

## IHEID TAs

# PRECARITY

Currently, Teaching assistants (TAs) at the Geneva Graduate Institute receive a net remuneration of **3,185.74CHF/month**, or **2,977.34CHF/month** after tuition fees (what we actually get in our bank accounts). As a result, we are amongst the lowest paid teaching assistants in Switzerland, earning below the minimum wage threshold in Geneva. We face financial hardships regarding the cost of living in Geneva, one of the most expensive cities in the world, access to healthcare and wellbeing services, as well as childcare, and adequate housing. This affects our ability to afford enrolling in a PhD programme at the Institute and, relatedly the attractiveness of our programmes for new PhD students. All of these issues are the direct result of a contract that does not ensure adequate remuneration to live in Geneva for at least four years and could be addressed with a fair and decent salary.

## HEALTH CARE



TAs have reported not being able to afford medical care, including preventative and mental health care.

General tests and essential gynaecological check-ups, such as pap-smears, are frequently inaccessible to TAs. Further, long term control of chronic diseases, autoimmune disorders, dental ailments, and depression, which are not covered by most health insurance plans available to TAs, go untreated due to prohibitively high costs.

Non-Swiss TAs are eligible for the exemption from the compulsory health insurance:

- ◇ for 3 years, renewable for 3 more years;
- ◇ if they have not received a gross yearly salary higher than 52,000CHF.

TAs with this exemption can apply for **student health insurance**: primes of 90-120CHF/month, deductibles ranging between 300 and 1,000CHF/year, and co-payment of 10% of medical costs.

However, TAs have reported of being refused a student health insurance due to holding B permits for education with accessory activity. In addition, student health insurance is limited in addressing healthcare needs on a longer term due to high deductibles and lack of a GP framework.

Swiss TAs and TAs who have been in Switzerland for more than 6 years or who held a different position before are required to pay for the more expensive **Swiss LAMAL health insurance**: cheapest primes of around 360CHF per month (TAs report paying over 400CHF/month), cheapest deductible of 2,500 CHF/year, and co-payment of 10% of medical costs.

For the cheapest LAMAL health insurance, in addition to the monthly prime of 360CHF/month, TAs need to pay for all of their medical expenses out of pocket until they reach 2,500CHF/year. Worryingly, the Swiss health insurance prime is expected to increase by 4.7% in 2023 in the canton of Geneva.

**With the current remuneration, TAs simply cannot afford to get sick!**

## HOUSING



Low wages for TAs mean we face high barriers to access decent housing in Geneva. This results in many TAs living for several years in situations that do not fulfil our needs as doctoral researchers.

**Student housing:** if TAs were to rent a studio with a kitchen at the Grand Morillon (GM) student residence, they would have to pay up to **33%** of their net income on rent alone.

If they opted for a one bedroom apartment at the GM student residence, they would spend up to **62%** of their net income on rent.

Cheaper student housing, besides being highly competitive, is inaccessible to and/or unsuitable for TAs and PhD students. The Cité Universitaire de Genève (CUG) allows a maximum stay of six consecutive semesters; the buildings managed by the Bureau des Logements (BLOG) of the University of Geneva are exclusively for Bachelor's and Master's students, finally, the buildings managed by the La Ciguë cooperative only offer very short-term solutions.

In addition, student residences tend to only have single beds (residents are usually not allowed to furnish them) and generally **have residents pay for guests**, meaning partners and friends cannot stay there. In a nutshell, **student residences are unsuitable for longer term stays and incompatible with the lives and living requirements of PhD researchers.**

**Private accommodations:** adequate housing on the private market is virtually unavailable to TAs insofar as it requires an income 3 times the price of the rent. Given that a scholarship is not a wage (see next page on the contract structure), régies do not recognise it as part of our remuneration, nor do they accept any statement from the Institute about the nature of our income. Since the TA gross salary is 1,900 CHF per month, this means that our only options for rent would be an apartment at 633 CHF per month, which are not available on the private market!

## CHILD CARE



The current 45%-activity rate negatively affects TAs who are also parents. It is well known, and has been confirmed by the Bureau d'Information Petite Enfance (BIPE), that 100% contracts are prioritised when applying for childcare. Switching TAs to 45% contracts has surprised pregnant and recently delivered parents, and those expecting to get a *crèche* spot for 2 years (the usual waiting time for childcare). Now, TAs with a 45% contract are not likely to get a spot for childcare for the duration of their contract.

In a survey circulated amongst TAs for the year 2021-2022 in summer 2022, 33/35 respondents (out of a population of 69 Graduate Institute TAs for the academic year) stated that they resort to various strategies to save money spent on food, including shopping at discount retailers and in France. 30 stated that they forgo taking part in social and cultural activities due to financial constraints. In the same survey, the stated average price for a return trip to once home town was roughly 850CHF.

This precarious living situation is unsustainable for the duration of the PhD programme and makes it very difficult for TAs to produce research of the quality and excellence the Institute aspires to.

# BEING A TA @IHEID

**Time rate:**  
45%

18h/week over  
48 weeks  
(+4 weeks of  
vacation)

864h/year

## Gross wage:

22,800CHF/year  
1,900CHF/month

## Net wage:

19,728.48CHF/year  
1,644.04CHF/month

## Tuition fees:

2022-2023  
2,500CHF/year

2023-2024  
2,000CHF/year

2024-2025  
1,000CHF/year

## Assistant tasks:

15h/week over 42  
weeks + 23 hours  
of training  
653h/year

## PhD research:

3h/week over 42  
weeks + 18h/week  
over 4 weeks + 13  
hours remaining  
211h/year

## Scholarship:

18,500CHF/year  
1,541.70CHF/  
month

## Before tuition fees (2022-2023):

38,228.48CHF/year  
3,185.74CHF/month

## After tuition fees (2022-2023):

35,728.48CHF/year  
2,977.37CHF/month

Total net  
remuneration  
(including  
scholarship):

The duration is  
of 1 year (6  
months in AN-  
SO) and there  
is no yearly in-  
crease

Similarly to  
other contracts  
at the Institute,  
there is no 13th  
salary.

TA contracts do  
not account for  
the remaining  
1,056h/year of  
PhD research

IHEID TAs at the Geneva Academy, the Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies (CERAH), and the LLM have different contractual conditions than those detailed above, which apply only to the TAs employed in the 5 departments and in the MINT programme (roughly 70h/year). This creates inequality within our community. In addition, from January 2023, the 14 TA positions for the Applied Research Projects (ARPs) in MINT will be replaced with another different contract remunerated just with a 1,900CHF/month wage for 15h/week of work.

# MEANWHILE TAS ELSEWHERE

	Minimum time rate	Maximum time for assistant tasks	Minimum time for PhD thesis	Gross remuneration at 100% (year 1)	Tuition fees
 <b>UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE</b>	70%	60%	40%	66,067CHF/year	130CHF/year
 UNIL   Université de Lausanne	60%	50%	50%	65,000CHF/year	200CHF upon enrollment and 80CHF/semester
		20%	80%	51,100CHF/year	150CHF/year and 1,200CHF for defending the thesis
 UNIVERSITÉ DE NEUCHÂTEL	50%	50%	50%	69,612CHF/year	120CHF/year
 UNIVERSITÉ DE FRIBOURG UNIVERSITÄT FREIBURG	100% (recommended)	50%	50%	59,910CHF/year	

Please note that the positions above generally entail a 13th salary and yearly increases.

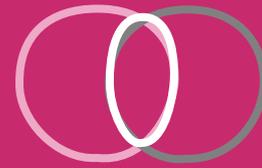
Even within the Graduate Institute, research assistants (RAs) on projects funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) generally have a full-time (100%) contract including 40% for assistant tasks and 60% for PhD research and remunerated with a salary at minimum wage (see below) for the first year and with yearly increases afterwards. RAs employed directly by the Institute have 100% contracts remunerated with a salary at minimum wage (with no yearly increase) including 50% for assistant tasks and 50% for PhD research. All RAs pay 3,000CHF/year of tuition fees

## Minimum wage in Geneva

	2022	2023
		
<b>Gross</b>	23.27CHF/h <b>48,401.60CHF/year</b> 4,033.47 CHF/month	24CHF/h <b>49,920CHF/year</b> 4,160CHF/month
<b>Net</b> (approximation on the basis of a 100% contract at the Institute)	38,580CHF/year 3,215CHF/month	39,520CHF/year 3,290CHF/month

# WHO BEARS THE BURDEN?

# F TEACHING ASSISTANTS C UL L STUDENTS Y



Between September 2016 and August 2022, TA contracts at the Institute were full-time (**100%**) and included 660h/year of TA tasks (15h/week over 44 weeks) and 1,260h/year of PhD research (25h/week over 44 weeks and 40h/week over 4 weeks). It was remunerated with the same wage as the current one and a scholarship of 16,800CHF/year (1,400CHF/month), resulting in a total net remuneration of **37,238.40CHF/year** (3,103.20CHF/month) or **34,238.04CHF/year** (2,853.17CHF/month) after tuition fees.

Since 2016, ADA has reported an increase in TAs' workload, which was exacerbated by the pandemic: the funding of the 5th year of the PhD programme was granted in 2019-2020 also because **the absolute majority of PhD students at the Institute cannot finish their programme in 4 years.**

Now, the PhD reform has introduced 4-year funding packages (2 years of scholarship and 2 of TA contract), thus ensuring stable funding for the expected duration of the programme. Every year, between 5 and 7 packages are allocated to each department, which means that, on the medium and long term, **between 50 and 70 TA positions will be available each academic year.**

At the same time, **the observed increased in TAs' workload can be easily traced back to the increasing number of admitted students and of classes.** In Spring 2022, the Direction, HR, and ADA have tried to address this through the new Terms of Employment (TOE), according to which each TA is assigned a maximum of 24 ECTS worth of classes, distributed equitably over the two semesters. The new TOE do not seem to be implemented uniformly across departments.

## 2016



353 Admitted students

60 TAs per semester

## 2021



799 Admitted students

63 TAs per semester

A low teaching-assistant-to-student ratio has a negative impact on:

- the time **PROFESSORS** can dedicate to substantial instead of administrative tasks;
- the **TEACHING ASSISTANTS'** capacity to effectively act as mentors, first points of contact, and intermediaries, attuned to the students' individual needs;
- the **STUDENTS'** overall learning experience.

These numbers are taken from the Institute's Annual Activity Reports and from ADA's mailing lists. These latter also include TAs at Geneva Academy, CERAH, and LLM, which had to be counted out. Just half of the TAs employed for six months are counted.



**2016** | Former Director, Prof. Burrin, introduces a new TA contract (see previous page), promising an increase in net remuneration. This is obtained through the split of the remuneration in wage and scholarship that leads to a decrease in social protection costs.

**Fall 2020** | The new minimum wage law is passed in the canton of Geneva.

**18th May 2021** | The ADA Board brings low TA remuneration to the attention of the *Collège des enseignants*. There seems to be no follow-up from the Direction.

**Fall 2021** | A poster campaign denouncing low TA remuneration at the Institute and the effects of such remuneration is launched.

**8th December 2021** | A new contract proposal is shared with the ADA Board (in late November) and, after 12 days, with all TAs in a Town Hall:

- ◇ **70% time rate**, 16h/week for assistant tasks, 12h/week for PhD research
- ◇ Same gross wage as the previous contract (22,800CHF/year) and a scholarship of 16,800CHF/year
- ◇ Total net remuneration of **3,212.65CHF/month**, **2,962.40CHF/month** after tuition fees.

**December-February 2021** | TAs mandate the ADA Board to gather more information and open negotiations with the Direction first in a TA Town Hall on 16th December, and then in two votes on 17th January, and 25th February.

**17th and 25th January 2022** | The ADA Board meet with the Direction and with HR staff to address the issues raised by TAs concerning the structure of the contract and the cut in the activity rate. HR staff provides TAs with a factsheet on the working of the new contract. TAs are communicated that everyone will be asked by HR by email to individually accept or reject the new contract until August 2022 and that the contract will be enforced for everyone from the 1st of September 2022.

**February 2022** | The ADA Board meets with the President and Vice-President of the Institute's Foundation Board. The TA contracts remain competence of the Direction.

**8th March 2022** | The Direction announces to the ADA Board the plan to reduce TAs' tuition fees from 3,000CHF/year to 2,500CHF/year in 2022-2023, 2,000CHF/year in 2023-2024, and 1,000CHF/year in 2024-2025. The ADA Board calls a new vote on this and the motion to continue the discussions wins by one vote. Due to the tight margin, the ADA Board decides not to give any recommendation to HR on whether to send the terms of the new contract for individual acceptance or rejection.

**March 2022** | TAs are asked to individually accept or reject the new contract from the 1st April 2022 as a contract amendment for 1st April –31st August 2022. If the amendment is rejected, the new contract terms would nonetheless be enforced on the 1st of September 2022. Requests to access a copy of the new contract before signing it are systematically rejected. **43** TAs accept the contract amendment. At the same time, in a Town Hall, TAs collectively decide to keep discussing better contractual conditions despite the new contract being implemented anyway either in April or in September.

**29th April 2022** | The assistants' GA votes to give a mandate to the Syndicat Interprofessionnel des Travailleurs et Travailleuses (SIT) and to the ADA Board to negotiate the new contract, and elects 9 TA delegates to participate in the negotiations (**TA representatives**, then, refers to the SIT union officer, the ADA Board, and the TA delegates). This is communicated in a letter to the Direction on the 4th May, which asks for a meeting date. TAs' reasons are presented in an article on The Graduate Press.

**13th May 2022** | The Direction replies to the meeting request reiterating previous arguments and offering to complement them with additional information. TA representatives insist for a meeting and the Direction agrees to meet on 1st June.

**31st May 2022** | TA renewals and new hirings are supposed to be communicated but this does not happen.

**1st June 2022** | First meeting to agree on negotiating TA contractual conditions. Delays in renewals and new hirings are explained by the Direction as due to TA representatives' request to meet. In order to accelerate the communication of renewals and new hirings, and for TAs to renew their residence permit, the Direction and TA delegations agree to enter negotiations and:

- ◆ co-construct a common solution to the problem of TA precarity;
- ◆ establish a schedule of negotiation sessions and discussions that will clarify both the content of the negotiation and its timeline;
- ◆ in the event that a solution is found, which the two parties are committed to seeking together, propose an amendment to the annual TA contract starting September 2022.

In addition, the Direction proposes to TAs decide collectively and vote between a 100%- and a 70%-activity rate contract with the same remuneration as the one proposed in December (the 100% entails a slightly higher total net remuneration due to lower retirement contributions).

**3rd June 2022** | TAs hold a GA to vote on the preferred terms and update the mandate. The majority picks the 100% contract and confirms the mandate to SIT and ADA. On the 6th June (Monday), the ADA Board releases TAs' choice to the Direction, asking to communicate the renewals and new hiring as soon as possible. 3 more delegates are elected.

**15th June 2022** | No communication about renewals and new hirings is sent out. On 13th June the Direction asks ADA and SIT representatives for a meeting on 15th June at 8am. The Direction invites a labour lawyer to the meeting and states that, after seeking legal advice, **none of the previous proposals applies anymore** communicating the **implementation of a brand new contract with a 45% activity rate** accompanied by a scholarship letter from September 2022.

**17th-21st June 2022** | Communication of renewals and new hiring is formally sent by email (but not the contracts).

**27th June 2022** | TA representatives propose to the Direction to fix negotiation dates twice on the week of the 12th September, twice on the week of 26th of September and once if needed on the week of the 10th October. The Direction rejects all the proposed dates suggesting three alternative options (22nd September and 3rd and 4th October).

**3rd August 2022** | ADA accepts these three and proposes new dates on the 19th, 21st, and 23rd of September (while sharing the draft minutes of the meeting on the 15th of June and a letter concerning the persisting issues of the 45% contract). In a letter to ADA and SIT on 18th August, the Direction states that none of the dates above are available anymore.

**26th August** | ADA asks for a new list of proposed dates and the 12th October at 2pm is agreed upon; on the 29th August the ADA Board also requests two additional dates (with no response).

**September 2022** | On 15th September, the Direction asks to move the meeting to 3pm. This does not work for TA representatives, who asks for at least four alternative dates before 24th October. On 26th September, TA representatives send a letter to the Département de l'instruction publique (DIP) to survey the public funder's perspective on the structure and changes in TA contracts (for instance, the Federal Accreditation Committee's Report in 2022 pointed out the necessity to address TAs' lack of financial stability). Communicating with public funders is common practice for unions in Geneva. The DIP shares the letter with the Direction on the 3rd October and the Direction answers to the DIP on the 3rd November.

**29th September 2022** | The Direction proposes to meet with TA representatives on 8th November from 2 to 3:30pm. On 4th October, TA representatives accept but highlight that a calendar of negotiations is needed (as agreed in June).

**8th November 2022** |  
At **1:13pm** (47 minutes before the scheduled time) the Direction unilaterally cancels the meeting.

**11th November 2022** | TA representatives send an email to the Foundation Board asking that the Direction reconsiders the decision not to meet by 17th November. The Foundation Board answers on the 16th November assuring that the Direction will meet with TA representatives before the end of the year. **Still no date nor calendar despite months of waiting!**

# TA

# DEMANDS

TAs' ultimate goal for these negotiations is to obtain **a contract that includes remunerated time for PhD research** (our main purpose at the Institute) and pays a **fair and decent wage** to live in Geneva. The list of demands below is a roadmap to how we think we can achieve this, but without sitting down to negotiate with the Direction it is difficult to envision what a concrete solution of compromise could look like.

## I STRUCTURE OF THE CONTRACT

- ◆ (Re-)Inclusion of the time for the PhD thesis in the TA contract, with a time rate according to industry standards in Geneva
- ◆ Raise of the activity rate back to 100%
- ◆ Authorisation for doctoral students with COVID and other extensions (6th-years in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, 5th-years from then on) to be able to (re-)apply for funding or employment positions

## II

### REMUNERATION

- ◆ A fair and decent salary according to the industry standards in Geneva
- ◆ An identical university fee for all doctoral students of 1000 CHF per year; unless current provisions are more favourable

## III

### WORKLOAD AND TAS' ROLE

- ◆ Drafting of department- and course-specific ToRs that reflect the different workload realities and ensure fairness and transparency in the distribution of courses, as well as in the hiring and renewal processes

## IV

### EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS

- ◆ Equal working and salary conditions for ARP assistants and any other position employing PhD students in any kind of teaching assistant duties

We acknowledge and appreciate the financial efforts made so far by the Institute by allowing PhD students to get funding for their 5th year as TAs or through a scholarship and by raising the scholarship part of TAs' remuneration. However, these do not address the structural issues of the TA contract. On the contrary, we believe that meeting our demands may turn out not to be the expected financial burden. More importantly, we do not expect any change to be implemented immediately but we would be glad to negotiate a timeline of compromise.