

# Geneva to introduce minimum wage of £3,500 a month

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## Voters back measure amid reports of growing poverty linked to Covid-19 pandemic

Geneva is to introduce a minimum wage of almost £3,500 a month, reported to be the highest in the world, after locals approved the measure in a surprise vote result sparked by reports of growing coronavirus-linked poverty in the Swiss city.

The canton's 500,000 voters passed the minimum wage proposed by local unions and leftwing parties, after twice rejecting it in 2011 and 2014.

The minimum hourly wage will be set at just under £19.50 an hour, more than twice the rate in neighbouring France, with a guaranteed minimum monthly salary of 4,086 Swiss francs (£3,457) based on a 41-hour working week, or 49,000 Swiss francs (£41,430) a year, in one of the world's most expensive cities to live.

France 3 television reported that the measure came after the Swiss city, whose economy depends on tourist and business visitors, had been hit particularly hard by the Covid-19 epidemic with concern about growing queues of people outside food banks.

Michel Charrat, the president of the [Groupement transfrontalier européen](#), an independent organisation that supports those living and working across the French-Swiss border, described the vote result as a "mark of solidarity" with the city's poor.

"Covid has shown that a certain section of the Swiss population cannot live in Geneva ... 4,000 (Swiss francs) is the minimum to not fall below the poverty line and find yourself in a very difficult situation," Charrat said. He added the measure would benefit 30,000 low-paid workers, two-thirds of them women.

Before Sunday's vote, Alexander Eniline of the Swiss Labour party (PST-POP) said: "The introduction of a minimum wage is a fundamental requirement of justice, and an essential measure against precariousness."

He added that opposition claims that the minimum wage would destroy jobs and increase unemployment were "baseless".

While the unions and leftwing politicians pointed out the high cost of living in Geneva, [classed the third most expensive city in the world](#) after Zurich and Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, the 300,000 cross-border workers living in neighbouring France were reported to be the biggest winners.

Wages in [Switzerland](#) can be regulated, or not, by authorities in the country's 26 cantons. Two other cantons, the Jura and Neuchâtel, have already introduced the same 20 Swiss franc (£18.51) hourly

wage. The rest of the country has no such measure.

The UK's national living wage, the minimum paid to workers over the age of 25, is £8.72. The minimum wage for those younger and apprentices ranges from £4.15-£8.20 an hour.

In France, the minimum wage is €10.15 (£9.28) an hour and €1,539,42 (£1,407.25) a month for a 35-hour working week.

According to [Expatistan](#), which uses crowdfunded data to produce a cost of living index for world cities, Geneva is the world's second most expensive city in which to live. London is listed ninth.

The minimum wage rise was [approved by just over 58%](#) of Geneva voters and the measure come into effect on 17 October. In a national vote, also on Sunday, the [Swiss rejected a rightwing proposal](#) to limit immigration from European Union member states.

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**Kim Willsher**

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