



Housing in Geneva

Have you just arrived in Geneva and are a beneficiary of the Hospice général? Do you have questions about your accommodation?

This document provides you with answers to the following questions:

1. What are the different types of places you can live in Switzerland?
2. What is the current housing situation in Geneva?
3. What happens when I arrive in Geneva?
4. How is life organized in a collective living center (CHC)?
5. How do I move from a collective living center to individual housing?
6. How do I access individual housing not covered by the Hospice général scheme if I have a type F, S or B residence permit?
7. What costs will I have to pay in addition to rent?
8. Who pays the rent? How much does the Hospice général contribute towards the rent?
9. Does the Hospice général pay for Wifi, television network and telephone subscriptions?
10. What is the Serafe fee?
11. What are the conduct rules in your housing?





1. What are the different types of places you can live in Switzerland?

Various living arrangements are possible in Switzerland. Here is a summary of the options:

Owner: The person owns their home. Note that it is difficult to own property in Switzerland because of the high cost of houses and apartments. Only four out of ten people own their homes in Switzerland, and less than two out of ten in Geneva.

Tenant: The person occupies a home for which they pay rent and expenses every month. (See point 7)

Apartments owned by private landlords: Real estate and property management agencies (known as “*régies*”) are firms which own housing as private landlords or manage housing for other private property owners. They deal with maintenance of the building, signature of the lease and all affairs relating to the various housing units they manage.

You can also find out about and register with these *régies* which look after a number of buildings and rent out apartments.

Subsidized apartments: These apartments are managed by public-sector landlords and are subsidized by the State to enable people on low incomes to access rental housing. If you meet all the conditions to access subsidized housing (check with your social worker or on ge.ch), you can apply to rent an apartment through the public housing scheme. You must register and renew your application (every eleven months).

An apartment share: An apartment share involves housing being shared by several people on an official and therefore legal basis. An apartment share is often a solution for people living on their own in Geneva enabling them to find a property other than a studio flat (which are very hard to find) and to share the costs relating to rent and expenses.

Renting a room from a homeowner: Owners make an area in their home (bedroom, studio flat) available to a third party in exchange for rent.

Parish/municipality: Certain parishes and municipalities also offer housing.

Host families: This housing solution is offered to people wishing to be welcomed and supported by families.

Hostels/collective living centers: Short-term housing offered to migrants arriving in Geneva or to support people when facing various situations in life.

2. What is the current housing situation in Geneva?

Unlike in other cantons, there is a housing shortage in Geneva, with many people waiting for housing, including residents of Geneva.

The market is saturated. It is very difficult to find individual housing, particularly in the case of studio flats. People facing outstanding debts or pending litigation will have even more difficulty finding housing.

On average, it takes five years to find subsidized housing in Geneva. You will need a lot of patience and will have to ask around.



3. What happens when I arrive in Geneva?

The Hospice général is here to help you and house you when you arrive.

If you already have somewhere to sleep, no problem! Tell the social worker who you meet. They will explain what you need to do.

If you have nowhere to sleep, don't worry, you will be offered a place at a collective living center.

Collective living centers: There are around ten in the canton. They have communal areas and offer similar services in terms of support. This type of housing is funded by the Hospice général until you are able to afford your housing costs.

4. How is life organized in a collective living center (CHC)?

Collective living centers are run by the Hospice général. A social worker providing group assistance will be there to welcome you and support you throughout your stay. Various activities to help you adjust are arranged, with the aid of benevolent organizations and associations, both within the center and outside it, in collaboration with the municipality and neighborhood. You are warmly invited to take part in these various activities. Don't hesitate to ask the team working at the collective living center for further information!

At the living center, residents help each other on a daily basis, which creates a harmonious environment and enables relationships to be forged. People living in the center are asked to adopt appropriate behavior and comply with house rules (no noise after 10 pm, no alcohol to be drunk on the premises, treat others with respect, etc.).

Parents are responsible for their children, who should never be left unsupervised in the center or its surrounding area.

Communal rooms are available to residents and are maintained by a cleaning team. Everyone is asked to leave the area clean and tidy after use. The future of our planet is important to us, and we ask you to ensure your waste is sorted. For this purpose, waste bins are made available in the living center, and you can obtain information from the welfare team on how we operate as an eco-friendly facility aiming to be environmentally responsible.

Instructions have been displayed on how to leave the premises safely in the event of fire. Please ask the welfare team for information about this.

Absence from a collective living center: Please note that any person living in a collective living center who is still in the process of seeking asylum must inform the welfare team if they are going to be absent for more than three days. In the event of an unreported absence of 72 hours, a missing persons report will be issued, which could have serious consequences in relation to your asylum claim.



5. How do I move from a collective living center to individual housing?

A form used to apply for individual housing is available in collective living centers or from the administrative teams. This form provides you with information and a list of the documents needed to prepare an application.

As demand is very high and supply is limited, we cannot guarantee that you will obtain individual Hospice général housing. Additionally, this procedure can be suspended if the system becomes overloaded.

Individual apartments not provided through the Hospice général: the Hospice général strongly encourages you to sign a lease in your name with private-sector *régies* or public-sector landlords and will help you search for housing.

6. How do I access individual housing not covered by the Hospice général scheme if I have a type F, S or B residence permit?

If you meet all the conditions to access subsidized housing, ~~Once you have been resident in Geneva for two years,~~ you should register with the following public landlords: *SFIDP (Secrétariat des Fondations Immobilière de Droit Public)* and *Gérance immobilière municipale (GIM)*.

You should also make a request for housing benefit to the cantonal office for housing and land-use planning (Office cantonal du logement et de la planification foncière) upon presentation of the housing certificate issued by the Hospice général.

If you are contacted and offered housing, we advise you to accept it because if you refuse without good reason the Hospice général may apply a sanction against you and the housing market partners will automatically move your application to the bottom of the waiting list. Don't waste any time and sign your lease as soon as possible!

Your housing application must always be ready with:

- Your last three pay slips or your last three benefit statements
- A document confirming you are not being pursued for unpaid debts (to be updated every three months)
- A housing certificate issued by the Hospice général
- Your employment contract
- A copy of your residence permit
- The completed form for the housing you wish to obtain.

You may send your application by email or deliver it by hand to the private or public landlord offering the housing.

Moving house: If you move house, it is essential that you tell the cantonal Population and Migration Office (OCPM). You have a period of fourteen days to do this.



Beware! You may be offered an unlawful subtenancy. This means that the person letting the housing asks you for rent exceeding the rent charged by the landlord. Therefore, you need to be very careful when you sign a subtenancy agreement and find out the actual amount of the rent.

You should also beware of property finders who offer to search for a property on your behalf and charge you a fee, which is often very high. To find out more about this issue, please read the brochure “Chercher un logement à Genève”.

When you find housing, it is essential that you notify the Hospice général and all of your official contacts who send you monthly invoices (health insurance, doctors, University Hospital of Geneva (HUG), telephone, etc.).

7. What costs will I have to pay in addition to rent?

If you are financially independent, remember that for your housing, you will have to pay:

- Rent: ensure that the cost of the rent does not exceed one third of your monthly income.
- Expenses: costs of heating, hot water, various public taxes. The total expenses are paid by the owner and re-invoiced to tenants.
- SIG: gas and electricity, an invoice is sent every four months.
- Serafe: television fee (further information is found in the Serafe section of this document).
- Third-party liability and home insurance: third-party liability, usually compulsory when you sign a lease in your name, covers you in the event of damage caused to another party's property (e.g. glass breakage in the housing).
Home insurance, not compulsory but strongly recommended, covers your possessions against certain events (theft, water damage or fire).

If you are housed by the Hospice général in a collective housing center or in a Hospice général apartment, you are insured under a collective third-party liability and home insurance policy (collective housing centers and apartments).

If you are not housed under the Hospice général scheme, the insurance cover is paid for while you are receiving financial benefits. If you become financially independent, you must take out an insurance policy in your own name from January 1st in the year following the year when you become independent.

- Before moving in, a rental guarantee must be lodged with the landlord: when you move into a new apartment, the landlord will ask for three months' rent. This is called the deposit. This money is a deposit which will be used to pay for any damage caused to the housing. If you return the apartment in the same condition in which you took it on, the deposit will be returned to you. If you have no savings available, you may request an advance on the deposit from Swisscaution.



As regards the furniture for your future housing, if housing is provided by the Hospice général, it will be fitted out with basic furniture (bed, wardrobe, chair, table). For privately rented apartments, you may request a financial contribution for basic furniture.

8. Who pays the rent? How much does the Hospice général contribute towards the rent?

While you are unable to pay your housing costs, the Hospice général will pay them.

Rented housing outside the Hospice général scheme (N, F, S and B permits):

- If you are housed through a private landlord, the Hospice général will contribute to payment of the rent on the basis of fixed scales.
- If you are provided with housing, the Hospice général will contribute to payment of the rent on the basis of fixed scales.
- Allowance for moving in costs: It may be useful to know that you can receive an allowance for moving in costs. This is an amount granted to you on the basis of your circumstances and residence permit to enable you to furnish your new apartment.

Be careful! The amount of the contribution varies depending on your status. A person may receive help amounting to CHF 1,100.00 per month towards payment of rent.

Once you start receiving an income, you will be invoiced for accommodation costs.

9. Does the Hospice général pay for Wifi, television network and telephone subscriptions?

The Hospice général does not pay for media subscriptions in apartments. These amounts are paid by you unless you are in a collective living center.

10. What is the Serafe fee?

The Serafe fee is compulsory and funds local radio and regional television programs. The annual invoice for CHF 335.00 can be paid quarterly or annually and will automatically be sent to your home address.

11. What are the conduct rules in your housing?

Here are some good-neighbor rules which you must respect:

- Avoid excessive noise between 10 pm and 7 am (music, hoovering, baths, work, parties, etc.). Your neighbors may call the police to report any loud noise, and you could even be fined.



- Do not leave your young children alone and unsupervised in the apartment or its surrounding area (lift shaft, courtyard to the building, etc.).
- Use the areas provided to store pushchairs and bikes and do not leave objects in places where they should not be.
- Please also respect the usage rules and the timetable for your building's laundry room.
- Do not hang washing out of the window.
- Sort your waste, put the dustbins out on the set days, use the specific areas to dispose of large items, do not throw anything out of the window (cigarette ends, dustbins, etc.).
- The washing machines are connected to a specific tap. Therefore, an approved installer must connect the machine permanently in your apartment.
- Be careful, there are many bedbugs in Geneva, so it's best not to pick up old things lying around which could be contaminated!