

The institutional landscape

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

According to the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office, the canton of Geneva hosts forty international organisations, out of forty-eight established in Switzerland, several hundred non-governmental organisations and the permanent missions of the 185 member States of the United Nations, Switzerland among them, and of two non-member States.¹ The cantonal statistical office, for its part, has counted thirty-eight international organisations since 2023, after thirty-four in 2018, thirty-six in 2019, thirty-seven in 2020, thirty-eight in 2021 and thirty-nine in 2022.² The differences between these counts stem from the definitions adopted, in particular the distinction between organisations benefiting from a headquarters agreement and other bodies.

These organisations include the United Nations Office at Geneva, the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Trade Organization, the International Telecommunication Union, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the World Meteorological Organization, the International Organization for Migration, CERN and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has the particular status of an organisation under Swiss private law endowed with an international mandate.³

The City of Geneva states that more than thirty international organisations are present and active on its territory, that 176 foreign States maintain a mission or permanent representation there, that more than four hundred non-governmental organisations are established there, of which two hundred and fifty enjoy consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and that nearly thirty thousand staff contribute to international cooperation from Geneva.⁴ The cantonal statistical office counted four hundred and sixty-one international non-governmental organisations in 2023.⁵

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The status of these organisations rests on headquarters agreements concluded with the Federal Council, which confer on them international legal personality and legal capacity in Switzerland, define their privileges and immunities and those of the persons called upon in an official capacity to work with them, and are accompanied by fiscal agreements governing the tax status of the organisation and its staff.⁶ These privileges — tax exemptions, inviolability of premises, immunities — are the conditions of hospitality that Switzerland offers in its capacity as host State.

Category	Order of magnitude
International organisations in the canton	38 according to OCSTAT (2023), 40 according to the Swiss Mission
International non-governmental organisations	461 (OCSTAT, 2023); more than 400 according to the City
States represented by a permanent mission	176 according to the City; 185 member States and 2 non-members according to the Swiss Mission
Non-governmental organisations with consultative status with ECOSOC	250
Conferences	around 581,000 delegates per year

The data on conferences come from the Swiss Mission.⁷

Key points. Geneva hosts some forty international organisations, more than four hundred non-governmental organisations and the permanent missions of almost every State in the world. These institutions rest on headquarters agreements that confer privileges and immunities on them.

1 Notes

1. Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office at Geneva, “La Genève internationale en faits et chiffres” (International Geneva in facts and figures), dfae.admin.ch (accessed September 2026). ↩
2. Office cantonal de la statistique, Informations statistiques no. 12, “Les organisations internationales”, November 2025. ↩
3. Els Debuf, International Review of the Red Cross, vol. 97, 2015 (association under Swiss law endowed with international legal personality, headquarters agreement with Switzerland); FDFA, “Loi sur l’État hôte” (Host State Act) (eda.admin.ch); Ville de Genève, “Fondation des immeubles pour les organisations internationales (FIPOI)” (geneve.ch). ↩

4. Ville de Genève, “Institutions internationales, missions permanentes et organisations non gouvernementales à Genève”, geneve.ch (accessed September 2026). ↩
5. “La Genève internationale en chiffres”, swissinfo.ch, 7 November 2024, citing the Office cantonal de la statistique. ↩
6. Office cantonal de la statistique, Informations statistiques no. 12, November 2025, cited above. ↩
7. Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office at Geneva, cited above. ↩

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