

11<sup>TH</sup>  
EDITION

# Living and Working in France



The best-selling, most accurate and most frequently updated book about living in France

David Hampshire

# Living & Working in **FRANCE**

● A Survival Handbook ●



David Hampshire



Survival Books ● Bath ● England

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La Ciotat, Bouches-du-Rhône



# What Readers and Reviewers Have Said About Survival Books:

"If I were to move to France, I would like David Hampshire to be with me, holding my hand every step of the way. This being impractical, I would have to settle for second best and take his books with me instead!"

**Living France**

"We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure."

**ICI (Switzerland) AG**

"I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter.

The whole laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what's involved. Gets my vote!"

**Reader (Amazon)**

"Get hold of David Hampshire's book for its sheer knowledge, straightforwardness and insights to the Spanish character and do yourself a favour!"

**Living Spain**

"Rarely has a 'survival guide' contained such useful advice – This book dispels doubts for first time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters – In a word, if you're planning to move to the US or go there for a long term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready reference."

**American Citizens Abroad**

"It's everything you always wanted to ask but didn't for fear of the contemptuous put down – The best English language guide – Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to complement the traditional guidebook."

**Swiss News**

"A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need.

Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches.

Highly recommended."

**Reader (Amazon)**

"Let's say it at once. David Hampshire's *Living and Working in France* is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l'Hexagone. It is Hampshire's meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. This book is absolutely indispensable."

**The Riviera Reporter**

"Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life – I know of no other book that could take the place of this one."

**France in Print**

"It was definitely money well spent."

**Reader (Amazon)**

"The ultimate reference book – Every conceivable subject imaginable is exhaustively explained in simple terms – An excellent introduction to fully enjoy all that this fine country has to offer and save time and money in the process."

**American Club of Zurich**

# Important Note

France is a diverse country with many faces, a variety of ethnic groups, religions and customs, as well as continuously changing rules, regulations, exchange rates and prices. A change of government in France can have a far-reaching influence on many important aspects of life, particularly taxes and social security. We cannot recommend too strongly that you check with an official and reliable source (not always the same) before making any major decisions or taking an irreversible course of action. However, don't believe everything you're told or read – even, dare we say it, herein!

The historic vote by the British people in 2016 to leave the European Union (see page 17) will also have consequences for British people planning to live or work in France, although nothing is expected to change until the UK actually leaves the EU in 2019.

To help you obtain further information and verify data with official sources, useful websites and references to other sources of information have been included in all chapters and in Appendix A. Important points have been emphasised throughout the book, some of which it would be expensive or foolish to disregard.

## Note

**Unless specifically stated, the reference to any company, organisation or product in this book doesn't constitute an endorsement or recommendation. None of the businesses (except advertisers), organisations, products or individuals have paid to be mentioned.**

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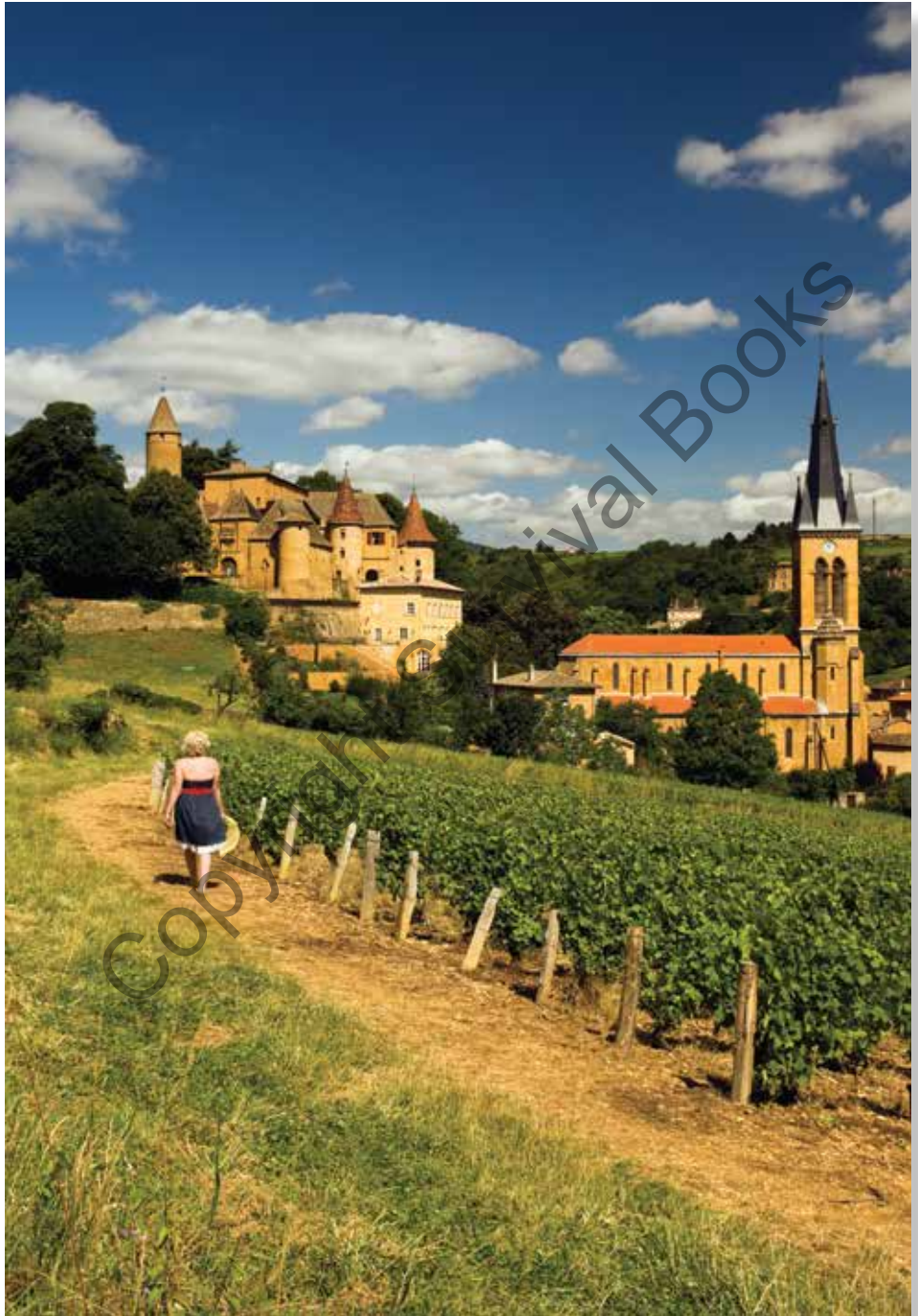
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# Author's Notes

- ◆ Frequent references are made in this book to the European Union (EU), which comprises Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The European Economic Area (EEA) comprises the EU countries plus the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, plus Switzerland (which is an EFTA member but not a member of the EEA). In this book, references to the EU countries generally also apply to the EEA countries and Switzerland.
- ◆ All times are shown using the 12-hour clock; times before noon are indicated by the suffix 'am' and times after noon by 'pm'.
- ◆ Prices quoted should be taken only as estimates, although they were mostly correct when going to press and fortunately don't usually change overnight. Although prices are sometimes quoted exclusive of value added tax (*hors taxes/HT*) in France, most prices are quoted inclusive of tax (*toutes taxes comprises/TTC*), which is the method used when quoting prices in this book. To convert from other currencies to euros or vice versa, see [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).
- ◆ His/he/him also means her/she/her (please forgive me ladies). This is done to make life easier for both the reader and the author, and isn't intended to be sexist.
- ◆ The French translation of many key words and phrases is shown in *italics* in brackets.
- ◆ British English and spelling is used throughout the book.
- ◆ A list of **Useful Websites** is contained in **Appendix A**.
- ◆ **Maps** – departments, airports and ports, TGV rail lines and motorways – are shown in **Appendix B**. A physical map of France is shown inside the front cover.





# Introduction

Whether you're already living or working in France or just thinking about it – this is THE BOOK for you. Forget about all those glossy guidebooks, excellent though they are for tourists; this book was written especially with you in mind and is worth its weight in truffles. Furthermore, this fully updated and re-designed 11th edition is printed in colour. *Living and Working in France* is intended to meet the needs of anyone wishing to know the essentials of French life – however long your planned stay in France, you'll find the information contained in this book invaluable.

General information isn't difficult to find in France (provided you speak French) and a multitude of books are published on every conceivable subject. However, reliable and up-to-date information in English specifically intended for foreigners living and working in France isn't so easy to find, least of all in one volume. This book was written to fill this void and provide the comprehensive practical information necessary for a relatively trouble-free life. You may have visited France as a tourist, but living and working there is a different matter altogether. Adjusting to a different environment and culture and making a home in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience – and France is no exception.

*Living and Working in France* is a comprehensive handbook on a wide range of everyday subjects and represents the most up-to-date source of general information available to foreigners in France. However, it isn't simply a monologue of dry facts and figures, but a practical and entertaining look at life.

Adapting to life in a new country is a continuous process, and, although this book will help reduce your beginner's phase and minimise the frustrations, it doesn't contain all the answers. (Most of us don't even know the right questions to ask!) What it will do, however, is help you make informed decisions and calculated judgements, instead of uneducated guesses. **Most importantly, it will save you time, trouble and money, and repay your investment many times over.**

Although you may find some of the information a bit daunting, don't be discouraged. Most problems occur only once and fade into insignificance after a short time (as you face the next half a dozen!). The majority of foreigners in France would agree that, all things considered, they love living there. A period spent in France is a wonderful way to enrich your life and hopefully please your bank manager. We trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of life in France and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

**Bon courage!**

*David Hampshire*

January 2017



# 1.

## FINDING A JOB

**F**inding work in France isn't always as difficult as the unemployment figures may suggest, particularly in Paris and other large cities, depending of course on your profession or trade, qualifications and, most importantly, your ability to speak French. Nationals of EU/EEA countries (see Brexit below) have the right to work in France or any other member state without a work permit, provided they have a valid passport or national identity card and comply with the member state's laws and regulations on employment.

EU nationals are entitled to the same treatment as French citizens in matters of pay, working conditions, access to housing, vocational training, social security entitlements and trade union rights, and their families and immediate dependants are entitled to join them and enjoy the same rights.

If you don't qualify to live and work in France by birthright or as an EU national you must obtain a long-stay visa, which is dependent upon obtaining employment. However, France has had a virtual freeze on the employment of non-EU nationals for many years, which has been strengthened in recent years due to the high unemployment rate. The employment of non-EU nationals must be approved by the Pôle Emploi (formerly the Agence Nationale Pour l'Emploi/ANPE), which can propose the employment of a French national instead, although this is rare.

For a permanent position, the prospective employer must have advertised the post with the Pôle Emploi for at least five weeks and must also obtain authorisation to employ a non-EU national from the French Ministry of Labour (Ministère du Travail, des Relations Sociales et de la Solidarité, [www.travail-solidarite.gouv.fr](http://www.travail-solidarite.gouv.fr)) or the Direction

Départementale du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Formation Professionnelle (DDTEFP) where the business is registered.

If you aren't an EU national it's essential to check whether you'll be eligible to work in France, before your arrival (see **Chapter 3**).

### BREXIT

The most important consideration for British citizens planning to live or work in France, either in the short or long term, is Britain's historic decision to leave the European Union (EU) – termed Brexit (British Exit) – in a referendum held on 23rd June 2016. The actual mechanism to leave the EU will begin with the invoking of Article 50 – due to happen before the end of March 2017 (after this book had gone to press) – after which the UK will have two years to 'negotiate' its exit from the EU.

Leaving the EU won't only affect the UK's relationship and trade with the EU and the 27 other member countries, but it will also influence the relationship between England and the other countries that make up the United Kingdom (not least Scotland, which voted to



remain in the EU, and Northern Ireland, which has a land border with the Republic of Ireland, an EU member). It will also have far-reaching consequences for Britain's future European and world trade relations, exchange rates, cost of living, laws, and – not least – the ability of Britons to live, work and study in France and other EU countries (and French citizens to live and work in Britain).

The consequences of the UK leaving the EU will take many years to become clear, but a certain amount of turmoil is expected in the short to medium term. However, the immediate Armageddon forecast by the remain campaign had yet to materialise six months after the vote (although the pound had predictably fallen in value against the Euro), although the uncertainty regarding future trading arrangements with the EU was causing anxiety among many businesses. However, many experts and analysts believe that the UK could eventually be better off as an independent nation able to make its own trade deals.

## ECONOMY

France is one of the world's wealthiest countries and its sixth-largest economy in 2015, with one of the highest per capita gross domestic products (GDP) in the EU of US\$44,444.84 in 2014, although this had fallen to \$38,653 in 2015 (source: [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)). The country experienced stagnant growth between 2012 and 2014, with the economy expanding by 0% in 2012, 0.8% in 2013 and 0.2% in 2014, though it picked up in 2015 with growth of 1.2% and forecast growth of 1.5% for 2016. Since 2008, the French economy has grown by around 3 per cent, while in the same period the German economy has grown 6 per cent, the UK by 8 per cent and the US by some 10 per cent.

Since the start of the new millennium, inflation has generally been low at around 2

per cent; in the ten years from 2006-2015 the highest annual rate was 2.3 per cent in 2012 (the rate for 2015 was 1.53 per cent).

France is among the world's largest exporters of goods and services and in 2015 was ranked sixth in the world for total exports. The country has experienced an economic transformation in the last few decades, during which its traditional industries have been thoroughly modernised and a wealth of new high-tech industries created. However, increasing competition, particularly from Far Eastern countries (known collectively as *the low-cost!*), has meant that traditional industries such as steel, clothing and textile production have become less competitive. Nevertheless, the manufacture of chemicals, ships, cars, aeroplanes and defence equipment remains significant.

Less labour and capital intensive industries such as electronics, pharmaceuticals and communications have flourished since the '80s,



although the largest growth in recent years has been in service industries, e.g. banking, insurance, advertising and tourism, which together account for over 70 per cent of GDP, compared with around 25 per cent for industry and under 3 per cent for agriculture. Despite the continuing decline in the number of farms, France remains Europe's largest agricultural producer and the world's second-largest after the USA.

## WORKFORCE

French workers enjoy an affluent lifestyle in comparison with those in many other western countries, with high salaries (especially for executives and senior managers) and excellent employment conditions (see **Chapter 2**). Much of the French 'working class' (France is supposedly a classless society) consists of skilled (*qualifié*) workers and technicians, with engineers part of the elite (as in Germany) and highly respected. France has a well-educated and trained workforce, and even employees doing what many would consider menial jobs, such as shop assistants and waiters, have trade training (although seldom in politeness!) and aren't looked down on.

Most French don't dream of becoming entrepreneurs or businessmen but of working in the public sector, which constitutes some 25 per cent of the country's workforce compared with around 15 per cent in most other EU countries, and where benefits are second to none, e.g. up to three months' annual holiday and retirement at 55 or even 50!

## WORK ATTITUDES

French companies have traditionally been expected to care for their employees and most have a paternalistic attitude. Experience, maturity and loyalty are highly valued (although

qualifications are even more valuable), and newcomers generally find it difficult to secure a senior position with a French company. The traditional hierarchical structure of French businesses with little contact between management and workers, both of whom are reluctant to take on responsibilities outside their immediate duties, has given way to a more 'modern' reward-for-achievement attitude and relations between management and staff have generally improved. However, the French 'old boy' network is still alive and well and may prevent foreigners achieving the promotion they deserve (see **Industrial Relations** on page 22).

As in the US, French employers tend to expect high standards and are intolerant of mistakes or inefficiency. However, it's difficult and expensive to fire employees. When it comes to hiring new employees (particularly managers and executives) and making important business decisions, the process is slower in France than in many other developed countries. Many foreigners, particularly Americans, find that they need to adjust to a slower pace of working life. Most French managers and executives rarely take work home and they seldom work at weekends, which are sacrosanct.

Don't be misled by the apparent lack of urgency and casual approach to business – the French can be just as hard-headed as any other race. Business relations tend to be formal: colleagues usually address each other as *vous* rather than *tu* and often use surnames instead of first names, while socialising with work colleagues is rare. Attire is generally formal, although in some companies Fridays are declared 'casual dress' days.

## WORKING WOMEN

The number of working women in France has increased dramatically in recent years, and some two-thirds of French women (and the



vast majority of those under 40), including 70 per cent of women with one child, now work – the highest percentage in Europe outside Scandinavia. However, around 30 per cent of women work part-time, compared with just 5 per cent of men. Most women are employed in distribution and transport, nursing and health care, education, secretarial professions and service industries such as retailing.

Male chauvinism is alive and well in France and most French women are more concerned with equal rights in the workplace and benefits (such as paid maternity leave and state-run nurseries) than the opportunity to reach the top. Women must generally be twice as qualified as a man to compete on equal terms, although the 1983 law on professional equality (*loi Roudy sur l'égalité professionnelle*) made it easier for women to break into male-dominated trades and professions. However, women still find it difficult to attain management positions, particularly in technical and industrial fields, where there has long been a tradition of prejudice against them.

Women have had some success in reaching the top in the professions and in sectors such as finance, insurance, the media, personnel, advertising and retailing. Career women are generally more accepted and taken more seriously in Paris, which has a more progressive outlook than the provinces. Nevertheless, over a quarter of France's 2.5 million businesses are run by women, by far the highest proportion in Europe. Since 1997, women have had the right to earn 90 per cent of a full-time salary if they work a four-day week, e.g. taking Wednesday off to look after their children.

A woman doing the same or broadly similar work to a man and employed by the same employer is legally entitled to the same salary and other terms of employment. However, despite the Equal Pay Act of 1972, women's

salaries are an average of around 15 per cent lower than men's. Around 15 per cent of women earn the minimum wage (see page 22), which generally reflects the fact that most women work in lower paid industries and hold lower paid positions than men (including more part-time jobs), rather than discrimination.

However, the situation has improved considerably in recent years, and women are much less exploited in France than in many other western European countries. Women continue to face the additional hazard of sexual harassment, as 'flirting' is an unwritten part of French life. If it's any consolation, refusing a sexual advance from your boss rarely results in your losing your job, as it's difficult to fire employees in France.

## SALARY

French executive salaries were lower than the international average in the '70s and early '80s, but rose much faster than the rate of inflation in the '80s and '90s and were augmented by lucrative bonuses and profit-sharing schemes. They've now caught up and even surpassed those in some other Western countries, although in recent years university graduates and school-leavers have been willing to accept almost any wage in order to get a foot on the career ladder. Annual salary increases have been minimal since the recession in 2008.

### SURVIVAL TIP

If you've friends or acquaintances working in France or who've worked there, ask them what an average or good salary is for your particular trade or profession. If locality is your prime consideration, you can consult the website ([www.salairesmoyen.com](http://www.salairesmoyen.com)) to check the average salary in a particular area.



Salaries often vary considerably for the same job in different parts of France. Those working in Paris and its environs are generally the highest paid, primarily due to the high cost of living, particularly regarding accommodation. When comparing salaries, you need to take into account compulsory deductions such as tax and social security (see **Chapters 13 and 14**), and also the cost of living.

For many employees, particularly executives and senior managers, their remuneration is much more than what they receive in their monthly salary. Many companies provide a range of benefits for executives and managers that may include a company car, private health insurance and health screening, expenses-paid holidays, private school fees, inexpensive or interest-free home and other loans, rent-free accommodation, free or subsidised public transport tickets, free or subsidised company restaurant, sports or country club membership, non-contributory company pension, stock options, bonuses and profit-sharing schemes,

tickets for sports events and shows, and 'business' conferences in exotic locations (see also **Chapter 2**).

Many employees in France also receive an extra month's salary at Christmas, known as a 13th month's salary, and some companies also pay a 14th month's salary before the summer holiday period.

Salaries in many industries are decided by collective bargaining between employers and unions, either regionally or nationally. When there's a collective agreement, employers must offer at least the minimum wage agreed, although most major companies exceed this. Agreements specify minimum wage levels for each position within main employment categories in a particular industry or company, and often require bonus payments related to the age or qualifications of employees or their length of service with the company (*prime d'ancienneté*). This means that wage levels are effectively fixed. The government doesn't regulate cost of living increases for salaries above the minimum wage (see below), although the collective agreement may provide for annual increases based on cost of living figures.

The introduction of the 35-hour week (see **Working Hours** on page 38) included guarantees that salaries couldn't be reduced from the levels paid on a 39-hour week basis. Government incentives available to employers for hiring additional workers did little to mitigate the cost of reducing the working week, and it's likely that most salaries will remain static with pay rises few and far between for the foreseeable future.

You can obtain a rough guide to salaries from many websites, including World Salaries ([www.worldsalaries.org/france.shtml](http://www.worldsalaries.org/france.shtml)) and Votre Salaire ([www.votresalaire.fr/main/salaire](http://www.votresalaire.fr/main/salaire) – in French).

## Minimum Wage

At the lower end of the wage scale, there has been a statutory minimum wage (*salaires minimum de croissance/SMIC*) since 1950. When the cost of living index rises by 2 per cent or more in a year, the minimum wage is increased. In practice, the minimum wage rises each year, usually in July and especially when elections are coming up! In 2016, the minimum wage was €9.67 per hour, equal to gross pay of €1,466.62 per month for 151.67 hours (the standard under the terms of the 35-hour working week). Working hours above 35 per week are considered overtime.



There's a lower *SMIC* for juveniles, those on special job-creation schemes and disabled employees. Unskilled workers (particularly women) are usually

employed at or near the minimum wage, semi-skilled workers are usually paid 10 to 20 per cent more, and skilled workers 30 to 40 per cent more (often shown in job advertisements as '*SMIC + 10, 20, 30, 40%*'). Note, however, that many employees, particularly seasonal workers in the farming and tourist industries, are paid below the minimum wage, despite it being illegal. Part time workers can't legally receive a lower wage than the *SMIC*.

Young people under 17 years of age with less than 6 months experience can be paid 80 per cent of the *SMIC* between the ages of

16-17 and 90 per cent between the ages of 17-18. Young students on apprenticeship contracts usually receive between 25 and 78 per cent of the *SMIC* in accordance with their age and the number of years they have served. Young people on work experience don't receive wages but may get an expense allowance, which is compulsory by law for work experience of more than two consecutive months.

## INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The French are notorious for their strikes (*grèves*, euphemistically known as *mouvements sociaux*), which are a common feature of French 'working' life – particularly in the public sector, where employees have long been known for their propensity to stop work at the drop of a beret. Recent years have seen strikes among public transport employees and among self-employed groups such as farmers, fishermen, truck drivers, doctors and other medical professionals, and strikes become increasingly common in the run-up to elections and in response to announcements of plant closures or sales of businesses to foreign investors.

There was a period when strikes in private companies were almost unheard-of in France, but they've recently started to become a popular means of protesting against threats to job security. In both the public and private sectors strikes are often seen as the only effective means of communicating with the government and elected officials, as it's the government rather than employers who are expected to resolve most work-related issues. Despite negligible union membership (less than 10 per cent and falling) most workers in France are automatically covered by industry-wide and legally recognised collective agreements (*conventions collectives*).

Nevertheless, there has been a huge reduction in strikes in the last decade or so

and a less confrontational relationship between employers and employees, which is due both to high unemployment and new legislation requiring both sides to discuss their differences and imposing a cooling-off period before a strike can be called.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

The French unemployment rate fell to 9.9 per cent in mid-2016, which was the lowest since Autumn 2012. The rate has averaged 9.25 per cent between 1996 and 2016, reaching an all-time high of 10.7 per cent in early 1997 and a record low of 7.2 per cent in 2008. In comparison, the unemployment rate in autumn 2016 was 4.2 per cent in Germany, 4.8 per cent in the UK, 11.4 per cent in Italy and 19.5 per cent in Spain.

Unemployment remains a major problem in France, particularly for those aged under 25 among whom it's almost three times the national average. France spends more on job creation schemes than any other EU country, yet has the worst job creation record in the OECD, and the government's recent attempt to introduce a 'youth employment contract' was a disaster.

Other groups badly affected by unemployment are older people, women and blue collar workers, the last currently suffering unemployment rates five times as high as executives and managers. Although unemployment has hit manufacturing industries the hardest no sector has survived unscathed, including the flourishing service industries in the Paris region. Some of the worst hit industries have been construction, electronics, communications, the media and banking.

Long-term unemployment is a huge problem, where the average period of unemployment is a year (the longest in Europe) and over a million people have been unemployed for over two years. Anyone aged over 50 who loses his job is unlikely to work again with an indefinite-term contract (*contrat à durée indéterminée/CDI*)

unless they're highly qualified and their skills are in demand.

## EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

Being attracted to France by its weather, cuisine, wine and lifestyle is understandable but doesn't rate highly as an employment qualification. You should have a positive reason for living and working in France. Simply being fed up with your job or the weather isn't the best motive for moving to France. It's extremely difficult to find work in rural areas and it isn't easy in cities and large towns (even Paris), especially if your French isn't fluent.

You shouldn't plan on finding employment in France unless you've special qualifications or experience for which there's a strong demand. If you want a good job you must usually be extremely well qualified and speak fluent French. If you plan to come to France without a job you should have a plan for finding employment on arrival and try to make some contacts before you arrive.

### Caution

An increasing number of people in France turn to self-employment or starting a business to make a living (see page 32), although this path is strewn with pitfalls for the newcomer.

If you've a job offer you should ensure that it's in writing (preferably in French). France has a reasonably self-sufficient labour market and doesn't require a large number of skilled or unskilled foreign workers. In recent years however French companies have been keen to expand into international markets which has created opportunities for foreign workers, particularly bilingual and tri-lingual employees. In recent years there has been a marked increase in French investment abroad,

and France is experiencing a brain drain as executives and entrepreneurs (not to mention football players!) leave the country, creating something of a vacuum – particularly in high-tech industries such as information technology. There are some 2,000 affiliates of US firms in France, employing over half a million people.

## QUALIFICATIONS

The most important qualification for working (and living) in France is the ability to speak French fluently (see Language below). Once you've overcome this hurdle you should establish whether your trade or professional qualifications and experience are recognised in France. If you are new to the world of full time employment French employers expect studies to have been in a relevant discipline and to have included work experience (*un stage*).

Professional or trade qualifications are required to work in most fields in France, where qualifications are also often necessary to be self-employed or start a business. It isn't just a matter of hanging up a sign and waiting for the stampede of customers to your door. Many foreigners are required to undergo a 'business' course before they can start work in France (see **Self-employment & Starting a Business** on page 32).

Theoretically, qualifications recognised by professional and trade bodies in one EU country should be recognised in France. However, recognition varies from country to country and in some cases foreign qualifications aren't recognised by French employers or professional and trade associations. All foreign academic qualifications should also be recognised, although they may be given less prominence than equivalent French qualifications.

All EU member states issue occupation information sheets containing a common job description with a table of qualifications.

These cover a large number of trades and are intended to help someone with the relevant qualifications look for a job in another EU country. For information about equivalent qualifications you can contact the Centre d'Études et de Recherche sur les Qualifications (CEREQ, 04 91 13 28 28/01 44 08 69 10, [www.cereq.fr](http://www.cereq.fr)) or ENIC-NARIC run by the European Network of Information Centres ([www.enic-naric.net](http://www.enic-naric.net)). A list of professions and trades in France can be found on the website of the Office National d'Information sur l'Enseignement et les Professions (ONISEP, [www.onisep.fr](http://www.onisep.fr)).

Further information can be obtained from the Bureau de l'Information sur les Systèmes Educatifs et de la Reconnaissance de Diplômes of the Ministère de la Jeunesse, de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Recherche (01 55 55 10 10, [www.education.gouv.fr](http://www.education.gouv.fr)) and the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieure et de la Recherche ([www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr](http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr)).

## LANGUAGE

Although English is the *lingua franca* of international commerce and may help you to secure a job in France, the most important qualification for anyone seeking employment is the ability to speak fluent French. Although most French children learn English at school and the majority of educated French people can speak some English, many of them are reluctant to do so, as they have an ingrained fear of making mistakes and 'losing face'.

### SURVIVAL TIP

The most common reason for negative experiences among foreigners in France, whether they be visitors or residents, is that they can't – or won't – speak French.

(Two-thirds of French people claimed to speak only French and less than 25 per cent admit to speaking English 'well'.) The French are extremely proud of their language (to the point of hubris) and – not surprisingly – expect everyone living or working in France to speak it.

If necessary you should have French lessons before arriving in France. A sound knowledge of French won't just help you find a job or perform your job better, but will also make everyday life much simpler and more enjoyable. If you come to France without being able to speak French you'll be excluded from everyday life and will feel uncomfortable until you can understand what's going on around you. You must usually speak French if you wish to have French friends.

However bad your grammar, limited your vocabulary or terrible your accent, an attempt to speak French will be appreciated more than your fluent English. Don't, however, be surprised when the French wince at your torture of their beloved tongue, pretend not to understand you even though you've said something 'correctly', or correct minor grammatical or pronunciation errors!

If you don't already speak good French don't expect to learn it quickly, even if you already have a basic knowledge and take intensive lessons (see **Learning French** on page 118). It's common for foreigners not to be fluent after a year or more of intensive lessons in France. If your expectations are unrealistic you'll become frustrated, which can affect your confidence. It takes a long time to reach the level of fluency needed to be able to work in French. If you don't speak French fluently you should begin French lessons on arrival and consider taking a menial or even an unpaid voluntary job, which is one of the quickest ways of improving your French.



Your ability in French and other languages must be listed on your curriculum vitae (CV/ résumé) and the level of proficiency stated as follows: some knowledge (*notions*); good (*bien*); very good (*très bien* or *parle, lis, écris*); fluent (*courant*); and mother tongue (*langue maternelle*). When stating your French language ability it's important not to exaggerate. If you state that your French is very good or fluent you'll be interviewed in French, which may also happen even if you've only a little knowledge.

When doing business in France or writing letters to French businesses communication should always be in French. Most business letters must be written in a very precise style with proper opening and closing greetings.

France also has over 70 regional languages, the most widely spoken including Alsatian (spoken in Alsace), Basque (Pyrenees), Breton (Brittany), Catalan (Roussillon), Corsican (Corsica), Gascon (southwest) and Occitan (Languedoc). In some areas schools teach in the regional language as well as in French. However fluent your French, you may still have



problems understanding these, as well as some accents – particularly those of the south – and local dialects (*patois*).

## JOB HUNTING

As many as 60 per cent of job vacancies in France aren't advertised but rather are filled by word of mouth. When looking for a job, it's therefore best not to put all your eggs in one basket – the more job applications you make, the better your chance of finding the right (or any) job. Contact as many prospective employers as possible by writing, telephoning or calling on them in person.



Whatever job you're looking for it's important to market yourself appropriately. For example, the recruitment of executives and senior managers is handled almost exclusively by recruitment consultants. At the other end of the scale, manual jobs requiring no previous experience may be advertised at Pôle Emploi offices (see below), in local newspapers and on notice boards, and the first suitable applicant may be offered the job on the spot. Job hunting resources are listed below.

## EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

### Government Employment Service

The French national employment service Pôle Emploi ([www.pole-emploi.fr](http://www.pole-emploi.fr)) operates offices throughout France with both local and national job listings, although jobs on offer are mainly for non-professional skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled jwork, particularly in industry, retailing and catering. Around 75 per cent are temporary (*intérimaire*) or short-term (*CDD*) opportunities, although higher-level jobs are offered by specialist offices (see below). You can search for your nearest office online under *Administrations du Travail et de l'Emploi* or *Pôle Emploi*.

Pôle Emploi offices provide free telephones for calling prospective employers (not your mum!). The Pôle Emploi website provides access to many of its services, including a searchable database of job vacancies. To apply for most of the jobs listed online you must contact a Pôle Emploi office, but a few of the listings give you the name and address of the company so that you can apply directly. The website also contains general information about job hunting in France (in French).

Pôle Emploi services are available to all EU nationals and foreign residents in France. However, offices have a reputation for being unhelpful to foreign job-seekers unless they've previously been employed in France or are unemployed and receiving unemployment benefit. Being a government department, the Pôle Emploi isn't service-oriented and the quality of service varies with the region, the office and the person handling your case.

Some Pôle Emploi offices specialise in certain fields and industries. For example, in Paris there are offices dealing exclusively with hotel and restaurant services, tourism, journalism, public works, civil aviation, the entertainment industry

and jobs for the disabled. Around 20 Pôle Emploi offices are termed *Points Cadres* and handle executive jobs. The Pôle Emploi also operates Jeunes Diplômés, a service for young graduates ([www.jd.apec.fr](http://www.jd.apec.fr)); the Association Pour l'Emploi des Cadres (APEC, [www.cadres.apec.fr](http://www.cadres.apec.fr)) for managers and engineers; and the Association Pour l'Emploi des Cadres, Ingénieurs, Techniciens de l'Agriculture (APECITA, [www.apecita.com](http://www.apecita.com)) for professionals in the agriculture industry.

## La Cité des Métiers

La Cité des Métiers is a careers resource centre at the Cité de Sciences et de l'Industrie (known as 'La Villette'), where you'll find information on over 2,500 jobs, magazines and periodicals, mini-computers and staff to help with job applications. Its website ([www.cite-sciences.fr](http://www.cite-sciences.fr) – follow the links to Cité des Métiers) provides information about the various services and resources available, opening hours, job fairs and exhibitions sponsored by La Villette.

## EURES

The European Employment Service (EURES) network covers all EU countries plus Iceland and Norway. Members regularly exchange information about job vacancies and you can have your personal details circulated to the employment service in selected countries, e.g. to the Pôle Emploi in France. Details are available in local employment service offices in each member country, where advice on how to apply for jobs is provided.

In the UK you can contact your local Employment Service, which publishes information about working in France (ask for the Jobcentre Plus service). EURES has a website (<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/homepage>) where you can find contact information for job counsellors in the UK and

other EU countries specialising in public sector jobs in France.

## RECRUITMENT CONSULTANTS

International recruitment consultants or executive search companies (*cabinet de recrutement*) and 'head hunters' (*chasseur de têtes*) act for French companies, although they mainly handle executive and management positions. Britons seeking work in France can obtain an *Overseas Placement List* from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation in London (020-7009 2100, [www.rec.uk.com](http://www.rec.uk.com)), which lists agencies that specialise in finding overseas positions.

Many foreign (i.e. non-French) recruitment consultancies post job vacancies on the main internet job sites with links to their own recruitment websites. See **Internet** below for the most popular online job sites.

## NEWSPAPERS & OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Most Parisian and regional newspapers contain job sections (*offres d'emploi*) on certain days and most newspapers also post job advertisements on their websites. The most popular Parisian newspapers for job advertisements are *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *France-Soir*, *Libération*, *Le Parisien* and *Les Echos* (the daily financial and stock exchange journal). The best newspapers depend on the sort of job you're seeking. If you're looking for a management or professional position, you should see *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération* and *Les Echos*. Those seeking employment as technicians, artisans, secretaries, sales clerks,

For links to the websites of the major French newspapers, see [www.onlinenewspapers.com/france.htm](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/france.htm) and [www.world-newspapers.com/france.html](http://www.world-newspapers.com/france.html).



factory workers and manual labourers should try *France-Soir* and *Le Parisien*. *Libération* has adverts for all job categories.

In addition to the above, there are many important regional newspapers in France, e.g. *Sud-Ouest* and *Ouest-France*. There are also a number of newspapers and magazines devoted to careers and jobs, such as *Carrières et Emplois* (which publishes regional issues), *Carrières Publiques et Privées*, *Emploi*, *Entreprise et Carrières*, *Job Pratique*, *Le Mardi du Travail* and *Rebondir*. Specialist publications include *Courrier Cadres* for management level jobs (published by Pôle Emploi), the *Journal de l'Hôtellerie* ([www.lhotellerie.fr](http://www.lhotellerie.fr)) for hotel and catering jobs, *L'Usine Nouvelle* for factory jobs and *L'Etudiant* for student summer jobs

Most professions and trade associations publish journals containing job offers (see *Benn's Media Directory Europe*). Jobs are also advertised in various English-language publications, including the *International Herald Tribune*, *Wall Street Journal Europe*, and *France-USA Contacts* (fortnightly – see [www.fusac.fr](http://www.fusac.fr)).

## INTERNET

The internet has hundreds of sites for jobseekers, including business, recruitment company and newspaper sites. Most of the main international job-finding sites have sections devoted to vacancies in France. Some of the best known are listed below (unless otherwise stated, sites cover all types of jobs in all parts of France).

- ◆ [Bale.fr](http://www.bale.fr) ([www.bale.fr](http://www.bale.fr)) for IT and communications jobs
- ◆ [Cadremploi](http://www.cadremploi.com) ([www.cadremploi.com](http://www.cadremploi.com)) for management jobs
- ◆ [Emailjob.com](http://www.emailjob.monster.fr) ([www.emailjob.monster.fr](http://www.emailjob.monster.fr))
- ◆ [Emploi.com](http://www.emploi.com) ([www.emploi.com](http://www.emploi.com))
- ◆ [Eurojobs](http://www.eurojobs.com/browse-by-country/france) ([www.eurojobs.com/browse-by-country/france](http://www.eurojobs.com/browse-by-country/france))
- ◆ [Indeed](http://www.indeed.co.uk/jobs?q=france&l=) ([www.indeed.co.uk/jobs?q=france&l=](http://www.indeed.co.uk/jobs?q=france&l=))
- ◆ [Jobs in Paris](http://www.jobsinparis.fr) ([www.jobsinparis.fr](http://www.jobsinparis.fr)) for English-speaking professionals
- ◆ [Keljob](http://www.keljob.com) ([www.keljob.com](http://www.keljob.com))
- ◆ [The Local](http://www.thelocal.fr/jobs) ([www.thelocal.fr/jobs](http://www.thelocal.fr/jobs)) for English-language jobs
- ◆ [Monster](http://www.monster.fr) ([www.monster.fr](http://www.monster.fr))
- ◆ [Offre-emploi.com](http://www.offre-emploi.com) ([www.offre-emploi.com](http://www.offre-emploi.com))
- ◆ [Regions Job](http://www.regionsjob.com) ([www.regionsjob.com](http://www.regionsjob.com)) for jobs in a particular French region
- ◆ [Talents.fr](http://www.talents.fr) ([www.talents.fr](http://www.talents.fr)) for media and culture jobs

Many of the above websites include articles about job hunting in France and information about work permits and qualifications. Don't forget to check the websites of large companies and international organisations.

## SEASONAL JOBS

Seasonal jobs are available throughout the year, the vast majority in the tourist industry.

Fluency in French is required for all but the most menial and worst paid jobs and is more important than your experience and qualifications, although fluent French alone won't guarantee you a well paid job.

Many seasonal jobs last for the duration of the summer or winter tourist seasons, May to September and December to April respectively, although some are simply casual or temporary jobs for a number of weeks.

Seasonal jobs include most trades in hotels and restaurants, couriers and representatives, a variety of jobs in ski resorts, sports instructors, jobs in bars and clubs, fruit and grape picking and other agricultural jobs, and various jobs in the construction industry. Seasonal employees in the tourist industry have traditionally been paid below the minimum wage, although the authorities have clamped down on employers in recent years.

If you aren't an EU national you may require a visa. Check with a French embassy or consulate in your home country well in advance of your visit. Foreign students in France can obtain a temporary work permit (*autorisation provisoire de travail*) for part-time work during their summer holiday period.

Note that seasonal workers have few rights and little legal job protection in France, unless they're hired under standard employment contracts (usually *CDDs*), and they can generally be fired without compensation at any time.

Lists of summer jobs can be found via the internet, e.g. [www.pole-emploi.fr](http://www.pole-emploi.fr), [www.cidj.com](http://www.cidj.com) and [www.jobs-ete-europe.com](http://www.jobs-ete-europe.com). There are a number of books for those seeking holiday jobs, including *Work Your Way Around the World* (Crimson).

## Hotels & Catering

Hotels and restaurants are the largest employers of seasonal workers, with jobs available all year round for roles from hotel manager to kitchen hand. Experience, qualifications and fluent French are required for all the best and highest paid positions, although a variety of jobs are available for the untrained, inexperienced and those who don't speak fluent French. Bear in mind that if accommodation with cooking facilities or full board isn't provided with a job it can be expensive and difficult to find, therefore you must ensure that your salary is sufficient to pay for accommodation, food and other living expenses.

The weekly trade magazine *L'Hôtellerie* ([www.lhotellerie-restauration.fr](http://www.lhotellerie-restauration.fr)) is a good source of hotel and catering vacancies, as is *L'Echo Touristique* ([www.echotouristique.com](http://www.echotouristique.com)).

## Language Teachers

Language teaching (particularly English) is a good source of permanent, temporary or part-time work all year round, but particularly in summer. This may entail teaching a foreign language at a language school or privately, or even teaching French to expatriates if your French is up to the task. Language schools don't always require a teaching qualification and a university degree may suffice, although you should take as many educational certificates with you as possible. However, some schools insist that teachers have a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (01349-800 600, [www.tefl.org.uk](http://www.tefl.org.uk)) qualification. Further information about teaching English in France is available from TESOL France ([www.tesol-france.org](http://www.tesol-france.org)).

You could also try placing an advertisement in a French newspaper or magazine offering private lessons. You can also apply directly to state schools for a position as a language