

The economic weight

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

The cantonal statistical office regularly measures the economic weight of International Geneva. In 2021, the international organisations generated 27,967 jobs in the canton, 64 per cent of them held by permanent officials of organisations benefiting from a headquarters agreement, to which were added 4,140 jobs in the permanent missions and consulates. Their total expenditure in 2020 reached CHF 6,446 million, 83 per cent of which was current expenditure, chiefly salary costs.¹ In 2023, the international organisations accounted for 28,730 jobs, a figure that fell for the first time in more than a decade, to which were added 4,025 people working for the permanent missions, 3,276 people employed by international non-governmental organisations and 198 consular employees, or around 36,000 jobs in total.²

These figures should be set alongside those of the financial centre, which has more than 38,000 jobs according to the Fondation Genève Place Financière.³ The two groups are of comparable size and, together with the multinational companies and commodity trading, form the pillars of the Geneva economy. The jobs of the international organisations are not included in the ordinary business statistics, so they must be added to the other data in order to measure the economy of the canton.⁴

The expenditure of the international organisations, in the region of CHF 6.4 billion in 2020, feeds the local economy: salaries spent in the region, rents, purchases of goods and services, and the construction and maintenance of buildings. The permanent missions and the conferences add considerable flows connected with the stays of delegates, hotels, restaurants and transport. A 2025 article puts forward much higher figures, of nearly 150,000 jobs and six billion francs in economic spin-offs, for the whole fabric formed by the organisations, the non-governmental organisations, the missions and the research centres. These figures, which

presumably rest on a very broad definition that includes indirect jobs, must be handled with care.⁵

International Geneva also maintains close links with the multinational companies. According to the cantonal statistical office, Geneva had 2,133 multinationals in 2019, compared with 931 in 2008, of which 754 were foreign. The multinationals account for around 37 per cent of the jobs in the canton, notably in intellectual and scientific professions and management functions, while having generated added value of CHF 32 billion.⁶ Among the major employers cited are a global tobacco company and two large commodity trading houses whose principal operational centres are in Geneva.⁷ The presence of the international organisations and that of the multinationals reinforce each other: the former attract talent and institutions, the latter head offices and investment.

Worked example. The international organisations spent CHF 6,446 million in 2020, 83 per cent of which was current expenditure, or around CHF 5.35 billion, chiefly on salaries. If half of this sum is spent in the region, the direct effect on the local economy amounts to around CHF 2.7 billion a year, even before counting the induced effects. The underlying figures are those of OCSTAT, whereas the geographical distribution of the expenditure is an assumption.

1 Notes

1. Ville de Genève, “Poids de la Genève internationale dans l’économie et l’emploi genevois”, geneve.ch (accessed September 2026), citing OCSTAT. ↩
2. “La Genève internationale en chiffres”, swissinfo.ch, 7 November 2024, cited above. ↩
3. Fondation Genève Place Financière, presentation, geneve-finance.ch (accessed September 2026). ↩
4. Ville de Genève, “Poids de la Genève internationale”, cited above. ↩
5. “L’avenir incertain de la Genève internationale”, Genève attractive, 24 June 2025. ↩
6. “La Genève internationale en chiffres”, swissinfo.ch, 7 November 2024, cited above. ↩

7. swissinfo.ch, cited above, which names Japan Tobacco International, Trafigura and Gunvor. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/geneva-the-economic-weight