
The Geneva Bar Association

In a Nutshell

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Contents

Introduction	3
Members	3
Organization.....	3
Missions	4
Events	5
Contact.....	6

Introduction

The Geneva Bar Association is a private association founded in 1895 representing the legal profession in Geneva, Switzerland and abroad.

Membership of the association is optional and is not a prerequisite for the practice of the legal profession.

Despite the voluntary nature of its membership, the Geneva Bar Association proudly unites the majority of lawyers registered at the bar in the Canton of Geneva, be it as self-employed lawyers or lawyers employed in a law firm. It also includes most of the trainee lawyers and certain lawyers holding a foreign barrister's license.

Members

The Association currently has 1,900 members exercising in 450 law firms.

Lawyers in Geneva practice in a wide **range of fields**, such as administrative law, civil law, commercial law, construction law and land use planning, tax law, international law, criminal law, arbitration, intellectual property, civil liability and insurance law.

The Geneva Bar has a wide range of **fields of expertise** at the national and international level: international arbitration, financial and banking law (including criminal banking law), intellectual property, expertise in raw materials, air navigation law, etc. International, multicultural and multilingual, the Geneva Bar Association resembles the image of Geneva, an international city of tolerance and migration, encompassing lawyers from 13 different nationalities, 23 different bars and speaking 42 different languages.

Organisation

The Chairman of the Geneva Bar Association is elected by peers for a two-year term and is the spokesperson for Geneva lawyers and their ambassador. He represents the lawyers, ensures discipline and promotes the activities of the Bar. He is the privileged spokesperson that deals with the public and the judicial authorities and transmits all the information concerning the life of the Bar to its members.

The **Board of the Geneva Bar Association**, chaired by the Chairman, is composed of twelve members and assumes the task of managing and administering the association and dealing with all matters concerning the legal profession.

The **Young Bar Association**, chaired by the First Secretary, is a section of the Bar Association. It comprises members of the Bar under the age of 40 and trainee lawyers who are members of the Bar.

The Bar Association has set up **committees** that demonstrate the commitment of its members to the common good:

- Commission on Innovation and Modernisation of the Bar
- Continuous Education Commission
- Human Rights Commission
- Fiscal and Financial Commission
- ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) Commission
- Commission on the Rights of the Child
- Criminal Law Commission
- Civil Law Commission
- Administrative Law Commission
- Equality Commission
- Commission for Lawyers from Foreign Bars

It has also created specialised **forums** for lawyers active in particular fields to exchange views with each other.

The Geneva Bar Association is a member of the Swiss Bar Association (FSA) and of several local associations. At the international level, the Geneva Bar Association is a member of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA), the International Bar Association (IBA), the Conférence Internationale des Barreaux (CIB), the Fédération des Barreaux d'Europe (FBE) and the OIAD (International Observatory for Lawyers in Danger).

Missions

The Geneva Bar Association has a number of missions, including

- To defend and represent the interests of the profession in dealings with the judicial and political authorities, as well as with other bar associations;
- Disciplinary proceedings ensuring the respect of essential principles, such as independence, respect for professional secrecy, social responsibility and generally setting an example;
- Social and professional support missions, by means of the organisation of numerous events (see *below*);
- To promote access to law and justice, in particular through its Legal Advice Centre, located at 13 rue Verdaine, where consultations are provided daily by volunteer lawyers at a cost of CHF 60; through its pro bono platform and through its annual event “The Lawyer in the City” (see *below*);
- To manage the duty solicitor permanence and to ensure that the conditions of detention in the canton's prisons are acceptable;
- To promote the defence of the defence, by supporting foreign lawyers at risk through a “Rapid Response Mechanism”, by hosting foreign lawyers in training programmes in Geneva and by conducting training, observation and judicial action missions abroad;
- Make members aware of occupational health issues, including a pilot project for an anti-harassment scheme within the Bar;
- To promote equality and diversity in law firms.

Events

As part of its missions, the Geneva Bar Association organises numerous events throughout the year, some of which are reserved for its members and others which are open to the public, some are even specifically intended for litigants.

The Bar Association stands out in Switzerland for its wide range of **academic events, training and workshops**, which can be viewed on the website www.odage.ch/formation-permanente/conferences/agenda.

Solemn and social events are also organised throughout the year, such as the Ceremonies for the Passing of the Bar Exam, the Bar Admission sessions, the “Lawyers' Gala”, the Young Bar Association Ski Weekend, the Summer Evening of the Young Bar, the “First Thursday of the Month Drinks”, Lunches for Trainees, Film screenings, Jass (card games) Tournament, Quiz, Trivial Pursuit and Giant Clue of the Young Bar.

In addition, various **cultural events and moot court competitions** are organised by the Bar Association.

The Young Bar Association organises two **"Job Fairs"** each year to enable newly qualified lawyers to meet representatives of law firms interested in hiring young associates and to exchange a few words with potential employers. A **Self-employment seminar** is also offered to any lawyer wishing to embark on the adventure of self-employment

To promote the access of the Law, a hundred volunteer lawyers from the Bar Association take part in the event **“The Lawyer in the City”** to provide free twenty-minute consultations to all citizens who wish to attend without an appointment. The event is held in the city, in a tent set up for the purpose. Advice is given in all areas of law.

Finally, to raise awareness of the Legal World, **“The Lawyer in Schools”** is organised by the Bar in collaboration with the Public Education Department of Geneva. It consists of lawyers, members of the Geneva Bar Association, visiting classes in order to introduce selected aspects of the world of law to 9th grade pupils and to present them with a practical case based on current themes.

Contact

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