

The linguistic landscape of Geneva

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The cantonal statistics draw a clear picture. Between 2020 and 2024, French remained the main language of 79 per cent of the canton’s inhabitants, down two points, followed by English, Portuguese and Spanish.¹ According to the data published in 2024, English was the main language of 12 per cent of the population, Portuguese of 9 per cent and Spanish of 8 per cent. Among the foreign population, French came first with 57 per cent, followed by Portuguese with 19 per cent.² The cantonal statistical office explains the predominance of English as the most common foreign language by the large English-speaking community resident in the canton and by its frequent use in professional life.³

In 2024, 41.5 per cent of the canton’s residents were foreign nationals, an exceptional proportion in Switzerland. Since respondents may declare several main languages, the totals exceed one hundred.⁴ The data for the period 2012–2016 indicated that 71 per cent of the resident population aged fifteen or over spoke only one main language, that 23 per cent were bilingual and that 6 per cent commanded three languages or more, French and English being the two languages most used at work.⁵

At national level, German, together with Swiss German, is the main language of 62 per cent of the permanent resident population, French of 23 per cent, Italian of 8 per cent and Romansh of 0.5 per cent, while non-national languages are declared by 23 per cent of the population.⁶ Geneva is therefore a French-speaking city in a country where French is a minority language, and a city where English, a non-national language, holds second place.

Language	Geneva (main language)	Switzerland (main language)
French	79% (2020–2024)	23%

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Language	Geneva (main language)	Switzerland (main language)
English	12% (2024)	most widespread non-national language
Portuguese	9%	—
Spanish	8%	—
German and Swiss German	minority	62%
Italian	approximately 6%	8%

Key point. French is the main language of 79 per cent of Geneva's residents, down two points between 2020 and 2024, while English, the language of 12 per cent of the population and the second working language, is gaining ground. At Swiss level, German dominates with 62 per cent, whereas French is a minority language with 23 per cent.

1 Notes

1. Tribune de Genève, 23 April 2026, cited above. ↩
2. 20 minutes, 23 July 2024, cited above. ↩
3. 20 minutes, 23 July 2024, cited above. ↩
4. Université Laval, "Suisse : canton de Genève", axl.cefam.ulaval.ca (accessed September 2026), for the share of foreign nationals; Federal Statistical Office, Langues principales (Main languages), for the method. ↩
5. "Quelles sont les langues les plus parlées à Genève ? L'OCSTAT répond", GB News, 23 March 2024. ↩
6. Federal Statistical Office, Langues principales (Main languages), structural survey, bfs.admin.ch (accessed September 2026). ↩

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