

RESEARCH BRIEF

THE RIGHT TO FOOD IN GENEVA: FOR A JUST TRANSITION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

KEY MESSAGES

On 18 June 2023, 67% of voters chose to enshrine the right to food in the Geneva Constitution. This right includes everyone's right to adequate food, as well as the right to be free from hunger.

In a canton as rich and resourceful as Geneva, it is the right to adequate food that needs to be put into practice. It is not enough to guarantee the right to be free from hunger. Implementing the right to adequate food requires the mobilisation of human and financial resources, which will be at least partly offset by the reduction in health costs associated with overweight and obesity, and by the reduction in the costs of unsustainable food for the environment, which will result from the fact that people in Geneva will be eating in a healthier and more sustainable way.

In international law, the right to adequate food is defined as the right to have physical and economic access at all times to nutritionally, socially and culturally adequate food, produced and consumed in a sustainable and equitable way, safeguarding access to food for future generations, and ensuring, physically and psychologically, individually and/or collectively, a life free from anxiety, fulfilling and dignified.

International law and the Geneva Constitution stipulate that the State (which includes the Canton and municipalities of Geneva) and those performing public functions must respect, protect and fulfil the right to food of everyone in Geneva, without discrimination, in the same way that school-age children are all welcomed at public schools, regardless of the status of their parents.

The right to food implies paying particular attention to patterns of inequality and exclusion in society and in food systems, and focusing on marginalised and vulnerable people and the systemic reasons underlying violations of this and other human rights. It also involves ensuring a just transition towards sustainable food systems and promoting agroecology.

In realising the right to food, it is essential to bring to life the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment, the rule of law and solidarity (PANTHERS), which are the key principles of a human rights-based approach.

DECEMBER 2024 | CHRISTOPHE GOLAY

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INTRODUCTION¹

The right to food was recognised in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which Switzerland ratified in 1992.² However, this right is not recognised in the Federal Constitution. The measures taken in Switzerland to tackle food insecurity – which has been increasing since the Covid-19 crisis, with more than 60,000 people turning to food aid in Geneva in 2023³ – rely on charities and private foundations, sometimes supported by the public authorities. A change of approach is needed.

In 2022, two years after the start of the Covid-19 crisis, the parliament of the Canton of Geneva (the Grand Conseil) proposed enshrining the right to food in the Geneva Constitution. On 18 June 2023, 67% of voters accepted this proposal. To make the right to food a reality, a framework law will have to be passed, and a number of measures have already been taken at municipal level. Since June 2023, the Geneva example has inspired similar initiatives in the Canton of Vaud, at federal level, in France and at the Council of Europe, and it has been presented to the Committee on World Food Security in Rome.⁴

The aim of this publication is to present the definition of the right to food and of the obligations to respect, protect and fulfil this right, without discrimination, which are enshrined in the Geneva Constitution. To do this, we will use their definition in international law, which has crystallised over the last 20 years within international Geneva.

This publication also aims to present a number of laws, strategies and policies at federal, cantonal and municipal level that promote or hinder the implementation of the right to food. We will also present initiatives taken by civil society that push for the right to food to be implemented.

Finally, this publication also aims to put forward recommendations to ensure that the Canton and municipalities of Geneva respect, protect and fulfil the right to food, without discrimination, and promote a just transition towards sustainable food systems.

RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The right to food has been enshrined in binding texts at international and cantonal level in Geneva, and in a more limited way at national and European level.

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

The right to food is recognised in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 ICESCR, as well as in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, all of which have been ratified by Switzerland.

EUROPEAN LEVEL

The right to food is not explicitly recognised in the two main instruments for human rights protection at European level: the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter. However, articles 4, 12, 13, 16, 17, 23 and 30 of the European Social Charter, which Switzerland has not ratified, protect important elements of the right to food.

Two initiatives aim to promote the right to food on the European continent. In October 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution in which it invited the Member States of the Council of Europe, including Switzerland, to include the right to food in their Constitutions; to adopt national framework laws based on the right to food; to give priority to the coherence of the legal framework to make food distribution, processing and marketing systems more equitable, sustainable and stable; and to move from a charitable approach to food aid to the right to food.⁵

The other development is the European Citizens' Initiative on the Right to Food, which was prepared in Geneva in May 2024 and presented in Rome in October 2024.⁶ In this initiative, for which the initiators will have to collect 1 million signatures in at least 7 European Union (EU) Member States, the EU is called upon to 'make the right to food a reality and to integrate human rights principles into all EU laws and policies that have an impact on the right to food in the EU and abroad.'⁷

NATIONAL AND CANTONAL LEVEL

Switzerland ratified the ICESCR in 1992. According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which monitors the application of the ICESCR, this should be accompanied by the recognition of the direct applicability of the ICESCR's provisions in domestic law.⁸

The reality is very different in Switzerland, where the highest political and judicial authorities have for decades taken the view that the rights enshrined in the ICESCR are not directly applicable.⁹ But this position has not prevented the Federal Court from developing case law from 1995 onwards on the protection of the core content of the right to food – the right to be free from hunger – through the right to human dignity. This right was not enshrined in the Constitution in 1995. The Federal Court then recognised the existence of an ‘unwritten federal constitutional right’ to minimum living conditions, including the guarantee of all basic human needs, such as food, clothing and housing, in order to prevent a state unworthy of the human condition.¹⁰ This right was subsequently enshrined in article 12 of the Federal Constitution in 1999.¹¹

In 2023, National Councillor D. Klopfenstein Broggini tabled a parliamentary initiative to enshrine the right to food in the Federal Constitution.¹² This initiative was withdrawn in June 2024 because it did not receive sufficient political support from other parliamentarians. But in the future, it would be quite possible for a popular initiative to call for the right to food to be enshrined in the Federal Constitution.

In Geneva, the limits of the measures deployed to respond to food insecurity were revealed during the Covid-19 crisis.¹³ The response to the emergency came from citizens, associations, private foundations and municipalities, and then from the Canton, which – on the basis of a bill initiated by Member of Parliament (MP) P. Bidaux – granted a CHF 5 million subsidy to the Fondation Partage, Geneva's food bank, in June 2020.¹⁴ The structural response came with the Grand Conseil's proposal – at the instigation of MP H. Verissimo de Freitas – to enshrine the right to food in the cantonal constitution.¹⁵

In the conclusion to his majority report to the Grand Conseil, MP D. Esteban outlined the objectives of this inclusion: ‘This provision represents the basis of a future public policy on food, as it exists for agricultural production. A public policy would enable a comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach to

be adopted, bringing together all the players in the field and moving away from the current situation, in which initiatives – often by associations – follow on from one another with no real coordination and little impact. (...) Food as advocated by the bill encompasses all the related issues. The State is called upon to encourage local, healthy production, produced under socially and ecologically fair conditions.’¹⁶

Prior to the vote, a campaign for the right to food was conducted by five political parties and associations involved in food aid, the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food products, the social economy, health, human rights and environmental protection.¹⁷

On 18 June 2023, 67% of voters agreed to include the right to food in the Geneva Constitution.¹⁸ The new article 38A of the Geneva Constitution states that ‘The right to food is guaranteed. Everyone has the right to adequate food and to be free from hunger’.¹⁹

In drafting the framework law on the right to food and defining a public policy on food, which should be holistic, i.e., include all the elements of the right to food and the corresponding obligations of the State, the Canton of Geneva could draw on the work of the Steering Committee on the Right to Food, which in the second half of 2023 brought together many actors involved in implementing the right to food in Geneva. It could also draw on several texts, including the FAO guide on legislating for the right to food, the Manifesto for the Right to Food adopted by Geneva civil society and signed by several UN experts, and our longest publication on the right to food in Geneva.²⁰

DEFINITION OF THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The right to food has two components, which are enshrined in article 11 of the ICESCR and article 38A of the Geneva Constitution: the right to adequate food and the right to be free from hunger. We will define these two components in this section. Before that, we will introduce the right to food holders.

RIGHT TO FOOD HOLDERS

Everyone has the right to food, without discrimination. This is provided for in article 11 of the ICESCR and article 38A of the Geneva Constitution. In Geneva, the holders of the right to food therefore include all persons residing in the

territory, without exception. This includes nationals and legal residents, but also undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers, people with precarious permits, refugees and stateless persons.²¹

RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD

The right to adequate food is defined in article 15 of one of the most recent instruments adopted by the UN, with Switzerland's support: the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP). It is the right to have physical and economic access at all times to nutritionally, socially and culturally adequate food, produced and consumed in a sustainable and equitable way, safeguarding access to food for future generations, and ensuring, physically and psychologically, individually and/or collectively, a life free from anxiety, fulfilling and dignified.²²

RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM HUNGER

The right to be free from hunger is the minimum level, the core content of the right to food. It is the threshold below which, in principle, we must never go, whatever the circumstances.²³ In the Geneva Constitution, it is part of the essence of the right to food that is described as inviolable (articles 38A and 43.4). It can be defined as the right to have access to minimum essential, sufficient and adequate food, so that everyone is protected from hunger, and from the deterioration of physical and mental functions leading to illness or even death.²⁴

STATES OBLIGATIONS

The right to food implies a series of obligations for States under the ICESCR, and for the State (which includes the Canton and municipalities of Geneva) and for persons performing public functions under the Geneva Constitution. These obligations make it necessary to subordinate all relevant branches of law and sectoral policies to the requirements of the right to food.

Under international law, States must respect, protect and fulfil the right to food, without discrimination.²⁵ Combined with articles 15 and 38.A, article 41 of the Geneva Constitution provides that the right to food must be respected, protected and fulfilled throughout the legal system, without discrimination, and that anyone who assumes a public function is required to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food.

TO GUARANTEE THE RIGHT TO FOOD WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION

Equality and non-discrimination are the two fundamental principles of international human rights law, enshrined in articles 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²⁶ Under international law and according to article 15 of the Geneva Constitution, the obligation to guarantee the exercise of the right to food without discrimination implies eliminating all discrimination in law and in practice.²⁷

In 2019, Switzerland was criticised by the CESCR because it does not have a comprehensive anti-discrimination law that applies uniformly throughout the country, and because of the discrimination that many individuals and groups such as people with disabilities, migrants and people living in poverty continue to suffer in practice.²⁸ In 2010, the same CESCR criticised the fact that people in an irregular situation were excluded from social assistance and had to turn to emergency aid.

To remedy this, it recommended that Switzerland 'provide social aid, instead of emergency aid, as the last social safety net for everyone living in the State party's territory. The Committee also recommends that the State party set common standards for access and entitlement to social aid.'²⁹

By virtue of the obligation to guarantee the exercise of the right to food without discrimination, the State must also guarantee that there is an equal and non-discriminatory enjoyment of the right to food in all schools in the Canton of Geneva.³⁰

International law also stipulates that the State must guarantee that there is no discrimination against peasants and other people working in rural areas. Article 16.6 of UNDROP provides that States 'shall take appropriate measures to ensure fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value, without distinction of any kind.'³¹ The fact that in Geneva, the minimum wage of CHF 24.32 gross per hour in 2024 (CHF 24.48 in 2025) does not apply in agriculture and floriculture, where it is CHF 17.87 (CHF 17.99 in 2025), is a violation of this obligation.³²

Another important article of UNDROP is article 4, which protects rural women against discrimination.³³ In 2023, Switzerland accepted the recommendation of another UN monitoring mechanism – the Universal Periodic Review – to 'guarantee that peasant women have the benefits of social security to strengthen their economic independence, regardless of their civil status and family situation'.³⁴ This

recommendation aimed to abolish discrimination against peasant women in the Swiss social security system. It was made on the basis of a report submitted to the UN by a Swiss peasant organisation and civil society actors working on the right to food.³⁵

TO RESPECT THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The obligation to respect the right to food is the State's obligation to refrain from taking measures that have the effect of depriving anyone of their access to food or the means to obtain it.³⁶

In his report on Covid-19, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, M. Fakhri, called on States to extend the policies implemented during the pandemic with a view to strengthening the realisation of the right to food and convert them into permanent programmes.³⁷ In Geneva, for example, it was essential to make permanent the Social Information Bureau (BiS), which was set up during Covid-19 and then disappeared, to be reopened in 2023.³⁸ The BiS is the result of collaboration between the Canton of Geneva, the City of Geneva, the Hospice général and partner associations. Its aim is to promote access to benefits and combat non-take-up of various forms of social assistance, including financial and food aid. Anyone who comes to BiS can ask questions anonymously, regardless of their status.

TO PROTECT THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The obligation to protect the right to food requires the State to ensure that private sector activities do not deprive individuals of access to adequate food or the means to obtain it.³⁹ This obligation implies that the State must put in place an appropriate legislative and institutional framework, policies and judicial system to protect the right to food.

In Switzerland, the private sector plays a key role in almost all aspects of the right to food. It is therefore important to regulate this private sector, including those involved in production, processing, distribution, consumption and catering, so that they respect the right to food, the rights of producers and those of workers throughout the food chain. The enshrinement of the right to food and the obligation to protect it in the Geneva Constitution means that laws and policies must be amended accordingly.

To protect the right to food, international law stipulates that the State must regulate food prices to ensure that they are fair for producers and affordable for consumers.⁴⁰

In Switzerland, two major retailers – Migros and Coop – play a central role in setting these prices. They account for 70% of the retail market – 80% if we add Denner, which belongs to Migros – and their margins have been denounced as being too high and opaque, notably by the Fédération romande des consommateurs (FRC), which has carried out studies on the prices of dairy products and market garden produce.⁴¹

To find a solution to this situation, National Councillor I. Pasquier-Eichenbergeren tabled a parliamentary initiative in 2022 to set up an observatory of prices and margins in the agri-food sector.⁴² Following the example of Spain, it would also be possible to prohibit buyers from paying a price lower than the production costs of producers, and distributors from buying a product at a price lower than the production costs of a manufacturer.⁴³

In Switzerland, other initiatives have been taken to set fair prices for food products, notably through local contract farming, alternative grocery shops and fair trade.⁴⁴ Two towns in the Canton of Geneva – the cities of Carouge and Geneva – became Fair Trade Towns in 2018 and 2022, in recognition of their commitment to fair trade with producers in the South and in the region.⁴⁵

To protect the right to food, it is also important to guarantee access to justice in cases of violations of the right to food. In our doctoral thesis, we were able to draw on a wealth of case law to demonstrate that the State's various obligations to guarantee the exercise of the right to food without discrimination and to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food are all justiciable.⁴⁶ Now that these obligations are enshrined, along with the right to food, in the Geneva Constitution, it is important that Geneva and federal judges recognise the justiciability of the right to food, and their role in protecting it. It is also important for lawyers to use the right to food to protect the victims of violations.

TO FULFIL THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The obligation to fulfil the right to food implies that the State must facilitate the realisation of the right to food, by creating an environment that enables individuals and groups to feed themselves adequately by their own means, and that it must guarantee the right to food of people who are unable to feed themselves, including through social protection and food aid, always in dignity.⁴⁷

This obligation to fulfil the right to food was defined in the Right to Food Guidelines adopted by States at the FAO in 2004, and in UNDROP adopted in 2018, both with Switzerland's support.⁴⁸ It has also been defined in the reports presented to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva by the Special Rapporteurs on the right to food and the UN Secretary-General.⁴⁹

Among the laws, strategies and policies at federal level that have an impact on the realisation of the right to food in Geneva are articles 104 and 104a of the Federal Constitution, on agriculture and food security, the Federal Law on Agriculture, and the discussions on the new agricultural policy for 2030 (CAP30+).⁵⁰ There is also the Swiss Nutrition Policy 2017-2024 and the Swiss Dietary Recommendations illustrated by the new Swiss Food Pyramid of 2024, as well as the Food Chain Strategy.⁵¹

On the civil society side, important initiatives include the recommendations for establishing a more sustainable food policy and food system, which were presented to the Federal Council in 2023 by the Citizens' Assembly for a Food Policy and the scientific committee *Avenir Alimentaire Suisse*.⁵² *Bio Suisse* and the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) promote the development of organic farming, whose products account for 11.6% of the country's food market.⁵³ The FRC study on the affordability of healthy, sustainable and local food – which showed that it was entirely possible to spend less by eating better – and the *Uniterre* brochure promoting collective access to land are also important.⁵⁴ In 2024, the Social Food Insurance Network proposed the creation of a social food insurance (ASA) modelled on the old age and survivors insurance (AVS).⁵⁵

Among the laws, strategies and policies at cantonal level that have an impact on the realisation of the right to food in Geneva are articles 146 and 187 of the Geneva Constitution, on international cooperation and agriculture, the Cantonal Law on the Promotion of Agriculture and the Cantonal Climate Plan, both of which were revised in 2021, as well as the GRTA – *Genève Région Terre Avenir* – guarantee mark created by the Canton of Geneva in 2004.⁵⁶ There is also the new Law on Social Assistance and the Fight Against Precariousness.⁵⁷

In 2020, a motion by the Grand Conseil, initiated by MP P. Bidaux, called on the Conseil d'Etat (State Council) to establish a territorial food system in a participatory

manner.⁵⁸ In 2023, another motion called on the Conseil d'Etat to contact the major retailers and ask them to remove sweets from the immediate vicinity of checkouts in their shops.⁵⁹ In 2024, MP R. de Sainte Marie tabled a bill to ensure that there are balanced school meals at reduced prices in all cycles d'orientation (secondary schools) in the Canton of Geneva.⁶⁰

In 2023, the Cour des comptes (Court of Audit) published a report in which it evaluated the cantonal programmes to promote healthy eating and regular physical activity aimed at avoiding the negative consequences of overweight and obesity.⁶¹ In the same year, the various partners in the Grand Genève defined a desirable scenario for food and agriculture in 2050.⁶²

Among the laws, strategies and policies at municipal level that have an impact on the realisation of the right to food in Geneva is the City of Geneva's Sustainable Food Charter.⁶³ In 2023, MP O. Azzabi submitted a motion to the Geneva City Council (Conseil administratif) calling for the creation of a common food fund.⁶⁴ In Meyrin, the Municipal Council adopted a motion in 2024 to evaluate the modalities of collaboration with the project to create a Geneva food fund.⁶⁵

In 2023, the twenty or so Swiss municipalities that have been awarded the title of Cities of Taste, including the cities of Geneva and Onex, have been invited to sign the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, adopted in the wake of Expo 2015 'Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life', and signed by more than 260 cities around the world, representing 450 million people.⁶⁶

On the civil society side, a number of initiatives have been taken to facilitate the realisation of the right to food in the Canton and municipalities of Geneva, including by the actors who have adopted the Manifesto for the Right to Food⁶⁷; by the *Mouvement pour une agriculture paysanne et citoyenne* (MAPC), the Geneva section of *Uniterre*, *APRES-Genève*, *Filière Alimentaire des Vergers* (FAV), the *Équilibre* cooperative and *FIAN Suisse*, which are planning the creation of the Geneva food fund⁶⁸; *Semences de pays* and *Bio Genève*⁶⁹; the *Association genevoise pour la promotion du goût*, *Swiss Food Academy* and *Fourchette verte*, which awards the *Fourchette verte* and *Ama terra* labels for restaurants and canteens⁷⁰; *Mater Fondazione* and the *Refettorio*⁷¹; the *Maison de l'Alimentation du Territoire de Genève* (ma-terre association) and *AgriGenève*⁷²; the *Collectif d'associations pour l'action sociale* (CAPAS),

the Fondation Partage, Caritas Genève, the Centre social protestant Genève and Les Colis du Cœur.⁷³

Academic research activities accompany these initiatives by the Geneva authorities and civil society, including through the promotion of new forms of food solidarity.⁷⁴

To facilitate the realisation of the right to food, the Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, within their respective competences, promote sustainable food systems and agroecology and reduce food waste; promote healthy food, an adequate food environment, nutritional education and school meals; ensure an adequate income and standard of living for all working people and their families, and access to productive resources and an adequate standard of living for producers.⁷⁵

To guarantee the right to food, the Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, in accordance with their respective competences, aim to universalise social assistance for those who need it with sufficient levels of benefits and combat non-take-up; reform food aid with a central role for the public authorities; and support the creation and development of a social food insurance and the Geneva food fund.⁷⁶

The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should also, in accordance with their respective competences, collaborate with the other cantons, the Grand Genève, the Confederation and other States to realise the right to food.⁷⁷

CONCLUSION

The enshrinement of the right to food in the Geneva Constitution was the result of a collective effort, and this collective effort must continue in the implementation of this fundamental right. Since June 2023, numerous initiatives have been taken by public authorities and civil society to promote the right to food in Geneva. The Geneva example has also inspired similar initiatives in the Canton of Vaud, at federal level, in France and at the Council of Europe, and it has been presented to the Committee on World Food Security.

In this publication, we have used the work of the UN experts – from International Geneva – to define the right to food and the obligations of the Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food, without discrimination, which are enshrined in the Geneva Constitution.

We can now make recommendations to ensure that the Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities fully respect, protect and fulfil the right to food of everyone in Geneva, without discrimination, and promote a just transition towards sustainable food systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To give practical effect to the right to food enshrined in the Geneva Constitution, the Canton of Geneva should adopt a framework law defining a public policy on food, in a participatory manner with all the stakeholders concerned. This law and policy should ensure that the Canton of Geneva, Geneva's municipalities and those performing public duties respect, protect and fulfil the right to food of everyone, without discrimination.
- The framework law on the right to food should include the creation of a body responsible for supporting the implementation of the law and public policy on the right to food. This body should be participatory and representative of all stakeholders, including people experiencing food insecurity.
- The framework law on the right to food should also include the creation of an interdepartmental, cross-cutting service within the Canton of Geneva responsible for issues relating to the right to food and sustainable food systems.
- Irrespective of whether the framework law is adopted, the Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, take a series of measures, which are set out below.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, review their existing laws, policies, strategies and programmes that impede the respect, protection and fulfilment of the right to food, without discrimination. If necessary, they should develop and adopt new laws, policies, strategies and programmes to ensure that the right to food is implemented in all its dimensions. In this way, they would develop genuine food policies at cantonal and municipal level.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, promote a systemic approach and mutual reinforcement between the realisation of the right to food and other areas of public action, including health, social welfare, education, the fight against climate change and the protection of the environment and biodiversity.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, collaborate with other actors in the Grand Genève and with other cantons, the Confederation and other States to facilitate the realisation of the right to food and ensure a just transition towards sustainable food systems.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, promote the right to food through awareness-raising and information campaigns for the general public and take targeted measures to educate those involved in food and agriculture, their administrations, judges and lawyers, students and pupils about the importance of realising this right in Geneva.
- The Canton of Geneva and Geneva's municipalities should, according to their respective competences, regulate the private sector, including actors involved in production, processing, distribution, consumption and catering, so that they promote the realisation of the right to food and a just transition towards sustainable food systems. They should regulate food prices so that they are fair for producers and affordable for consumers. They should also support the creation of an observatory of prices and margins in the agri-food sector.
- Cantonal and federal judges should protect victims of violations of the right to food, by recognising the justiciability of this fundamental right. Lawyers should use the right to food to protect victims of violations.
- The Canton of Geneva and Geneva's municipalities should, according to their respective competences, encourage local, healthy production, produced under socially and ecologically fair conditions. They should promote sustainable food systems, agroecology and the fight against food waste. They should support producers in the transition of their production methods towards agroecology. They should encourage short distribution channels and identify the potential for increasing local production and processing, by sector, in order to increase the level of self-sufficiency in the canton and Grand Genève.

- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, step up the promotion of a healthy, balanced diet, a suitable food environment and nutritional education, particularly to combat overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases. The Swiss nutritional recommendations illustrated by the 2024 food pyramid should be implemented. The possibility of having access to healthy, local and sustainable food at affordable prices should be promoted, including for people in situations of food insecurity.
- The Canton of Geneva and Geneva's municipalities should, according to their respective competences, take steps to ensure that information on foodstuffs sold in the area (nutritional quality, geographical origin, production methods, etc.) and on the various actors in Geneva's food systems is accessible, so that consumers can make informed choices.
- The Canton of Geneva and Geneva's municipalities should, according to their respective competences, define appropriate purchasing criteria for public food purchases in order to encourage a fair transition towards sustainable food systems. They should do so by favouring GRTA-certified products, peasant, local, seasonal and organic agriculture, vegetarian food, and for imported products, organic or fair trade labelled products.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, make school and pre-school catering universal, guaranteeing equal access without discrimination to adequate food in all schools, at primary and secondary level, and in all early childhood facilities. They should do this by promoting GRTA-certified products, the Fourchette verte and Fourchette verte-Ama terra labels, peasant, local, seasonal and organic agriculture, vegetarian food, and, for imported products, organic or fair trade labelled products.
- The Canton of Geneva and Geneva's municipalities should, according to their respective competences, ensure that other public and semi-public establishments that have collective catering services, including the HUG, IMAD, the University of Geneva and other higher education establishments, facilitate the realisation of the right to food by offering an adequate diet. These establishments should also promote GRTA-certified products, the Fourchette verte and Fourchette verte-Ama terra labels, peasant, local, seasonal and organic agriculture, vegetarian food, and, for imported products, organic or fair trade labelled products. Adequate, local and sustainable food should also be promoted in EMSs and other establishments and restaurants.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, take measures to ensure that all working people and their families have an adequate income and standard of living. Workers in agriculture and floriculture should be paid the same minimum wage as those in other occupations.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, strengthen the links between those who produce and those who consume, in particular through local contract farming and alternative grocery shops. They should also promote fair trade in Geneva and Switzerland.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, ensure that producers have access to productive resources, including production tools, technical assistance, credit, insurance and other financial services. They should identify opportunities for setting up new agricultural structures. They should help young farmers to start up by facilitating their access to land and other productive resources. They should also promote the selection and use of local peasants' seeds, and provide technical support and investment aid for agro-ecological production methods.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, aim to universalise social protection and combat non-take-up of social benefits. The Canton of Geneva should provide the greatest possible number of people who need it with ordinary social assistance. Levels of social benefits should be high enough to ensure that everyone has an adequate standard of living, including the right to adequate food. The Geneva public authorities should promote at federal level the abolition of emergency assistance and the principle of ordinary social assistance for all people in need, as well as the abandonment of the link made between recourse to social assistance, the renewal of a residence permit and the right to family reunification.

- The Canton of Geneva and Geneva's municipalities should, according to their respective competences, identify people in situations of food insecurity and reform food aid, in consultation with the actors concerned and the beneficiaries, so that it guarantees the right to adequate food to anyone who, despite all other measures taken, cannot feed themselves by their own means. The public authorities should have a central role in food aid, which should aim to ensure that people in need and their families enjoy a life free of anxiety, fulfilment and dignity, both physically and psychologically. The public authorities should favour forms of aid that enable beneficiaries to have access to adequate, sustainable and chosen food, and those that aim to help them regain their autonomy in terms of food.
- The Canton of Geneva and the Geneva municipalities should, according to their respective competences, facilitate the creation and development of a social food insurance scheme and a Geneva food fund, in particular to combat the fact that food is an adjustment variable in household budgets. The Geneva food fund aims to give its members, who include people in situations of food insecurity, a monthly sum to buy food in places chosen according to criteria defined by citizens' committees. The aim of the fund is to strengthen the collective and democratic commitment of local residents when it comes to making food choices. It also aims to facilitate physical and economic access to adequate food for all, and a just transition towards sustainable food systems.

END NOTES

¹ This publication is a summary of a larger study in French. C. Golay, [Le droit à l'alimentation à Genève. Pour une transition juste vers des systèmes alimentaires durables](#), 2024.

² ICESCR, 1966.

³ A. Martenot, [Cartographie de l'aide alimentaire à Genève](#), 2024, p. 19. In the Canton of Geneva, which has a population of around 500,000, this represents 12% of the population.

⁴ [Initiative pour un droit à l'alimentation dans le Canton de Vaud](#), 2024 ; [Initiative parlementaire pour inscrire le droit à l'alimentation dans la Constitution fédérale](#), 2023 ; [Sénat français, Droit fondamental à l'alimentation](#), 2024 ; [Action contre la faim, Droit à l'alimentation. La France doit se mettre à table](#), 2024, p. 29 ; [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Guaranteeing the human right to food](#), 2024, para. 35 ; [Committee on World Food Security, Special Event on the Right to Food](#), Rome, 27 October 2023. See also [photos of this event in Rome](#).

⁵ [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Guaranteeing the human right to food](#), 2024, para. 16. See also the recommendations to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, [Guaranteeing the human right to food](#), 2024.

⁶ [Mater Fondazione, Fondazione Pistoletto, Geneva Academy, Geneva Demopracic Forum 2024. European Citizen Initiative for the Right to Food](#), 2024.

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¹⁴ [Projet de loi permettant de répondre à l'urgence du droit à l'alimentation](#), 2020.

¹⁵ [Projet de loi constitutionnelle modifiant la Constitution de la République et canton de Genève](#), 2022.

¹⁶ [Rapport de la commission des Droits de l'Homme \(droits de la personne\) chargée d'étudier le projet de loi constitutionnelle modifiant la constitution de la République et canton de Genève](#), 2022, p. 21.

¹⁷ See the campaign coordinated by the [Groupement associatif pour un droit à l'alimentation](#) and by the [Comité pour le droit à l'alimentation](#).

¹⁸ [Résultats cantonaux de la votation populaire du 18 juin 2023](#).

¹⁹ [Constitution de la République et canton de Genève](#), article 38A.

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²¹ C. Golay, [Le droit à l'alimentation à Genève. Pour une transition juste vers des systèmes alimentaires durables](#), 2024, pp. 28-29.

²² [UNDROP](#), 2018, article 15.2 ; M. Ramel et al., [The Right to Food for a Just Transition Towards Sustainable Food Systems: How the right to food can underpin and guide the European Commission's work on a legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems \(FSFS\)](#), 2023, pp. 11-13 ; C. Golay, [Le droit à l'alimentation à Genève. Pour une transition juste vers des systèmes alimentaires durables](#), 2024, pp. 29-31.

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²⁴ C. Golay, [Le droit à l'alimentation à Genève. Pour une transition juste vers des systèmes alimentaires durables](#), 2024, p. 31.

²⁵ [CESCR, General Comment 12. The right to adequate food \(art. 11\)](#), paras 14-20.

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³⁸ [Bureau d'information sociale](#), 2023.

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⁶⁹ [Bio Genève](#) has more than 50 members, with more than 1,000 hectares of utilised agricultural area (UAA) in Geneva (out of almost 400 farms and more than 11,000 hectares of UAA in total).

⁷⁰ Of the labels awarded by [Fourchette verte](#), [Ama terra](#) is the most demanding in terms of nutrition and sustainability.

⁷¹ [Refettorio](#) is a gastronomic restaurant created by chef W. el Nagar, where you pay to eat at lunchtime, and where people in precarious situations can eat for free in the evening, with the same meal and the same service as at lunchtime. Refettorio was the first adult restaurant in Geneva to be awarded the Fourchette verte-Ama terra label.

⁷² [Association ma-terre](#) brings together 11 actors from Geneva's food system, including [AgriGenève](#), the FRC, [Fourchette verte](#), [Slow Food](#), the [Fondation Partage](#), the [Canton of Geneva](#) and the [City of Geneva](#). See also [AgriGenève, L'agriculture genevoise en 2030. Partie 1. Fondements d'une vision stratégique](#), 2020 ; [AgriGenève, L'agriculture genevoise en 2030. Partie 2. Vision et objectifs stratégiques](#), 2020.

⁷³ CAPAS, [Fondation Partage](#), [Caritas Genève](#), [CSP Genève](#), [Colis du Cœur](#), [Pour la fin de la précarité alimentaire: Oui à un droit à l'alimentation le 18 juin prochain !](#), 2023 ; [Caritas Genève](#), [Épicerie Caritas](#) ; [Caritas Genève](#), [Ateliers Cuisine et Santé](#).

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⁷⁶ C. Golay, [Le droit à l'alimentation à Genève. Pour une transition juste vers des systèmes alimentaires durables](#), 2024, pp. 79-99.

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