

International organisations in Switzerland

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Geneva is home to the European headquarters of the United Nations, the headquarters of the World Trade Organization and the World Health Organization, and many other international organisations. For companies this means a large market for services and a unique place to meet decision-makers from every continent.

1 The legal framework

The Federal Act on the Privileges, Immunities and Facilities and the Financial Subsidies granted by Switzerland as a Host State (Host State Act) of 22 June 2007 governs the status of international organisations, international conferences and their staff (SR 192.12). Each organisation concludes a headquarters agreement with the Federal Council that sets out its immunities, tax exemptions and the status of its officials.

2 What this means for business

- **Procurement:** international organisations buy goods and services under their own procurement rules, not under Swiss public procurement law.
- **Immunity:** disputes with an organisation cannot usually be brought before Swiss courts; contracts should therefore provide for arbitration.
- **Staff:** officials of international organisations are generally exempt from Swiss income tax on their salaries and hold special residence permits; this affects employment, housing and banking arrangements.
- **Trade policy:** the World Trade Organization and the International Trade Centre make Geneva the place where trade disputes are decided and trade rules negotiated.

3 International non-governmental organisations

Geneva also hosts hundreds of non-governmental organisations, foundations and associations active worldwide. Many of them are organised as Swiss associations (Art. 60 ff. CC) or foundations (Art. 80 ff. CC) and can be tax-exempt if they pursue public-interest purposes (Art. 56 lit. g DBG).

4 What pays off in practice

- **Agree on arbitration** in every contract with an international organisation.
- **Register as a supplier** with the procurement services of the organisations relevant to your business.

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