



INSTITUT DE HAUTES
ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES
ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT
GRADUATE INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AND
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Paying for Multilateralism Amid Global Shocks: Financing of International Organizations in Geneva, 2013-2023

Livio Silva-Muller
Remo Gassmann
Guilherme De Franco

May 2025*



REPUBLIQUE
ET CANTON
DE GENEVE

POST TENEBRAS LUX

This report was produced by the Geneva Graduate Institute with the generous support from the Republic and State of Geneva

* The findings of this report do not represent an official position of the Republic and Canton of Geneva. All mistakes remain the responsibility of the co-authors.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Part I: Overall Funding Trends	8
The Size and Evolution of International Geneva	8
International Geneva in Comparative Perspective	11
Contributions by Mandate	13
Part II: Exogenous Shocks	15
Brexit and the UK's Reform of ODA	15
United States: Presidencies of Obama (II), Trump (I), and Biden	17
COVID-19 and COVAX	21
Invasion of Ukraine	24
Annex: Methodology	26
About the Authors	28
Acknowledgements	28

Executive Summary

This study charts the funding trends of 21 large international organizations in Geneva based on unique data on over 25,000 contributions from at least 1,000 different funders between 2013 and 2023. Specifically, the study describes how donors behave in the context of four exogenous shocks: the 2016 US elections, the 2016-2020 Brexit process, the 2020 global pandemic, and the 2022 conflict in Ukraine. The report builds on a completely updated and revised dataset and is the second report in a series, contributing to a transparent analysis about the financing and a potential reform of multilateralism. A first study published in 2024 covered the period 2000-2020.¹

The study has the following overall findings, reported in real US dollars (corrected for inflation):

- Annual contributions to Geneva have remained stable between 2013 and 2019, ranging between \$15bn and \$17.9bn. **In 2020, we observed a strong increase to \$21bn, followed by a decrease to \$18.7bn in 2023.** Contributions from public donors increased —from \$15.52bn in 2013 to \$18.7bn in 2020— but contributions started to decline to \$15.9 bn in 2023. This increase and decline can only partially be attributed to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which might mean that governments are decreasing donations more generally. Private donations, which average at about 11% for the decade, follow a different pattern of steady increase: from \$1.3bn in 2013, to \$2.1bn in 2020, and finally \$2.3bn in 2023 (Figure 1).
- The **top 15 donors** account for over 86% of all contributions received by the 21 institutions studied. This donor group is composed of **Western governments, the EU, the UN, and the Gates Foundation.** Their donations overall follow the above-mentioned pattern of stability until 2019, increase in 2020, and then decrease (Figure 2). While G7+EU contributed steadily with over 90% of donations, contributions by remaining G20 countries were at roughly 4.5%, and all other countries 3.5% (Figure 3).
- Between 2014 and 2023, **12 Geneva-based UN agencies accounted for between 18% and 21% of the overall UN budget of 57 UN agencies, funds, and programmes** (Figure 4). In 2023, Geneva-based UN organizations received 21% of overall contributions and employed 33% of UN staff globally (Figure 5). Overall, UN staff increased from around 100,000 in 2014 to 133,000 in 2023.
- Organizations focusing on a mandate in **Health or Humanitarian Law and Action received the most contributions.** This was particularly striking in 2021, when the two mandates combined accounted for almost 91% of total contributions (Figure 6).

With respect to the impact of exogenous shocks on financing trends, the reports find the following:

- **Brexit and the UK's reformation of ODA** had a consequential impact on International Geneva. Donations from the UK prior to Brexit followed trends of other wealthy nations, whereas after Brexit, we observed a strong decrease of almost \$1bn (Figure 7). We find confirming evidence at the level of organizations as well as UN-wide donations (Figure 8).
- Changes in the **US Presidency** also affected International Geneva. While American donations increased like those from other top donors up to 2016, in 2017 we observe a strong decrease, and then in 2021 donations follow expected trends again (Figure 9). Organizations are unevenly affected by these fluctuations, suggesting presidents target specific mandates (Figure 10). The level of dependence of International Geneva on American donations averages at about 30% (Figure 11). However, the level of dependence varies across institutions, with high rates of dependency of IOM (37%), UNHCR (39%),

1 Silva-Muller, Livio, and Remo Gassmann. 2024. *Paying for Multilateralism: Taking Stock on the Financing of International Organisations in Geneva, 2000-2020*. Geneva: Geneva Graduate Institute. doi: 10.71609/iheid-8dyp-db82.

and UNAIDS (47%) in 2023, and institutions with lower rates of dependency around 10% (WTO, OHCHR, and WIPO)

- The **COVID-19 Pandemic** increased donations to health-based organizations in Geneva by almost \$2bn (Figure 13, 14). Importantly, the mix of donors that increased donations, particularly in the case of COVAX, is more varied and includes non-Western governments such as Brazil, China, and Saudi Arabia (Figure 12). Donations receded to normal levels very quickly once the pandemic eased.
- Russian and Ukrainian donations declined after the **2022 invasion of Ukraine**, which had been overall low before (Figure 15). While we do observe an increase in the donations received by humanitarian organizations with mandates affected by the conflict, when controlling for non-affected organizations, it is too early to establish any direct relationship (Figure 16). It is likely that increased pressure on European nations to remilitarize following the Russian invasion will lead to declining humanitarian and development aid budgets.

Introduction

This study reports on an updated database of financial contributions to international organizations (IOs) based in Geneva in the period from 2013 to 2023. It complements a previous report published in 2024. This update comes in the context of an unparalleled reduction in overseas development assistance (ODA), stemming primarily from the ongoing freeze and review of US foreign assistance, but also similar reductions in favor of increased defence spending by several European countries.² It also comes in the aftermath of a series of exogenous shocks that play a role for International Geneva: the 2016 US presidential elections, the 2016 British referendum on the European Union, the 2019 global pandemic, and the 2022 Ukraine war.

For the purposes of this report, we characterize a crisis as a sudden and severe disruption with a widespread impact on a global scale. Such disruptions can stem from exogenous shocks such as natural disasters, pandemics, wars, or financial breakdowns that are beyond the control of authorities, or stem from systemic vulnerabilities. As such, they require a policy response, usually in the form of an immediate intervention by governments or international organizations. In the context of our dataset, such policy responses are visible in the form of shifts in donors' contributions - whether within ODA from one issue area to another or in the form of overall cuts to support other policies such as capital injection into domestic financial markets, emergency spending on public health, or increases in defence budgets.

Crises are often seen as threats to IOs, given the fact that the overwhelming majority of them are dependent on continuous external funding to execute their mandates. Nevertheless, exogenous shocks can sometimes be turned into opportunities for organizations to streamline their core functions, enhance accountability, and diversify their donor base. Crises have often been the starting point for better coordination among UN agencies or channeling of funds in regional coalitions, leading to the creation of the UN-internal Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) or the broader International Recovery Platform (IRP) that brings together UN agencies, international financial institutions and non-governmental organizations.

The Sample of Organizations

The data collected for this study consists of individual contribution-level donations retrieved from the financial reports of 21 organizations between 2013 and 2023. The organizations that compose our sample are UN organizations with headquarters agreements with Switzerland, other large IOs based in Geneva from outside the UN system, and three up-and-coming organizations in the health sector (numbers 19-21 in the list below):

1. World Trade Organization (henceforth WTO)
2. World Intellectual Property Organization (henceforth WIPO)
3. World Health Organization (henceforth WHO)
4. World Economic Forum (henceforth WEF)
5. United Nations Office at Geneva (henceforth UNOG)
6. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (henceforth UNHCR)
7. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (henceforth OHCHR)
8. International Telecommunication Union (henceforth ITU)
9. International Organization for Migration (henceforth IOM)
10. International Labour Organization (henceforth ILO)

2 See US President Executive Orders 14169 and 14199 at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/reevaluating-and-realigning-united-states-foreign-aid/> and <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-and-ending-funding-to-certain-united-nations-organizations-and-reviewing-united-states-support-to-all-international-organizations/> respectively. For details on European ODA reductions see <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/23/global-development-economics-donor-spending-refugee-oecd-world-bank-peak-aid>.

11. International Committee of the Red Cross (henceforth ICRC)
12. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (henceforth Global Fund)
13. European Organization for Nuclear Research (henceforth CERN)
14. International Trade Centre (henceforth ITC)
15. World Meteorological Organization (henceforth WMO)
16. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (henceforth UNAIDS)
17. United Nations Institute for Training and Research (henceforth UNITAR)
18. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (henceforth UNRISD)
19. Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance (henceforth GAVI)
20. Global Antibiotic Research & Development Partnership (henceforth GARDP)
21. Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (henceforth DNDi)

These organizations represent a considerable selection of International Geneva’s main actors. While there are numerous other relevant organizations headquartered in Geneva, especially those working around peace and conflict resolution, these are not included in this report. Neither is the multitude of small and medium-sized NGOs based in Geneva, focusing on similar topics. It is very likely, though, that the dataset covers a substantial part of the funds that flow into International Geneva, as the staff size of organizations is one of the variables considered in building the sample.

Scope of Report

Our dataset consists of over 25,000 contributions from at least 1,000 different funders to the 21 organizations listed above. The granularity of our data is generally high—that is, we find an actual name for a donor (e.g. United States or Gates Foundation) rather than just a type (e.g. public or private)—but varies depending on organization and year (please refer to the annex for more details on our methodology). Unlike other data sources such as the UN System Chief Executives Board of Coordination (CEB) or the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) reports, *our dataset aims to provide a snapshot of International Geneva beyond the UN, including relevant international non-governmental organizations, public-private initiatives, and foundations.* This underscores the role of Geneva as an incubator for global action beyond institutional frameworks. Where reasonable, though, we provide comparisons between our dataset and the UN Chief Executive Board of Coordination data.

The contributions to the IOs in our dataset come from a variety of sources, from government or private donations to membership fees and patent revenue. Similarly, the use of these funds varies heavily according to the purpose of the organization, ranging from staff and research budgets to logistical and material costs. All organizations are headquartered in Geneva and have significant staff presence in the city. For some of them, such as WIPO, WTO, and UNOG, the majority of costs come in the form of salaries for staff. Others, such as IOM or UNHCR, maintain large field presences outside of Geneva and have considerable expenses for material supplies. Our dataset does not include information about the geographic breakdown of each contribution. While it would be interesting to receive that information (albeit it is rarely provided by IOs), its lack does not affect the validity of our argument: despite continuous efforts to minimize overhead costs, funding trends impact every aspect of an organization, whether at its headquarters or in its work on the ground.³ Hence, while comparing organizations within our sample is not the intention (e.g., ICRC raises more money than ITU), the findings extend beyond Geneva and reach the field because organizations are reporting on overall budgets.

3 See the article by DEVEX on reactions to the most recent funding challenges (which are not reflected in this dataset) and how organizations “will do less with less” across the board: <https://www.devex.com/news/europe-s-peace-capital-feels-sting-of-trump-funding-cuts-109854>.

Finally, several IOs within our dataset receive assessed contributions through the UN budget, yet they often rely heavily on voluntary contributions (such as in the case of IOM, OHCHR, and UNHCR). These organizations provide numbers for the overall percentage of assessed vs. voluntary contributions.⁴ Furthermore, a number of IOs in our dataset are outside of the institutional framework of the UN and do not receive assessed contributions, therefore making comparisons across the dataset difficult. Where important, we draw on other data sources such as the UN's Central Executive Board to illustrate differences in assessed versus voluntary contributions.

Annex 1 includes additional information on the methodology of the report.

⁴ Within CEB data, assessed and voluntary contributions are disentangled, yet private donors are not included. In public reports that include private donor data, public donations are not disentangled.

Part I: Overall Funding Trends

The Size and Evolution of International Geneva

Over the ten-year period from 2013 to 2023, governments remain the strongest contributors to Geneva-based IOs. Two observations with seemingly parallel trends stand out: the evolution of overall contributions and the relative share of private contributions.

Figure 1 below shows the overall development of contributions to International Geneva for the period of 2013 to 2023. Until 2020, public and private contributions are steadily increasing, with small reversals in 2015 and 2017. Similarly, the share of private contributions as a percentage of overall contributions grows from 8.14% in 2013 to 10.40% in 2020. The trend stops after 2020 but is followed by a strong increase in the share of private contributions in 2023, reaching a record high of 12.45%.

Governments remain the main funders of International Geneva, but their donations and shares have decreased.

Percentages indicate share of public donations from total.

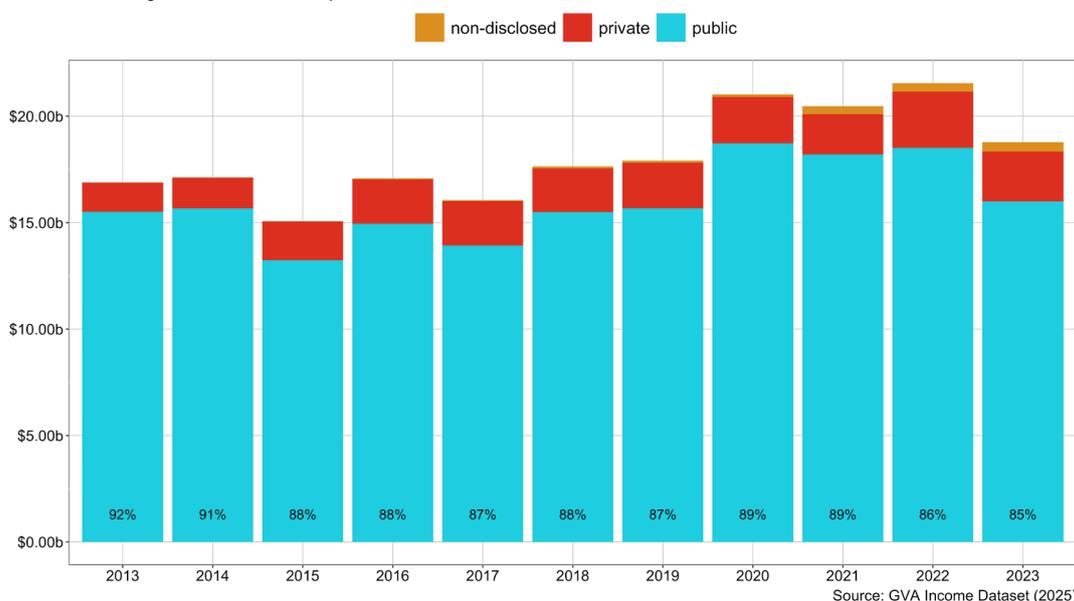


Figure 1: Total contributions per year

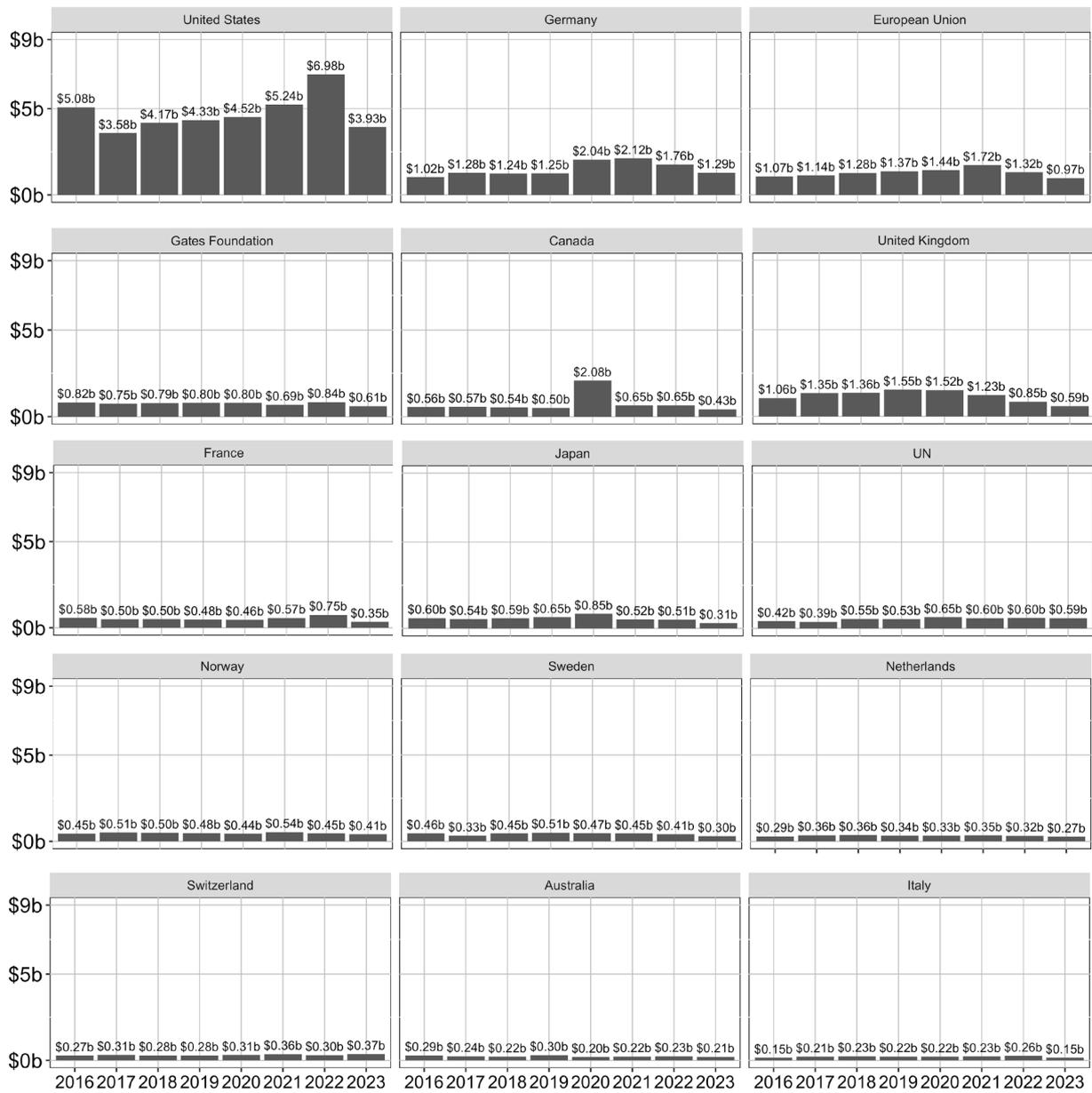
Not all organizations provide the same amount of detail in reporting their donations, which is why there is a small but not insignificant amount of non-disclosed contributions that could be either public or private.⁵ While later subchapters examine the exogenous shocks of the reporting period in detail, the funding plateaus in 2015, 2017, and 2021, as well as the reversal in 2023, coincide with the combined effects of the European sovereign debt and migrant crises in the mid-2010s, and the global disruptions to budgets and supply chains caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine in the early 2020s.

Figure 2 shows the 15 largest contributors and consequently demonstrates the dominance of public money from the Global North in International Geneva. The Gates Foundation is the only private contributor in this list, all other top contributors are sovereign states (12) or intergovernmental organizations (the United Nations itself and the European Union). The list is led by the United States and populated mostly by Western European countries, in addition to Canada, Japan, and Australia. Similar to the overall trend, most top donors' contributions increase in the first half of our reporting period and start decreasing towards the end.

⁵ Please consider our methodology section for more details on the levels of data granularity over the years and for each organization.

Contributions to Multilateralism Decreased Across Most Top Donors

Facets are ordered according to top-15 rank.



Source: GVA Income Dataset (2025)

Figure 2: Top 15 Contributors Over Time

Figure 2 also provides a detailed overview of the 15 top contributors over the last eight years (2016-2023). Most notably, contribution levels for 2023 are lower than for 2016 in real USD for many of the top 15 donors. This is even more striking as most contributors (except for the Gates Foundation, Switzerland, and the US) feature higher funding levels between 2019 and 2022, highlighting the reversal of a nearly global trend of steady increase in funding until 2021-2023.

Within the eight-year period, the United States stands out, contributing 34.12% of the total contributions for 2018-2023 (with 29.18 billion USD), roughly equivalent to the share of the next four top contributors combined (34.84%). While this ratio fluctuates over the years, the US remains by far the most important financial sponsor of International Geneva.

When arranging public donors according to their economic power and membership of (informal) groups for the six-year period from 2018 to 2023, we see a similar picture as with the top donors: Members of the EU and G7 contribute the overwhelming majority of public money to International Geneva, hovering between 90% and 95% of overall public contributions. The combined share of the G20 countries (at around 3%) is almost as high as the sum total of the remaining public donors.

While G7 and EU are the main donors, remaining G20 countries have contributed almost as much as all others in recent years.

Note: y-axes vary in each plot; percentages indicate annual share.



Source: GVA Income Dataset (2025)

Figure 3: G7, G20, Other Countries

Apart from the relative share of the different groups, Figure 3 also shows how funding trends among the groups differ over time: While EU and G7 contributions only started dropping significantly by 2022-23, contributions from G20 countries decreased earlier and less strongly, even picking up by 2023. Contributions from all other countries took the strongest hit between 2018 and 2019 when they almost halved, but then remained much more stable throughout the early 2020s.

International Geneva in Comparative Perspective

The history of international Geneva reaches back far beyond the scope of this report, as it served as the birthplace of the ICRC and housed the League of Nations. Today, Geneva serves as one of the four major hubs of the UN system, together with Nairobi, New York, and Vienna. Out of 57 specialized UN agencies, funds, and programs, 12 are headquartered in Geneva, and various others have regional or liaison offices. As the majority of IOs in our dataset are either specialized agencies of or affiliated with the UN system, this section dives into some analysis specific to those IOs. Of particular interest are the trends in relative budget size and staff count in Geneva compared to the overall UN system.

Share of Contributions to Geneva-based UN Organizations

Out of 57 UN Organizations, 12 are based in Geneva.

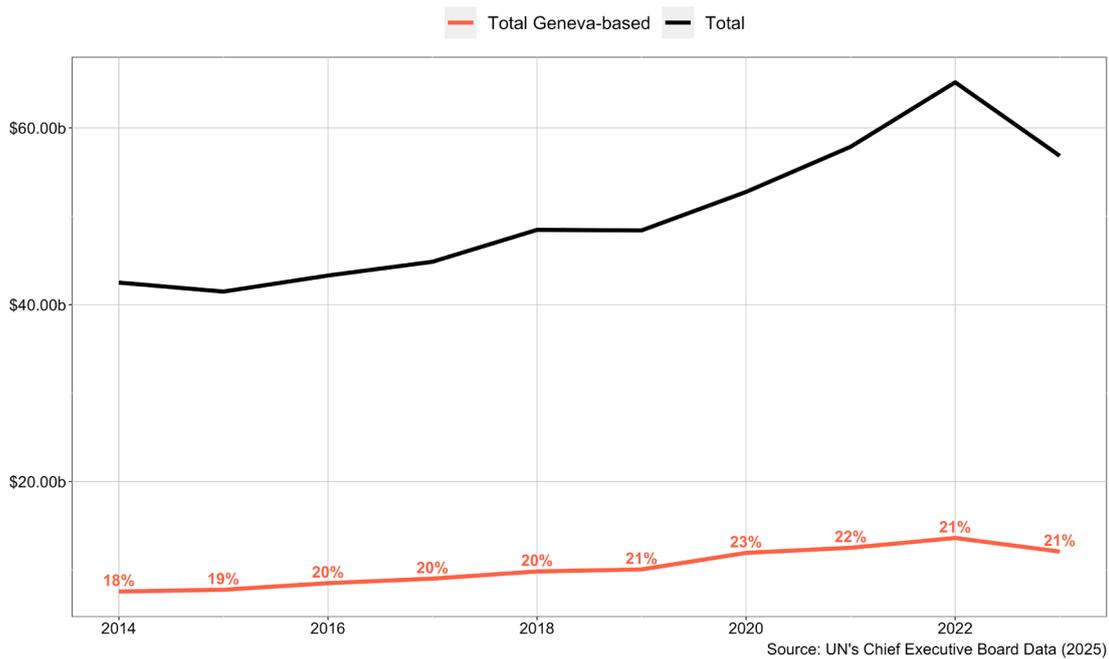


Figure 4: Share of UN Budget Going to Geneva

Figure 4 provides an insight into the relative share of UN contributions going to Geneva. Analogous to our findings, total contributions have risen over the last nine years with a plateau in 2018 and a more pronounced increase in 2020–2022, followed by a drop in 2023. Over the same period, Geneva has consistently received between 18% and 23% of the overall UN budget. Strikingly, Geneva’s share fluctuated less in relative and absolute terms - Geneva has seen less of an increase in the late 2010s but also a smaller drop in 2022–23.

In accordance with the growth of the UN system’s budget, UN staff has increased over the years. Figure 5 shows the overall staff count per year for the UN system, with the share of staff working for organizations headquartered in Geneva. The overall staff count increased from slightly above 100’000 members in 2014 to over 133’000 in 2023.⁶ Within this, the share of UN staff based in Geneva has grown both relatively and in absolute terms from slightly over 25’000 (27% of overall UN staff) to almost 45’000 (33%).

⁶ Importantly, these figures reflect the number of people working for IOs headquartered in Geneva, but not the number of people working in Geneva. According to official figures from the Canton of Geneva, All international organizations in Geneva employed 29’000 people in 2023. Staff includes personnel with staff contracts or on staff appointments for one year or more, but excludes consultants and other forms of contractors. See <https://unsceb.org/hr-organization> for more.

Share of UN Staff working for IOs headquartered in Geneva

Note: HQ in Geneva does not entail that all staff is physically based in Geneva.

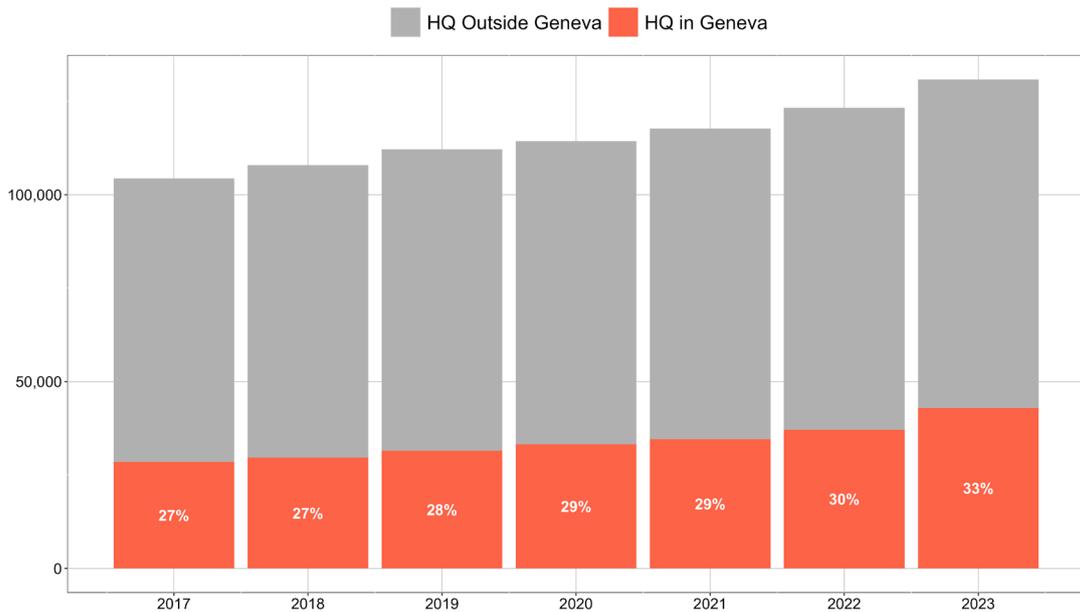


Figure 5: Share of Overall UN Staff Based in Geneva and Abroad

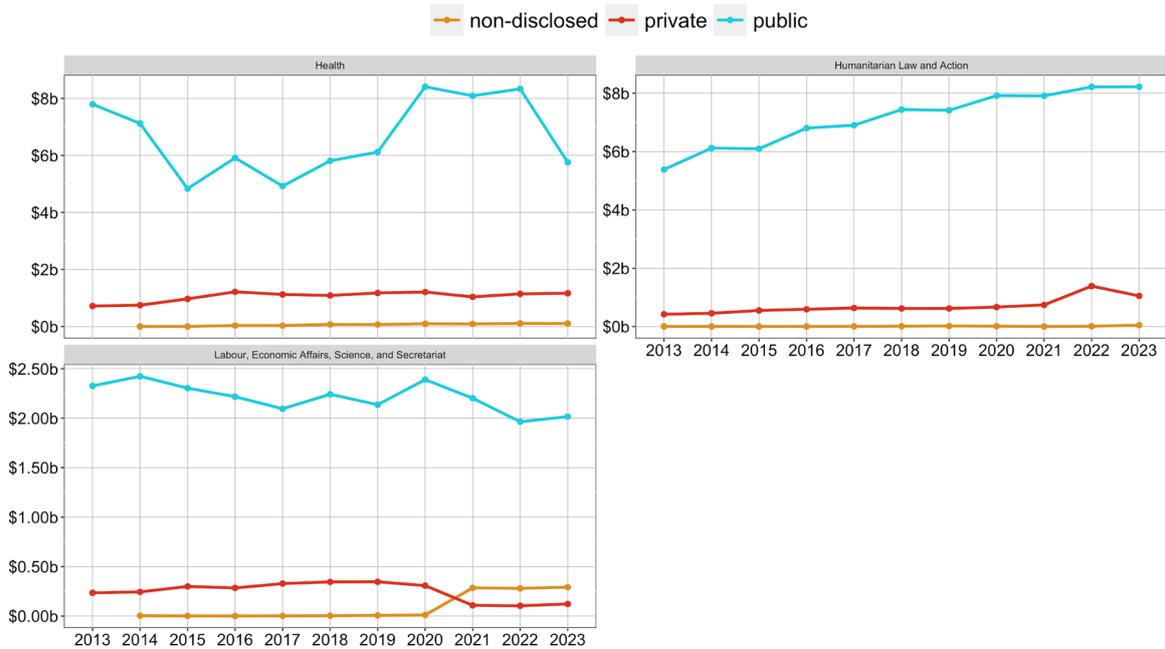
Comparing the figures from 2017 to 2023, two things stand out: first, Geneva-based UN organizations receive on average 21% of overall UN contributions while employing an average of 29% of overall UN staff. In 2023, it received 21% of the funds and employed 33% of the workforce. Second, while the relative share of staff increased, the relative share of funds did not.

Contributions by Mandate

On the recipient side, few trends are discernible across all 21 IOs. During the period covered by our dataset, most organizations show steady or even increasing levels of contributions until 2018/19, which are then followed by strong decreases towards the end of the dataset. Some organizations have seen massive increases in funding after 2020, while others saw no changes or even decreases. Grouping the 21 organizations according to their mandates, we can see that organizations with health-related policies received the majority of these increases.⁷

Figure 6 shows that the health mandate did not only see heavy fluctuations but also received the majority of contributions in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic: consisting of five organizations from our dataset (DNDi, GARDP, GAVI, Global Fund, UNAIDS and WHO), in 2020-22 the mandate received most of the contributions. By comparison, the humanitarian mandate has benefited from the most stable and continuously increasing contributions from the public sector over the entire period.

The share of contributions received by Health and Humanitarian mandates peaked in 2021, representing almost 91% of donations.



Source: GVA Income Dataset (2025)

Figure 6: Total Contributions by Mandate

Some of the mandates subsume several organizations (11 of the 21 organizations within our dataset are grouped into labor, economic affairs, science, and secretariat), while others consist of fewer organizations (the humanitarian mandate is made up of ICRC, IOM, OHCHR, and UNHCR). This must be kept in mind when making comparisons across mandate groups. Similarly, some mandates are much more resource-intensive than others: most of the organizations working on issues related to labor, economic affairs, and science incur mostly staff costs (with some, such as ITU, WEF, and WIPO, even creating income through their activities). Others, especially in the health and humanitarian sectors, have additional outlays in the form of medications, emergency food rations, and winterization kits, as well as the logistical cost associated with their distribution.

⁷ We utilize the categories provided by Genève Internationale’s website, but we include UNOG to the “Labor, Economic Affairs, Science, and Secretariat” mandate to ease comparison. See <https://www.geneve-int.ch/resources-topic>.

Nevertheless, the differences across mandates are striking. Not only does the health mandate receive the most contributions overall, but it is also the mandate with the most relevant private contributions, making up about 13.60% of overall contributions. This is mostly tied to the targeted funding of health initiatives by the Gates Foundation. None of the other mandates received private contributions of similar magnitude; private contributions made up 8.9% of overall contributions to the humanitarian mandate and 9.7% of contributions to the labor mandate.

PART II: Exogenous Shocks

Our dataset covers several disruptions to the functioning of the multilateral system: as of 2013, the European economies were still reeling from the European sovereign debt crisis. In the mid-2010s, the EU experienced a surge of migrants and refugees coming mainly from the Middle East and Africa, which strained the EU's asylum and social protection systems. The 2016 referendum on the UK's membership in the EU and the election of Donald Trump in the US in the same year were an expression of increasing disillusionment with globalization and multilateral institutions. 2020 saw one of the biggest disruptions to every aspect of global activity with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the 2022 full-scale war in Ukraine destabilized the international system and left global trade in disarray.

While not all of these shocks are traceable in our dataset, this section will look in detail at the consequences of Brexit, the first presidency of Donald Trump in comparison to his predecessor and successor, the impact of Covid-19, and the Ukraine war. For each one of these exogenous shocks, we will draw on specific comparisons in an attempt to better gauge their effects. To inform our analyses, we conduct a few more reliable statistical analyses in the background, but we opt for presenting graphs only for ease of reading.

Brexit and the UK's Reform of ODA

Brexit encompasses a series of macro-level changes to British politics, the British economy, and British society. While the referendum took place in 2016, negotiations stretched over four years. This means that the exact pathways through which Brexit affects the UK's contributions to International Geneva are varied and complex. Under the leadership of Boris Johnson, for example, we observed both a reduction in overall budgets—that is, austerity—as well as attempts to minimize the size of government. An important part of these attempts was the UK's post-Brexit structural reform of its development policy. The Department for International Development (DFID) was closed and integrated into the development agenda in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 2020.⁸

To assess the impact on contributions to International Geneva, we compare the UK with similar advanced industrialized economies (Figure 7). Contributions of all other groups continued to rise throughout 2021, while the UK decreased its contribution to all IOs in our dataset from 2019 onwards. Strikingly, UK contributions increased just after the referendum in 2017 and once again in 2019, but decreased consistently and rapidly after 2020, when Brexit was officially implemented and DFID was merged into what became the FCDO.

⁸ While the implementation of Brexit and the closure of DFID and merger into the FCO were two distinct processes, they are indirectly linked to Boris Johnson's broader foreign policy under "Global Britain" that aimed to align development policy more closely with the UK's economic and geopolitical goals. See Devanny & Berry for a detailed analysis: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13619462.2021.1969232?>

Contributions from the UK declined after Brexit when compared to similar developed economies.

Note: y-axes vary in each plot.

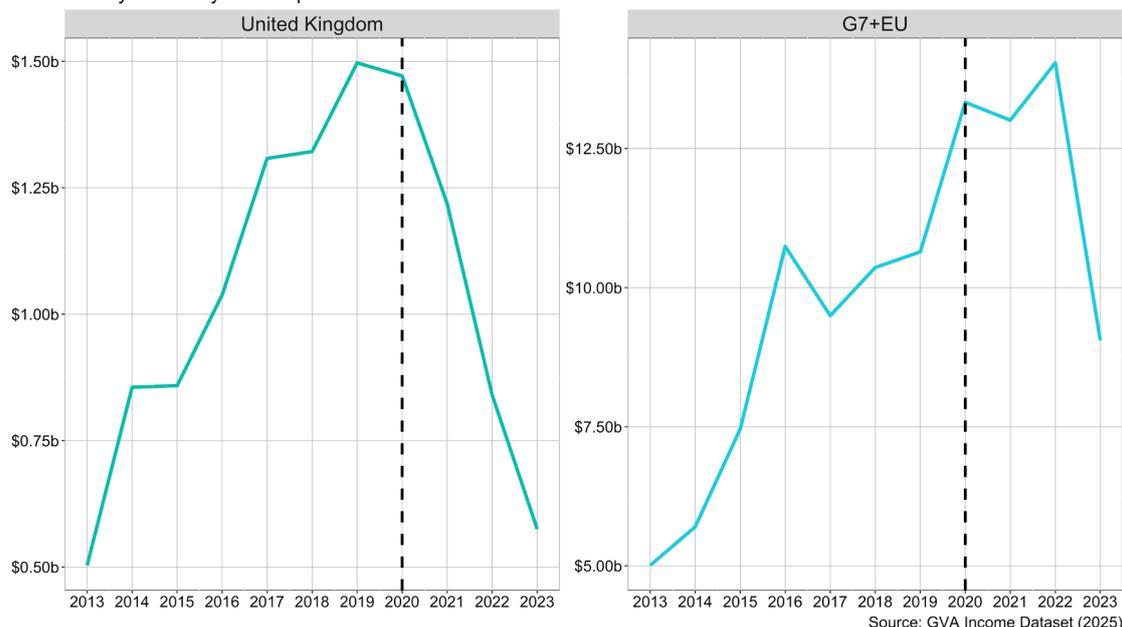


Figure 7: UK donations in Comparison

The decrease in UK contributions had a significant impact on overall contributions. The UK’s percentage of overall contributions increased steadily from 7.83% in 2013 to 11.32% in 2019. Upon completion of the Brexit negotiations, UK contributions decreased by roughly 2 percentage points every year to 5.28% in 2022. This relative decrease remained steady (at 5.40% in 2023), mainly due to the overall decrease in funding in that year. When comparing the UK’s contributions to International Geneva with its GDP over the period of review, contributions fluctuate between 0.40% and 0.53% of GDP from 2018 to 2021, decreasing drastically in the last two years in our dataset to 0.26% in 2022 and 0.18% in 2023. Looking at individual recipients, which we do not depict for brevity, a similar picture emerges: public contributions by the UK went down to all recipients in our dataset by 2020-21, with a slight delay in the case of GAVI. Organizations in the health and humanitarian sectors have seen particularly heavy cuts (ranging from approximately 25% in the case of OHCHR to more than 70% in the case of WHO). Recipients focusing on labour, economic affairs, and science experienced less drastic cuts, apart from ITC, which lost almost the entirety of its USD 20 million contributions from the UK over the three years between 2019 and 2022.

Donations from the United Kingdom by Type

Each panel shows one type of contribution, with percentages indicating share of total.

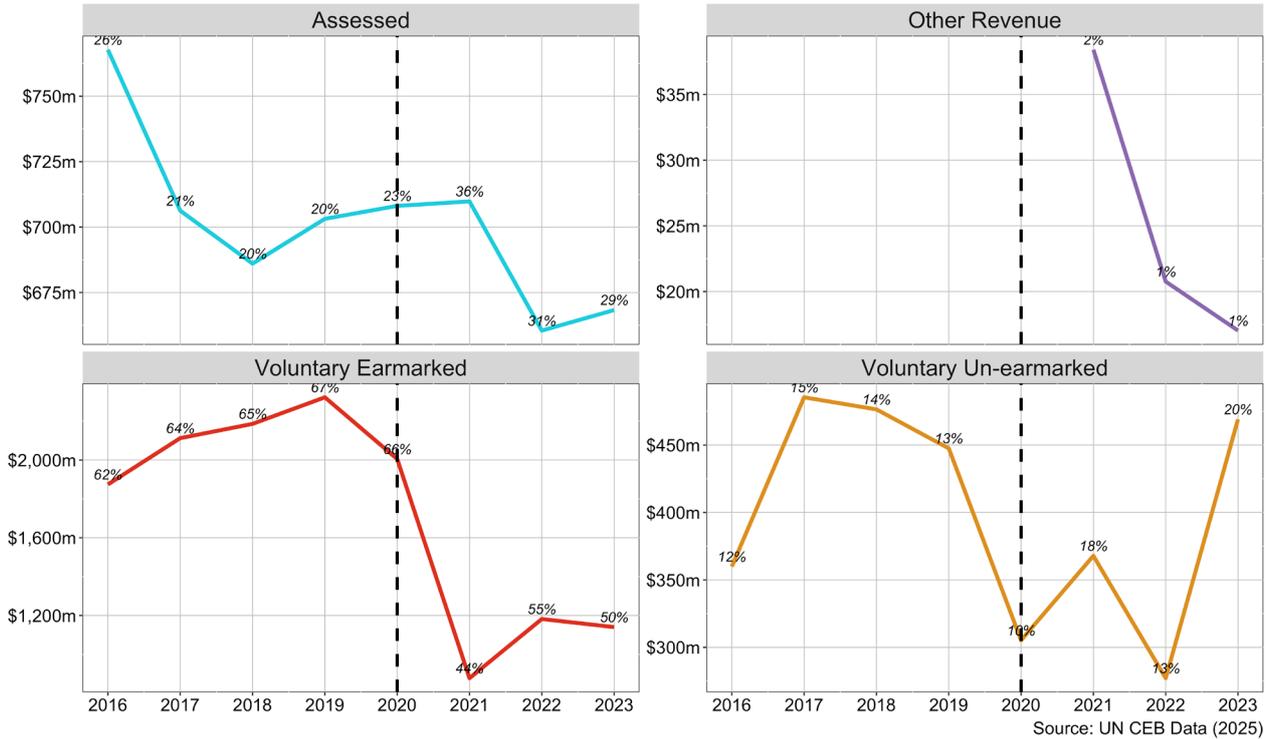


Figure 8: UK Donations by Contribution Type to Overall UN

This trend was visible across assessed and voluntary contributions by the UK: Figure 8 provides an overview of UK contributions to all UN organizations (using UN CEB data). As expected, given the degree of flexibility inherent in voluntary contributions, they decreased massively between 2019 and 2021, both in relative and absolute terms. This is the case for both earmarked and unearmarked voluntary contributions, with the latter recovering in 2021 and 2023, respectively. Similarly, assessed contributions experienced drops in 2016-2018 and 2021-2022, albeit at a smaller level (beware of varying y-axes).

Given the descriptive and comparative evidence above, it is likely that Brexit and its consequences for the UK’s foreign and development policy are associated with a strong decrease in support for International Geneva.

The United States: Presidencies of Obama (II), Trump (I), and Biden

Our dataset encompasses terms of three US presidents with different understandings of the role and value of the multilateral system: Barack Obama (2013-2016), Donald Trump (2017-2020), and Joe Biden (2021-2024). While policy changes by US presidents traditionally materialize with a lag of 1-2 years, and US presidents do not have the legal authority to change or withhold assessed contributions to the UN, they have discretionary power to provide or withhold voluntary contributions to individual UN agencies and other IOs in our dataset.⁹

Figure 9 provides an overview of US contributions to International Geneva compared to other groups of states for all three terms, except for the Biden administration’s last year. The dashed lines show the first year

⁹ Assessed contributions (to the UN regular budget, UN peacekeeping, etc.) are obligatory payments that member states agree to under international law (UN Charter, Articles 17 and 19). The U.S. president cannot unilaterally withhold or stop these contributions without Congressional authorization. Voluntary contributions (to individual agencies or IOs) are discretionary and much more within the executive branch’s control. If the US Congress provides funding for, e.g., global health or environmental programs, the US President (via the State Department or USAID) can choose which agencies to support and how much to give.

of Trump’s and Biden’s terms. Apart from showing the trendline for each presidency, the graph illustrates the dominance of US contributions to International Geneva. US contributions are about the same value as the combined contributions of all G7; they are up to seven times higher than the contributions of G20 countries and all other countries combined.

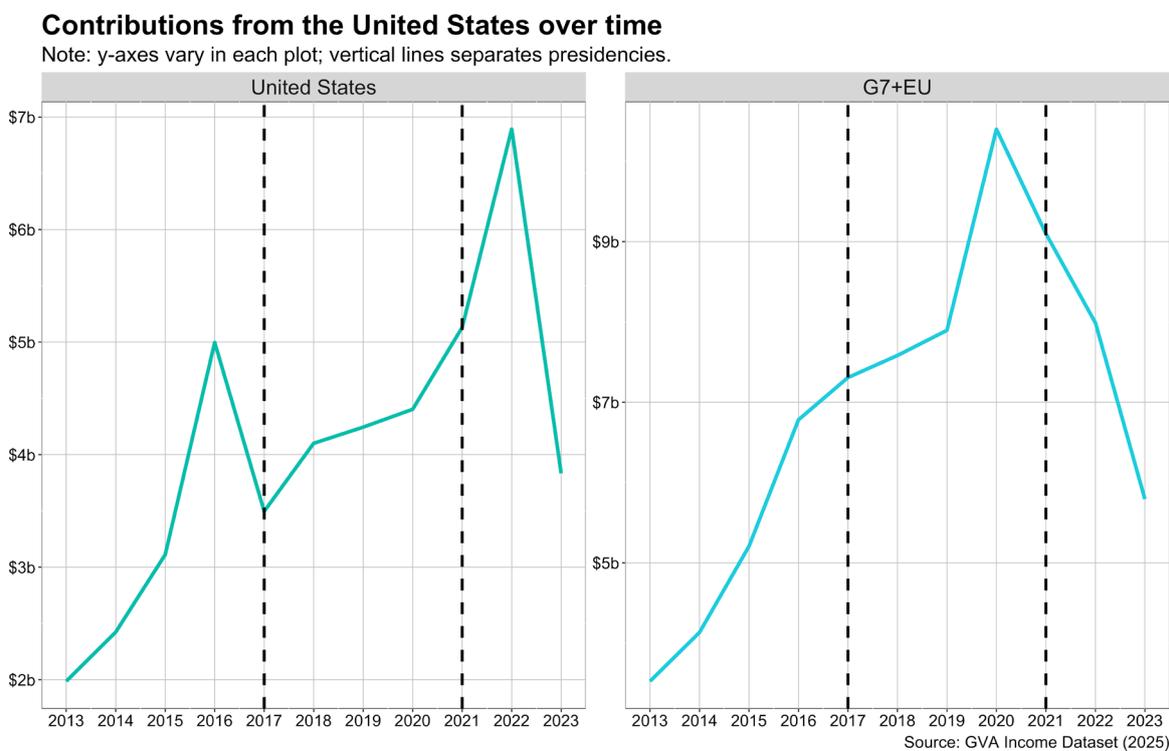


Figure 9: US donations by issue-area wrapped by Presidency

Following a steady increase in contributions during Obama’s second term, Figure 8 shows a drop as Trump took office. While the 2017 contributions were still set under the Obama administration, Trump immediately attempted to cut UN funding and disengage from multilateralism, freezing and withholding funds that had been appropriated by the U.S. Congress in previous years. Many of these were reinstated by Congress, approving funding at higher levels than requested by the administration.¹⁰

From 2018 onwards, contributions recovered from the initial shock and even increased by the end of Trump’s first term, although never reaching the levels of 2016. With Joe Biden taking office in 2021, US contributions leaped by almost USD 2 billion in 2022, as Biden pledged to revitalize the US role and contribution to multilateralism. Yet the strongest drop in US contributions to International Geneva over all three presidencies happened in 2023, when US contributions dropped by almost USD 3 billion. This might in parts be related to domestic politics in the US: in September and December 2022, the Biden administration faced several government shutdowns due to partisan disagreements over spending priorities and policy provisions. Negotiations among US lawmakers resulted in a budget where funding to the UN and other IOs was cut, including humanitarian assistance by USD 1.3 billion and multilateral assistance by USD 1.75 billion compared to previous levels.¹¹

10 See the first paragraph of the Congressional Research Service’s In Focus brief on US funding to the UN, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF10354>.

11 See Vox “Congress short-term funding bills are a terrible way to govern” (<https://www.vox.com/2022/2/17/22933441/congress-government-shutdown-continuing-resolution>) on the shutdown threats and US Global Leadership Coalition “International Affairs Budget Update” (<https://www.usglc.org/the-budget/international-affairs-budget-update-02-13-2024/>) on cuts.

American Contributions and Share of Total Organizational Budgets

Percentage labels in lines show U.S. share from organizational total budget.

Health Humanitarian Law and Action Labour, Economic Affairs, Science, and Secretariat

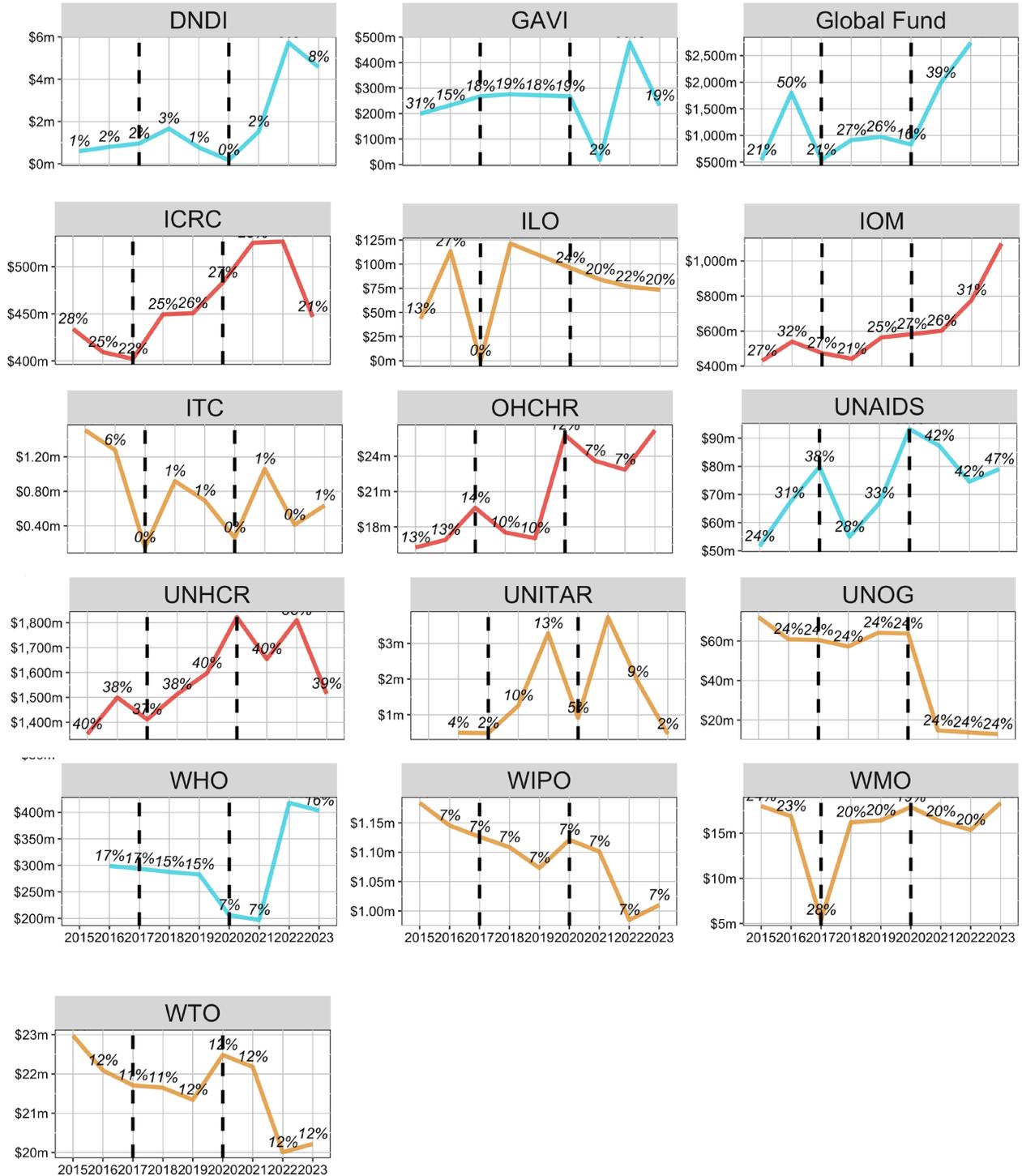


Figure 10: US Donations by Organizations

Source: GVA Income Dataset (2025)

Figure 10 shows US contributions to individual IOs from 2015 to 2023, with the vertical dashed lines representing the changes in presidential administration. We observe significant drops in 2017, particularly for IOM, OHCHR, UNAIDS, and WHO. This coincides with the initial cuts by the first Trump administration to specific UN agencies, which they believed did not align with US foreign policy objectives. Particular targets were organizations working on reproductive rights (which did not align with the administration’s anti-abortion views), global health (where the administration believed other countries needed to contribute more), and migration (which conflicted with the administration’s stronger stance on immigration in the domestic context).¹²

The United States provides more than 30% of the overall contributions to International Geneva during the reporting period. Fluctuations in US contributions, therefore, impact the IOs in our dataset considerably, as illustrated above. However, this dependency is not static but changes over time: dependency varies from one quarter to one third of total funding between 2013 to 2023. Figure 11 below shows the share of US contributions (public and private) to International Geneva from 2013 to 2023. Importantly, the figure only shows the sum of contributions for which we have very granular information (see our annex on methodology), which means that the overall percentage of US contributions each year might differ in reality.

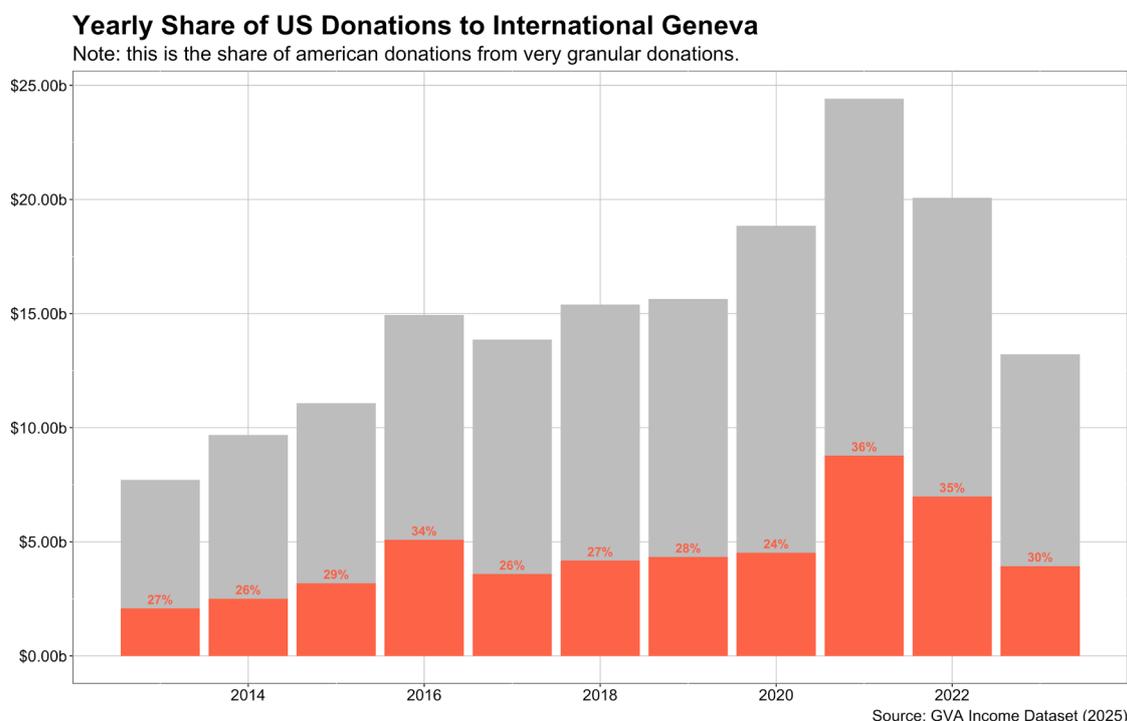


Figure 11: Dependency levels on the USA

Interestingly, there seems to be little correlation between the overall budget size and the US share. While we observe a stable increase in the overall budget until 2021, the relative share of US contributions rose and fell independently, from a relative high of 34% in 2016 to a relative low of 24% in 2020, followed by the highest relative share of 36% in 2021. This could point to other actors stepping in temporarily when the US reduced its contributions, as in the case of Germany in 2020 with WHO funding.¹³

12 See the Guardian regarding reproductive rights <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/apr/04/trump-administration-un-population-fund-abortion>, the Center for Immigration Studies on migration policies <https://cis.org/Rush/IOM-Votes-No-Trump> and KFF on global health policy <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/a-check-up-on-u-s-global-health-policy-after-one-year-of-the-trump-administration/>.

13 In June 2020, following the U.S. administration’s announcement to halt funding to the WHO, Germany pledged over €500 million (approximately \$560 million) to support the organization’s efforts in combating the pandemic. See <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/06/25/883302474/germany-and-france-promise-new-financial-support-to-world-health-organization> for details.

The US is the single largest contributor to the UN system beyond the organizations based in Geneva. This stems not so much from the US being assessed at the single highest level for regular UN budget contributions as it does from the US’s massive provision of voluntary contributions. Figure 12 below shows the trend of US contributions to the UN system over the last nine years (based on UN CEB data). While the assessed contributions peaked in 2015 and then dropped steadily, voluntary contributions were much more volatile (and were two to four times the size of assessed contributions).

Donations from the United States by Total and Share of Contribution Type

Each panel shows one type of contribution.

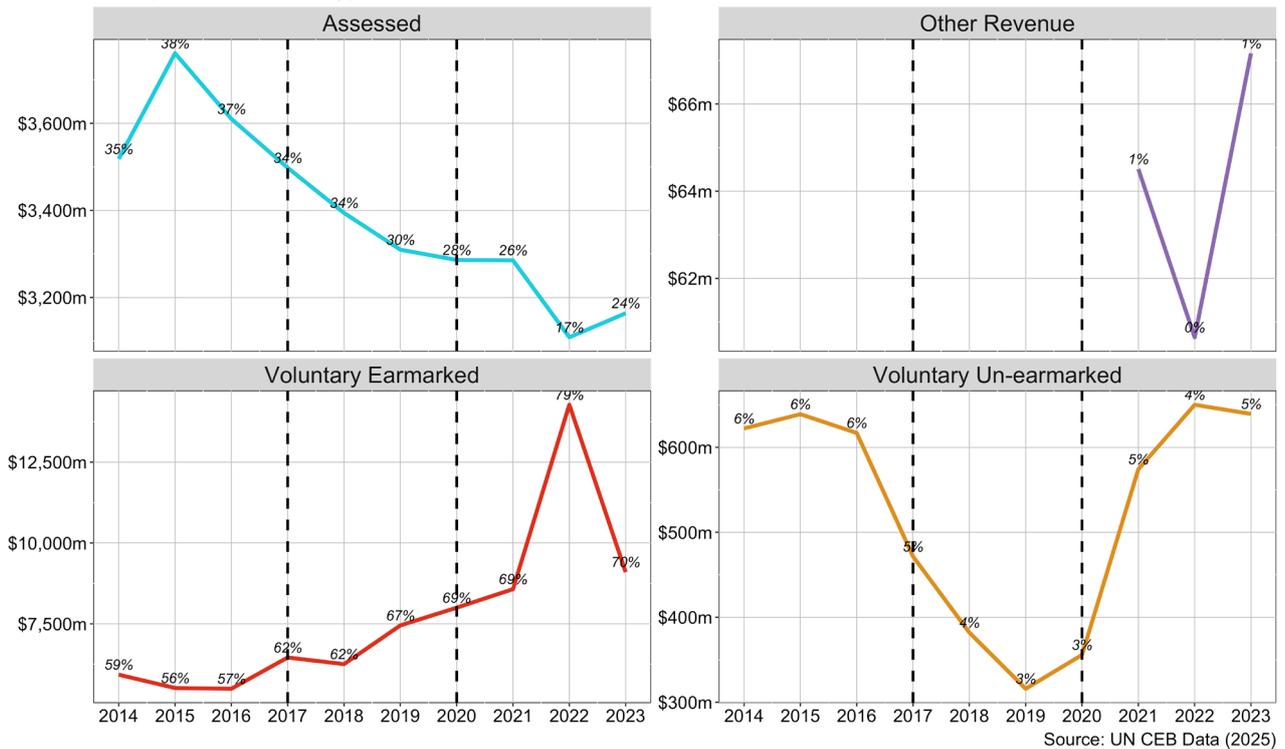


Figure 12: US Donations by Contribution Type to Overall UN

Both voluntary earmarked and unearmarked contributions by the US to the UN system peaked in 2022, with the former showing a steady increase in the preceding decade while the latter returned to 2015 levels after dropping by almost half until 2019. The increase in voluntary contributions took place in the context of the international efforts to curb the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the US was highly involved (see next section).

COVID-19 and COVAX

The worldwide spread of the coronavirus throughout 2020 and 2021 brought unparalleled disruptions to almost every aspect of human activity. In response, the global community set up COVAX, the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access initiative, to ensure that all countries, regardless of income level, could access vaccines at the same time and at the same price. Two out of the three leaders bringing together COVAX, GAVI, and the WHO, are part of our dataset (the third being CEPI, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations). Apart from coordination and technical support, COVAX supported low- and middle-income countries in accessing vaccines through the Advance Market Commitment (AMC) mechanism, which was facilitated by GAVI. The mechanism was launched in April 2020 and concluded its activities in December 2023, thus operating fully within our reporting period.

Top Donors to Multilateralism vs. COVAX AMC (2013–2023)

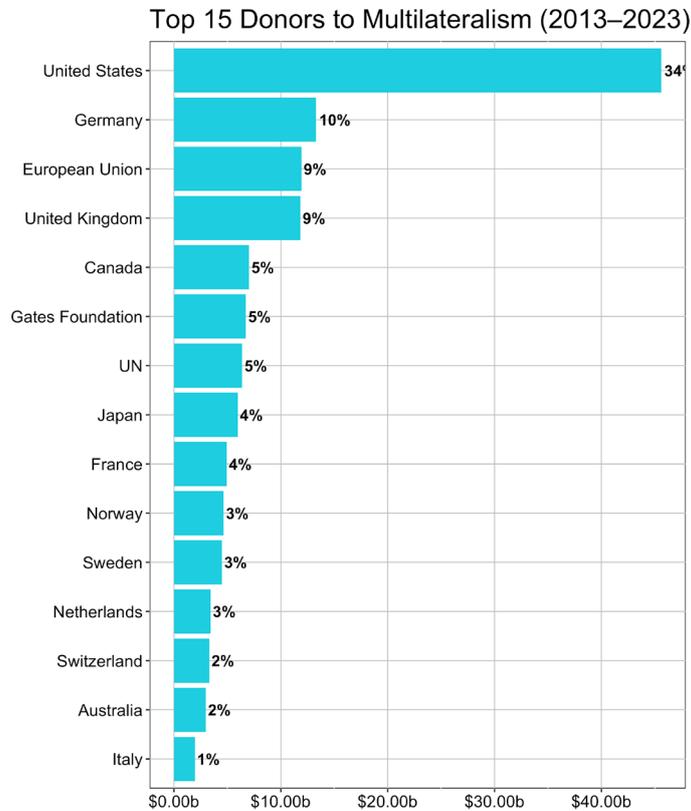
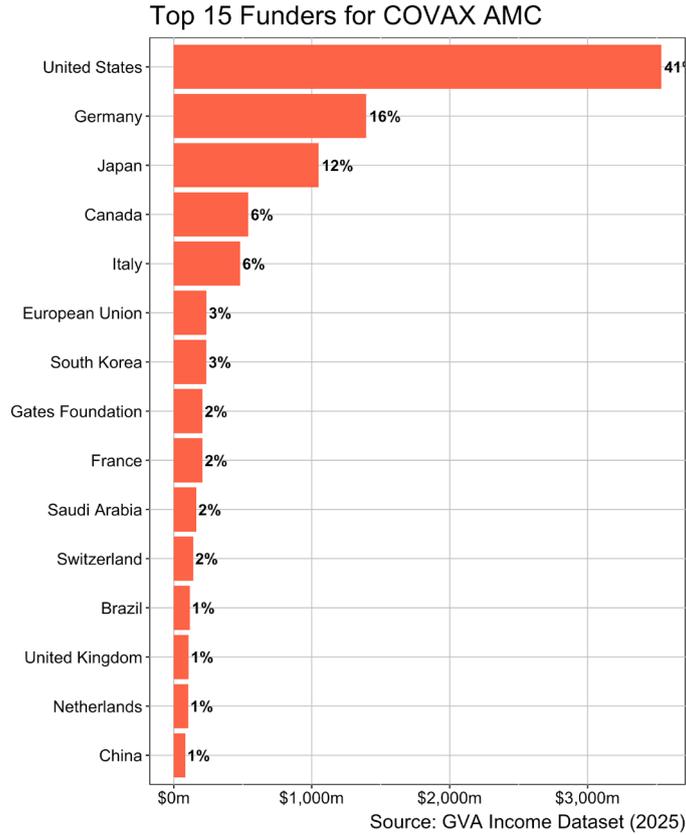


Figure 13: COVAX Breakdown

Figure 13 above shows the biggest donors to COVAX’s AMC mechanism within our dataset. Similar to our overall findings, public donors from the Global North dominate the picture, with the Gates Foundation as the recurring exception. The list is led by the United States, which provides almost as much as the next five contributors. In contrast to our other observations, though, the list features many unexpected players. The second facet, right-hand side in blue, provides again the top 15 overall contributors for comparison purposes. The comparison highlights how unexpected G20 nations—such as South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and China—became important funders for COVAX.

Over its three-year funding period, COVAX received over USD 12 billion in contributions.¹⁴ Did this impact the budget of other IOs within International Geneva’s health mandate? While a direct answer to that question is difficult, we can compare the financing trends for IOs operating under the health mandate with IOs operating under the other mandates during the period.

Even if we exclude COVAX, the increase in donations to health organizations is substantial.

Note: y-axes vary in each plot.

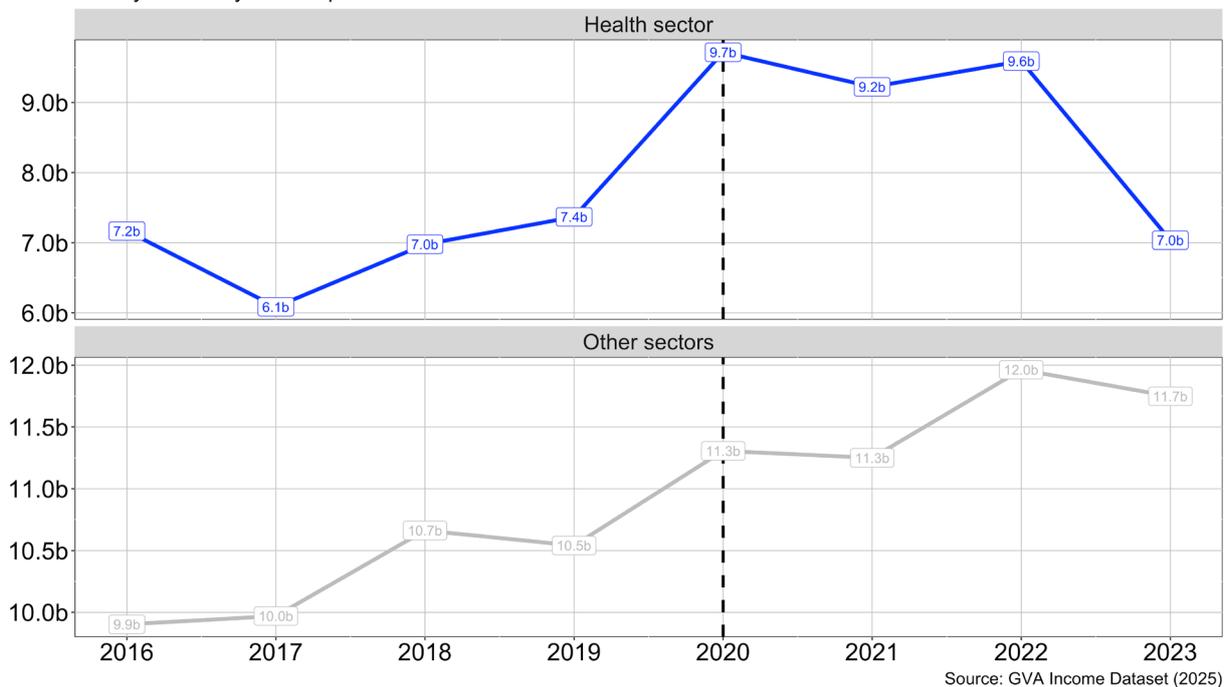


Figure 14: Beyond COVAX

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, the health sector received less than half of all contributions (39.55% in 2018, 41.14% in 2019). Even when excluding contributions to COVAX AMC from the health mandate, Figure 14 shows a clear increase in contributions to it in 2020. Contributions to health peaked in 2020 at 46.22% of overall contributions, dropping back to levels slightly below pre-pandemic times of 37.46% in 2023. This increase was unmatched by the other mandates, but there was also no significant drop in contributions to the latter. Therefore, the pandemic seems to have had no long-term effect on the budget of either the health mandate or International Geneva overall. It is possible, however, that donors shifted their funds from other IOs outside of our dataset.

¹⁴ Our numbers are slightly lower (10'602'849'000 USD). The discrepancy might stem from the fact that we only counted contributions that were clearly labelled as “COVAX”, whereas GAVI’s USD 12 billion will most likely also include contributions from COVAX founding partners such as WHO and others, who might have contributed some of their own budget or un-earmarked funds without fully labelling them. See GAVI for more details on their numbers here <https://www.gavi.org/gavi-covax-amc>.

Invasion of Ukraine

Contributions from Russia and Ukraine diminished in 2022.

Note: y-axes vary in each plot.

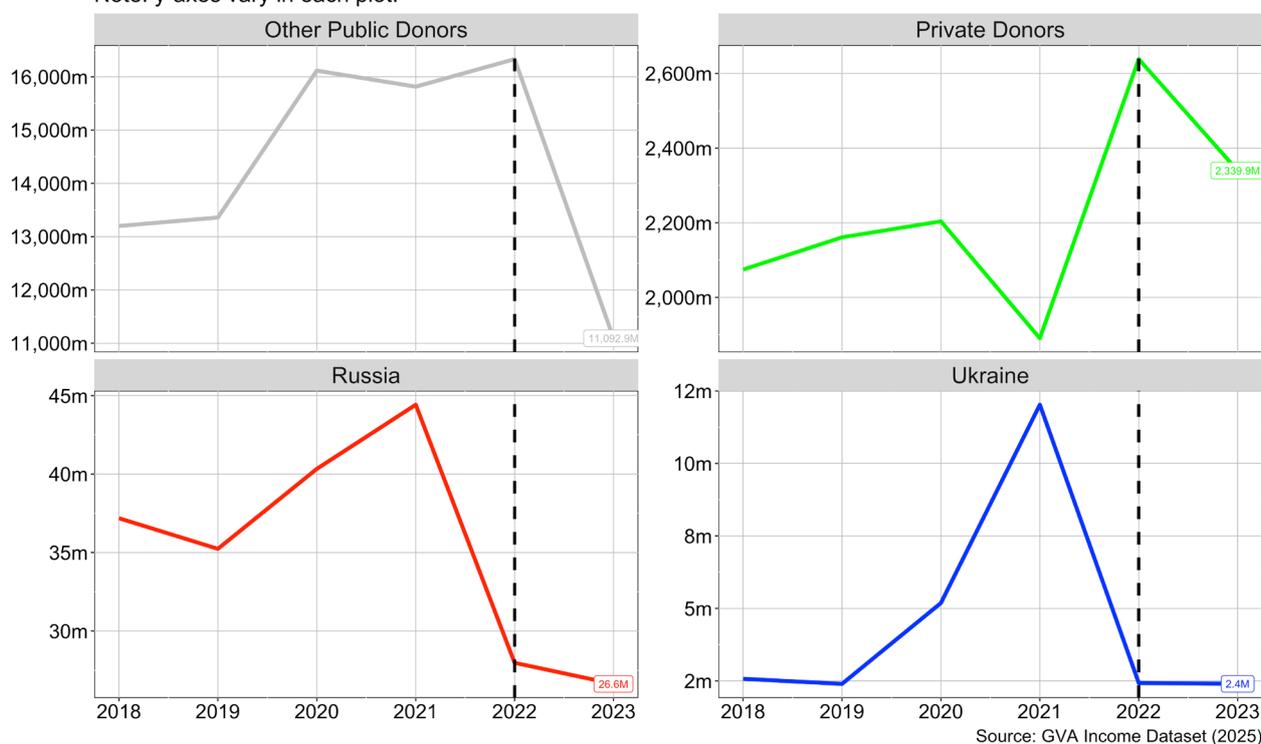


Figure 15: Russian, Ukrainian, and Other Contributions

The final exogenous shock analyzed in our report is the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022. Figure 15 provides a detailed breakdown of the donations to IOs in International Geneva by Russia and Ukraine. There is a clear drop in contributions from both countries in 2022, by almost half in the case of Russia and more than 75% in the case of Ukraine. In comparison, contributions from all other public donors and the private sector dropped as well from 2022-2023 - however, by a much smaller extent (note that the y-axes vary for each plot).

Figure 16 compares contributions to the humanitarian mandate with overall contributions for the period of 2018-2023. We can see a strong increase in contributions to the humanitarian mandate in 2022 compared to a slight drop in all other mandates. This difference is even more pronounced for 2023, when contributions to the humanitarian mandate decreased by less than 5% while the other mandates experienced a drop of almost 20%.

Contributions to the humanitarian sector saw a more pronounced increase in 2022 compared to others.

Note: y-axes vary in each plot.

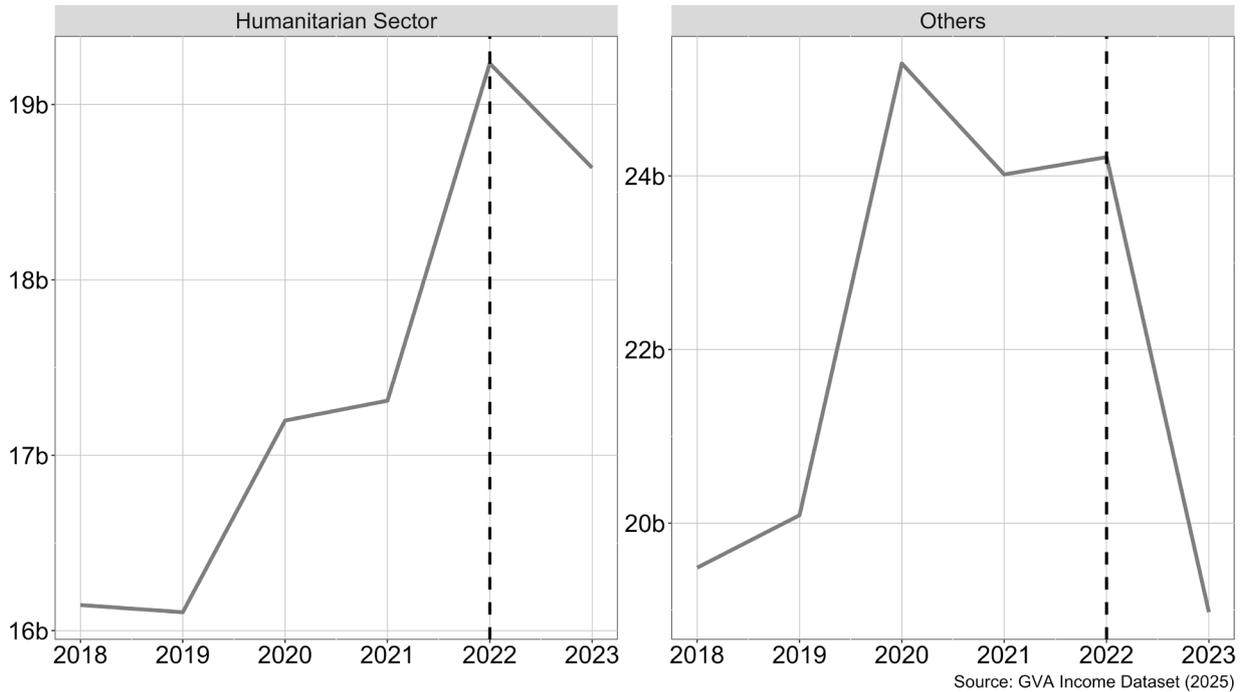


Figure 16: Contributions to the Humanitarian vs. Other Mandates

Comparing the impact of COVID-19 on contributions to the health mandate and the war in Ukraine on contributions to the humanitarian mandate, we can see that both had measurable impacts on the respective budgets. The visible drop in contributions to the health mandate in 2023 (see Figure 14) could reflect the redirection of funds to the humanitarian mandate. However, the fact that our dataset recorded high levels of contributions to both the health and humanitarian mandate in 2022 undermines that argument and makes it more likely that (public) donors have a high degree of flexibility in mobilizing funds in times of crises. Whether and how these shocks change long-term funding trends to International Geneva can only be answered once we can analyze contributions after the multilateral system has recovered from these events, and is not faced with new shocks.

Annex: Methodology

Data Granularity in our Sample

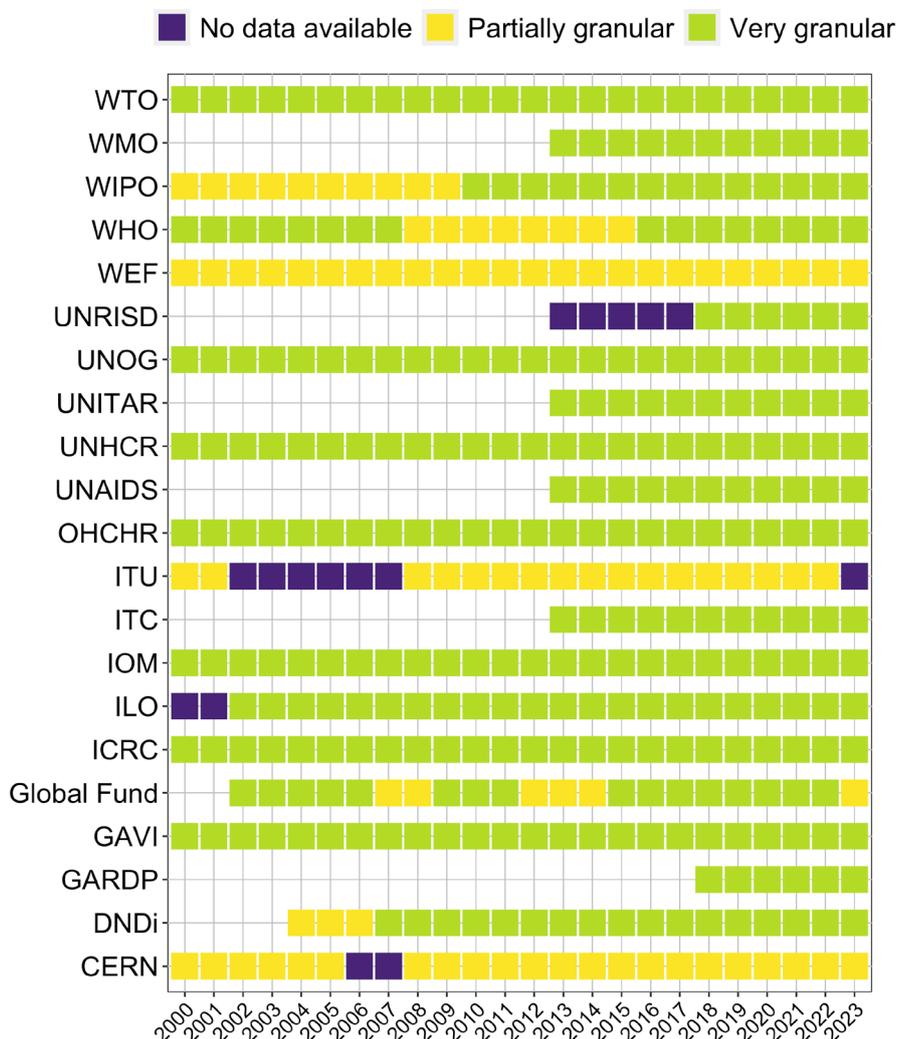


Figure 17: Granularity in our Sample

The Geneva Income Dataset contains yearly contribution-level data for 21 organizations headquartered in Geneva since the year 2000. Given that not all organizations existed for the period covered (2000–2023), this creates a sample frame with over 400 organization–year dyads. We built the dataset by scraping contributions from publicly available financial reports and other sources for each dyad. Where financial reports were not available, we used documents submitted to the assemblies of the organization or available data on online platforms. We define contribution (and donation) as the real amount contributed by an actor to an organization each year (this excludes pledges, intended donations, and commitments). As recipients might aggregate different donations by the same donor in their yearly financial report (i.e., they report total received rather than individual payments/grants received), our data reflects the minimal possible number of payments, but the actual value received. We use the World Bank deflator to calculate real amounts donated in USD.

We classified each contribution encountered by its granularity level.

Very granular: observation contains the name of the contributor and the value of the contribution in a given year (e.g., Switzerland/ The Rockefeller Foundation contributed with USD 150’000/USD 200’000 in 2005/2010 to CERN/IOM).

Partially granular: observation contains the type of the contributor and the value of the contribution in a given year (e.g., a private actor/a public actor contributed with USD 150'000/ USD 200'000 in 2005/2010 to WEF/GAVI).

Aggregate: observation contains the value of the contribution in a given year (USD 160'000 in 2006 to ICRC).

No data: no observation for the dyad.

Figure 17 (above) indicates the most frequent level of granularity for each organization-year dyad. We have encountered 30'062 contributions, out of which 28'601 are very granular, 1'377 are partially granular, and 84 are aggregate. Moreover, we have identified 1'105 unique contributors in the last two decades.

To render the contributions at different levels of granularity comparable, we assume that the sum of very granular (or partially granular) data equals the partially granular (or aggregate) data for a given organization-year dyad. By way of illustration, our data from WIPO features very granular observations for the period of 2009-2020, but only aggregate data for the period of 2000-2008. Our WTO data features very granular observations for the entire period under review. Our granularity assumption allows for an overall analysis of WIPO funding trends both internally (across two decades) and in comparison to WTO (and the other organizations in our dataset).

With the granularity assumption and the large availability of very granular data portrayed in Figure 17, we created sub-samples to reliably describe a specific trend. We briefly indicate what sub-sample informs a specific plot in the subtitle. As a one-time illustration, for the overall trend of yearly income of International Geneva (Figure 1), we need to ensure each year has the same number of organizations. Hence, our sub-sample starts in 2013. We removed smaller organizations that were created afterwards (DNDi and GARDP), as well as ITU and UNRISD, because of missing data. This way we can trust that trends reflect differences in the data itself, and not in the data availability. Where we believe data problems are still pervasive, we indicate. Otherwise, we refrain from engaging in detailed explanations of the sub-sample.

Furthermore, we researched other data sources and identified the opportunity of expanding our data by combining it with others. As we want to proceed cautiously because of differences in data collection and standards, we opted only for including UN Chief Executive Board Coordination data. Specifically, that dataset includes funding information for five organizations:

1. International Trade Centre (ITC)
2. World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
3. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
4. United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)
5. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

Finally, a note on the compilation of data: To arrive at the data set, we analyzed all publicly available documents related to the organizations' financial performance. This included annual reports, financial reports, UN General Assembly documents, and UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) Financial Statistics Database (in the case of UN entities), and organizations' websites. In this process, we dealt with various issues related to differences in reporting. Some organizations were very consistent in their reporting—some providing very detailed data consistently, some unveiling very little data throughout the period under review—and some organizations seemed to change reporting standards from one period to the next.

About the Authors

Livio Silva-Muller is a computational and qualitative sociologist working at the intersection of policy effectiveness, transnational finance, and governance. He's interested in how states, markets, and societies can — and hopefully will— decarbonise and redistribute in global and comparative perspectives. Livio holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the Geneva Graduate Institute. His work can be read at www.silvamuller.com.

Remo Gassmann heads the Global Development Policy Program at the Heinrich Boell Foundation in Washington D.C. Previously, he worked at the UN RCO in Bosnia and Herzegovina and with OHCHR in Ukraine, amongst other positions. Remo holds a BA in International Affairs from the University of St. Gallen, and an MA in Development Studies from the Geneva Graduate Institute.

Guilherme de Franco is interested in the linkages between international economics and territorial development, with a focus on applying quantitative research methods. Previously, he worked at the cities' alliance ICLEI and with impact investing at NESsT. He is a MA candidate in Development Studies at the Geneva Graduate Institute and holds a BA in International Relations from Fundação Getulio Vargas in Brazil.

Acknowledgements

The Geneva Graduate Institute would like to thank the Republic and State of Geneva for the generous support that made the present study on the financial sources of International Geneva possible. The report was produced by the Geneva Policy Outlook and the authors would like to thank Prof. Achim Wennmann for his support. Thanks also go to Prathit Singh for language editing and Oleg Smerdov for graphic design & layout.