

Employment and Business in France

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For many expats, moving to France isn't just about lifestyle – it's about building a sustainable life that includes meaningful work, steady income, and long-term professional fulfillment. Whether you're looking to find a job with a French employer, launch a business, or freelance from your laptop in the countryside, navigating the French employment and business landscape requires an understanding of legal structures, cultural expectations, and administrative procedures.

This module explores the primary paths to working in France, covering how to find employment as a foreigner, what it takes to start your own business or work independently, and how to build a professional network that will help you integrate and thrive in your chosen field.

The French labor market is highly regulated, with robust employment laws in place. While this may feel complex at first, these structures provide protections that benefit both employees and entrepreneurs—if you understand how to operate within them.

We'll also discuss some of the unique challenges that foreigners face in the job market, including language barriers, recognition of qualifications, and visa restrictions, along with strategies to overcome them. For those interested in working for themselves, we'll explain the various business structures available to expats, from the popular auto-entrepreneur model to more formal company formations, such as SARL or SASU.

Finally, success in France is as much about who you know as what you know. So, we'll finish with guidance on professional networking—how to find and connect with the right people, organizations, and communities that can help you integrate into your industry and local economy.

Whether you're coming to France with a job in hand or starting from scratch, this module will give you the tools to make informed, strategic decisions about your work life in your new country.

Finding a Job as a Foreigner

Before diving into the job search process in France, it's essential to understand that your visa type determines your right to work. Not all long-stay visas include work authorization, and working in France without the appropriate permit is illegal, even if you're freelancing or working remotely for a non-French company. The first step is always to check the specific conditions of your visa or residence permit.

Visa Types and Work Eligibility

- VLS-TS Visas (Long-Stay Visas – Equivalent to Residency): These often permit work, depending on the category (e.g., employee, student with limited working hours, or family reunification). You must validate your visa and confirm work eligibility with OFII after arrival.
- Passeport Talent (Talent Passport): This is designed for qualified professionals, entrepreneurs, artists, and tech workers. It includes full work rights, making it easier to secure jobs in your field.
- Visitor Visas: Do not allow employment or business activities. If you want to work, you'll need to change your status or apply for a new visa.
- EU/EEA Citizens: Can live and work in France without restrictions.

Always consult an immigration lawyer or visa specialist before making any assumptions about your work rights. Visa violations can result in fines, visa revocation, or being barred from re-entering France and all the Schengen countries.

The Job Market for Foreigners

Finding employment as a foreigner in France can be both rewarding and challenging. The job market is competitive, and French employers are generally required to give preference to EU citizens or residents with full work authorization before hiring a national from a third country. However, expats who speak French, possess specialized skills, or bring international experience are in demand in sectors like:

- Tech and IT
- Engineering
- Healthcare
- Education and language instruction (especially English)
- Tourism and hospitality (seasonal or regional)
- Luxury, fashion, and international marketing
- Research and academia

If you are coming from outside the EU, you'll need an employer willing to sponsor your work permit if your visa doesn't already include employment rights. This adds complexity but isn't impossible, particularly if you bring niche expertise.

Language Requirements

While multinational companies and startups in Paris may operate in English, most French employers expect at least a basic conversational level of French, especially in customer-facing roles or smaller firms. In rural areas, fluency is often essential.

If you're still learning French, consider starting your job search with:

- International schools
- NGOs or nonprofits
- English-language media
- Tourism and seasonal work
- Remote work with non-French companies

Fluency not only opens more doors but also demonstrates commitment to integrating into French life. You don't need to be perfect, just proactive.



Where to Search for Jobs

There are numerous platforms and agencies where you can begin your job search. The most popular and reliable include:

- Pôle Emploi (pole-emploi.fr): The national employment agency with job listings and support for job seekers.
- Indeed France, Monster, Welcome to the Jungle, and Apec (for executives).
- LinkedIn.fr – especially valuable for international companies and professional networking.
- Teaching English: Consider platforms like TEFL.com, ESL Employment, and Wall Street English.
- Local classifieds and networking groups: Many expats find opportunities through Facebook groups, regional forums, or word of mouth.

If you qualify for unemployment assistance in France (e.g., after working on a French contract for the required period), you must register with Pôle Emploi and adhere to their job search guidelines to receive benefits.

Application and Interview Process

The French hiring process can be slow and formal, with expectations that differ from those in North America or the UK. Resumes (called CVs) are typically concise—one page for junior roles, two for experienced professionals. Include a photo, date of birth, nationality, and a short, factual cover letter (lettre de motivation) tailored to each job.

Interviews may involve multiple rounds and are typically conducted in French, unless otherwise specified. Employers value stability and qualifications over self-promotion, and there's an emphasis on diplomas and certifications, which sometimes need to be recognized or validated by a French body (ENIC-NARIC).

Tips for Success

- Tailor your CV and letter to the French style and avoid overly "salesy" language.
- If your French is limited, consider starting to network and volunteer to gain exposure.
- Take a French language course with a job-related focus—many are subsidized through regional programs.
- Use relocation services or job coaches that specialize in expat transitions.

In summary, finding a job in France requires preparation, perseverance, and a realistic understanding of your visa status and language abilities. But with the right tools, guidance, and a willingness to adapt, it's absolutely achievable.



STARTING A BUSINESS OR FREELANCING IN FRANCE

For many expats, starting a business or working as a freelancer in France offers the flexibility, autonomy, and income potential that traditional employment may not provide—especially if you're bringing clients with you or working online. France supports entrepreneurship, but it also comes with strict legal structures, tax implications, and registration requirements that must be carefully understood and followed.

Just like with employment, your visa type determines whether you are allowed to start a business or work as an independent contractor. Not all visas allow business activity. If you're entering France on a visitor visa, for example, you are prohibited from engaging in paid work. However, other visas—such as the Passeport Talent (Profession Libérale) or a business-specific visa (entrepreneur/profession libérale visa)—permit self-employment. Always verify your work rights before starting.

1. Micro-Entrepreneur (formerly Auto-Entrepreneur)

The micro-entrepreneur regime is by far the most popular for freelancers, digital nomads, and solo entrepreneurs. It's easy to set up and ideal for low-risk, small-scale operations.

Key features:

- Quick, online registration (via URSSAF)
- No need for an accountant
- Flat-rate social charges and income tax
- Revenue caps (as of 2025):
 - • €77,700 for services/professions
 - • €188,700 for sales/commerce
- You must file monthly or quarterly declarations of turnover, even if it's zero
- Limited deductibility of expenses (not suitable for high-overhead businesses)

This is an excellent option for freelance writers, consultants, coaches, graphic designers, virtual assistants, and artisans. It's also visa-compatible for many expats applying under the "profession libérale" or "entrepreneur" categories.

2. Profession Libérale (Regulated Freelance Work)

Some independent activities—such as therapists, architects, legal advisors, and medical professionals—fall under the "profession libérale" category. These require a specific visa or legal status, professional qualifications, and possibly registration with a professional body or order (such as l'Ordre des Médecins for doctors).

You can register this under the micro-entrepreneur system if you meet income and activity conditions, or as a full entreprise individuelle with a different tax structure.

3. EURL, SARL, SASU (Company Structures)

If you're launching a larger-scale business or plan to employ others, setting up a limited liability company may be a more suitable option. The three primary forms include:

- EURL (Entreprise Unipersonnelle à Responsabilité Limitée): Single-owner LLC
- SARL (Société à Responsabilité Limitée): Multi-owner LLC
- SASU (Société par Actions Simplifiée Unipersonnelle): Flexible, single-owner simplified company

These entities allow you to:

- Deduct a broader range of business expenses
- Pay yourself a salary or dividends
- Limit personal liability
- Build business credit

However, they require:

- Formal accounting and annual filings
- Notarial documents and articles of incorporation
- Payment of corporate taxes (Impôt sur les Sociétés)

A bilingual accountant and legal advisor is highly recommended for these structures.

Taxes and Social Contributions

As a business owner or freelancer, you'll be subject to:

- Social contributions (URSSAF): Covers health insurance, retirement, family benefits, and more.
- Income tax or corporate tax: Depending on your legal structure
- VAT (TVA): Once you pass certain turnover thresholds, you must register and collect TVA on invoices
- CFE (Cotisation Foncière des Entreprises): Annual business property tax, even if you work from home

The French system is contribution-based—meaning even small payments entitle you to access healthcare, pensions, and social benefits. It may seem expensive upfront, but it provides significant long-term value.

Registering and Operating Legally

To start a business legally, you'll need:

- A valid visa that allows you to work or run a business
- A French address (you may use your residence or a domiciliation service)
- A French bank account for business use
- Business registration with URSSAF, INSEE, or the local Chambre de Métiers or Chambre de Commerce
- A SIRET number (French business ID)

Once registered, you must:

- Track your revenue and file taxes on time
- Issue invoices with legally required information
- Keep copies of all transactions and documents

If you're not fluent in French, it's highly advisable to work with a French-speaking accountant or business coach, especially during the setup process.



Remote Work for Non-French Companies

If you are working remotely for a company abroad (e.g., Canada or the U.S.), you still need to ensure that:

- Your visa permits remote work
- You comply with French tax residency rules
- You declare your income in France if you become a fiscal resident

Even digital nomads and location-independent professionals must meet France's residency and taxation requirements once they spend more than 183 days in the country or establish their "center of life" there.

Starting a business or working independently in France is empowering, but it can also be admin-intensive. With the proper planning and support, it can be a rewarding path to financial independence, social integration, and a legally stable life abroad.





PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING

Professional Networking Tips

In France, who you know can be just as important as what you know. Whether you're seeking employment, clients, partnerships, or simply professional support, building a strong local network is a vital part of succeeding in your new professional life. While networking in France may feel different from what you're used to—often more formal and relationship-driven—it's entirely accessible to expats who are willing to be proactive and culturally respectful.

Understand the Cultural Context

French professional culture values credibility, formality, and consistency. Cold outreach and aggressive self-promotion are less effective than warm introductions, personal recommendations, and showing genuine interest in others' work. Establishing trust and rapport often takes time, but once formed, professional relationships can be strong and loyal.

Key cultural considerations:

- Always use proper titles (e.g., Monsieur, Madame, Dr.) and formal language when meeting someone for the first time.
- A firm handshake and eye contact are important; cheek kissing (*la bise*) is reserved for informal situations and people you know well.
- Avoid diving into business too quickly—small talk matters, especially about neutral topics like travel, food, or culture.
- Keep your CV or business pitch clear and fact-based. Over-embellishment can seem insincere.

Where to Network

There are a wide variety of spaces—both physical and virtual—where expats can connect with French professionals and other international residents:

- Professional Associations: Many industries in France have local or national associations (for example, architects, educators, or consultants). These are excellent for meeting peers, attending events, and accessing training.
- Chambers of Commerce: The *Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie* (CCI) and international chambers, such as the American Chamber of Commerce in France or the British Chamber of Commerce, host regular networking events, business breakfasts, and seminars.

- Co-working Spaces: Cities across France have vibrant co-working hubs, such as WeWork, Wojo, La Cordée, and smaller local outfits. These often host talks, "afterworks," and member-only networking nights.
- Meetup.com and Eventbrite: These platforms list professional gatherings ranging from tech talks and entrepreneurship events to language exchanges and industry-specific meetups.
- LinkedIn France: Widely used among professionals and recruiters. Join local industry groups, comment on posts, and reach out to people who work in companies or fields you're targeting.
- Facebook Groups: Search for expat, freelancer, or industry-specific groups for your region. Many job opportunities and client referrals are shared here informally.
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Leverage Bilingual or Expat Networks

As an expat, don't overlook the power of connecting with others who've walked your path. There are countless English-speaking networking groups throughout France, including:



- Internations.org
- Expat.com
- Business in France for Expats (Facebook group)
- Women in Business France
- Local "Anglophone" clubs in cities like Paris, Lyon, Bordeaux, and Nice

These communities are not only helpful for business referrals but also for navigating bureaucratic hurdles, finding bilingual professionals, and sharing real-life experiences.

French Language Tips for Networking

While it's possible to get started using English in international circles, making the effort to use French, even just a few phrases, shows respect and commitment. Learn how to introduce yourself, describe your work, and ask polite questions in French. If you're attending a French-language event, it's okay to be honest about your language level—most people will be supportive, and many speak English themselves.

Free and affordable ways to practice:

- Language exchange events and cafés
- Duolingo, Babbel, or TV5Monde's Français Facile
- Adult education centers offering business French classes

You may also find local organizations offering business French classes subsidized by the French government or region (cours de français professionnel), which can boost your confidence in meetings and written communication.

Consistency and Follow-Up

In French networking, consistency is key. One meeting or introduction is rarely enough to build a meaningful professional connection. Follow up after events with a thank-you message, propose a coffee meeting, or offer to collaborate on a small project. Maintain your communication as polite, professional, and concise as possible.

Building a network in France takes patience and persistence, but it's one of the most powerful tools you have as an expat professional. Whether you're seeking job leads, clients, partners, or simply a sense of belonging, relationships are the gateway to opportunity and support.





Please continue to Module 8:
Education and Family Needs

