out advocacy, take part in negotiations and obtain funding. Two hundred and fifty of them enjoy consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which allows them to participate in the work of the organisation.² A mapping of the non-governmental organisations of International Geneva, published in 2019, analysed their diversity and their relationships.³

The non-governmental organisations maintain ambivalent relationships with the financial centre. They are clients of the banks, for the management of their assets and the execution of their payments, often to countries in crisis. They are partners of the foundations and of impact finance, which Chapter IV describes. Some of them are also critics of the financial centre, denouncing its role in tax evasion, capital flight from developing countries, commodity trading and the financing of contested activities.⁴

This criticism, voiced from Geneva itself, acts as a spur to the financial centre. It has contributed to the reforms described in Part E, in particular the criminalisation of money laundering, tax transparency and the extension of due diligence obligations. It continues to feed the debate on commodity trading, which Parts G and H will examine. Practitioners in the financial centre have an interest in knowing these criticisms, assessing their merits and answering them with facts.

1 Notes

1. “La Genève internationale en chiffres”, swissinfo.ch, 7 November 2024, citing OCSTAT. ↩
2. Ville de Genève, “Institutions internationales, missions permanentes et organisations non gouvernementales à Genève”, geneve.ch (accessed September 2026). ↩
3. Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office at Geneva, “La Genève internationale en faits et chiffres”, which refers to the “Cartographie des ONG au sein de la Genève internationale” (Mapping of NGOs within International Geneva) of April 2019. ↩
4. Public Eye, “Dirty Diesel”, September 2016 (publiceye.ch); Swissaid, report of 30 May 2024 on African gold (see Part I, Chapter II); Transparency International Switzerland, reports cited in Part H. ↩

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