

# FRENCH VISAS.fr

YOUR PASSPORT TO FRANCE

Newsletter: January 2026

## Welcome to the 1st edition of the FrenchVisas newsletter.

**About FrenchVisas :** Whether you already call France home, divide your time between countries, or are actively planning a move here, one thing quickly becomes clear: French immigration and residency rules are not always easy to navigate—especially in another language.

FrenchVisas is dedicated to helping non-French-speaking clients understand and manage French visa and residency matters with clarity, accuracy, and confidence in the outcome. Our vocation is not simply to process applications, but to clarify the rules, anticipate issues, and guide you through what can otherwise be a complex administrative journey. From first-time visa applications to renewals, changes of status, and long-term residence planning, our aim is to be a reliable point of reference at every stage of your immigration journey.

This newsletter is part of that mission. In the coming months, we will be sharing practical information, expert insights, and updates on topics that affect expatriates and future residents of France, including:

- The different types of French visas and residence permits, and who they are intended for
- Long-stay visas (VLS-TS) and residence permit renewals
- Moving to France as a retiree, employee, or business owner
- Visa options for second-home owners
- Permanent residence and long-term settlement strategies
- Common mistakes and how to avoid delays or refusals
- Changes in French immigration policy and procedures

Immigration situations are rarely “one size fits all”, and the issues faced by applicants may not always be covered by official guidance. FrenchVisas strives to provide the best fit for your situation and help you navigate the unknown.

So, if you have questions or issues you would like to see addressed in future editions - a specific visa type, personal situation, or administrative challenge - please let us know.

Send your requests to [sarah.frenchvisas@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.frenchvisas@gmail.com). Your suggestions will help shape our future content.

Thank you for being part of the FrenchVisas community. We look forward to accompanying you - wherever you are in your French journey.

And we wish you a very Happy New Year 2026.

**The FrenchVisas Team**



Editorial by:  
Sarah MacGilchrist

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# How will travelling in and out of the Schengen Zone change in 2025 and 2026?

Two new systems are set to impact travelling into the Schengen Zone for non-EU passport holders: ETIAS and EES. Here's what you need to know about these systems.

## ETIAS – European Travel Information and Authorisation System

The ETIAS system will require citizens from visa-exempt countries, such as the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, to obtain travel authorisation before entering the Schengen Area. The system is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2026 (the launch was previously anticipated to be earlier in the year).

### Key Details:

- ETIAS Authorisation: Valid for short-term stays (up to 90 days within a 180-day period) across the Schengen Area.
- Duration: Valid for three years, or until the passport associated with the ETIAS expires, whichever comes first.
- Application Process: Applicants will need to complete an online form and pay a €7 fee (more details and the application page will be shared once live. See link below).
- Exemptions: Travellers under 18 or over 70 are exempt from the fee but not the application.
- Processing Time: Most applications will be approved within minutes, but it is advised to apply well in advance of your trip to avoid delays.

### Where to Apply:

Once ETIAS is operational, you will be able to apply through the official ETIAS website:

ETIAS Application Portal link ([The link will become active once the system is live in 2026.](#))

Who is Exempt from ETIAS?

1. UK Nationals holding a Carte de Séjour obtained under the Withdrawal Agreement and their card holding family members : Beneficiaries of the Withdrawal Agreement (WA), whatever their nationality, are exempt from the ETIAS requirement.
2. EU passport holders and their card holding family members : Spouses and close family members of EU passport holders who do NOT have a Carte de Séjour are required to obtain an ETIAS but, as for the WA card holder's family members, there is no charge.

Family members under the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement and EU law include:

- Spouses (including same-sex spouses)
- Registered partners (if recognized as equivalent to marriage under national law)
- Direct descendants under 21, or dependants, including those of the spouse or registered partner
- Dependent ascendants (parents or grandparents) of the EU national, their spouse, or their registered partner.

These family members will not be required to pay the €7 fee, and their application will not be checked against illegal immigration screening rules.

3. Long-Stay Visa Holders: Individuals with a valid national long-stay visa (e.g., a residence permit) are also exempt.

Special Case: Non-EU spouses of French nationals must still apply for ETIAS when visiting France. This may seem to be incoherent but their case falls under French national law, not EU law, unless they hold specific residence status in another EU country.

## What about countries that are in the EU but not in the Schengen Zone ?

The most likely candidates here among EU passport holders regularly travelling to France are Irish passport holders. According to [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/1240 on ETIAS](#) (paras 5 and 6) which defines the implementation procedures for ETIAS, it is specified that ETIAS applies to citizens of third countries who benefit from a visa exemption for entry into the Schengen Area. However, EU citizens (including those from Ireland) do not fall into this category. Continue reading ↓

## **Schengen Zone cont.....**

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU): [Article 21 of the TFEU](#) guarantees the freedom of movement of EU citizens, meaning that Irish citizens (like other EU citizens) can move freely within all Member States, including those in the Schengen Area.

### **EES – Entry/Exit System**

The EES will track the entry and exit of travellers (both visa-exempt and visa-required) into and out of the Schengen Zone for short stays. This system will operate at all external borders of the 29 Schengen Area countries, and no prior action will be needed before your trip.

Key Details:

- **Registration at the Border:** Travelers will be automatically registered each time they cross external borders, replacing the manual stamping of passports. This will be done through biometric data collection (fingerprints and facial recognition).
- **Impact on Travellers:** The system will make border control processes more efficient in the long run, and help authorities combat irregular migration and security threats, but delays may be unavoidable in the introductory phase.

What Does This Mean for Travellers?

- **No Pre-Travel Application for EES.** Travellers under this scheme don't need to register or apply before travelling. Registration will happen automatically upon entry at the Schengen border.
- **ETIAS Required for Some Travellers:** If you are from a visa-exempt country, you'll need ETIAS authorisation to enter the Schengen Area.

However, if you are :

- a card-holding family member of an EU national or
- a card-holding beneficiary of the Withdrawal Agreement or
- a holder of a valid Long Stay Visa,  
you are exempt from this requirement.

### **Timeline for Changes**

- ETIAS is expected to become operational by the end of 2026. Until then, travellers will not need to apply for ETIAS. (See the link previously)
- The EES system is scheduled to be rolled out in stages alongside ETIAS, with border control changes likely happening around the same time.

References

[Regulation - 2018/1240 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

[EUR-Lex - 12008E021 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

## **Language lessons going on-line in 2026**

OFII language lessons are being moved online for many learners in 2026, as part of a broader reform of the French integration and language-training system. This move concerns people who are here and hold work visas (Entrepreneur/Profession Libérale, Salarié).

Traditionally the OFII has organised their lessons without much attention to a student's pre-existing level of French which means that applicants have often found themselves in lessons with people who do not have the same level of education, do not use the same alphabet, sometimes not any alphabet at all, and who do not speak the same language as the other students in the class. The classes were all given in French. They were organised in blocks of four or five hours several days a week, which is not conducive to starting a business or settling into a job.

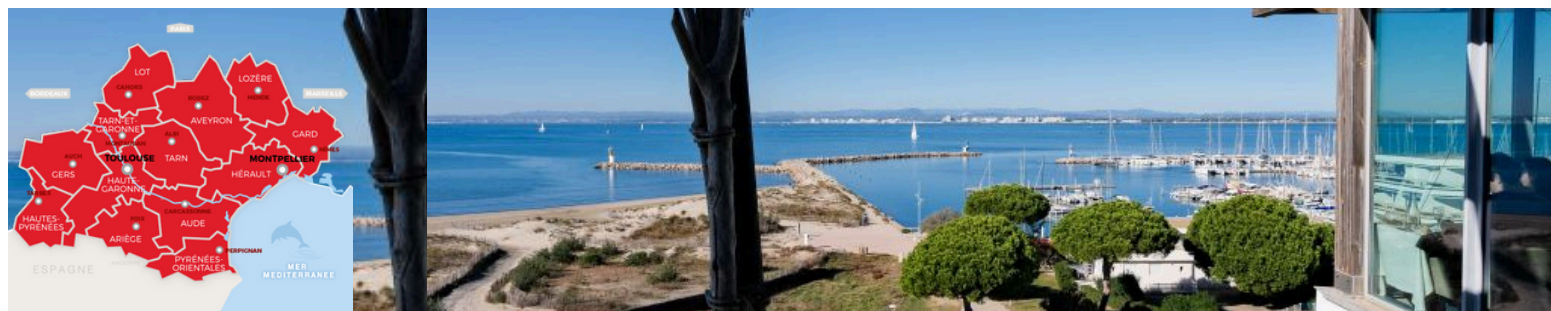
Another problem is that for people living in rural départements where the population is thinly spread out, the applicants were travelling long distances to go to their lessons. Continue reading ↓

## Language Lessons cont.....

Since the summer of 2025 those who already have an A1 level, have been offered the chance to use the on-line platform and app. This initiative is not complete at the moment and in some instances classroom teaching has been maintained for the time being or a mixed system using both classroom teaching and the on-line system is in place.

In certain cases, classroom teaching will be continued for certain types of residency applicant, such as asylum seekers, people with a low level of literacy and people without access to the Internet. The site is called Frello. To access it you need an invitation from the OFII.

## Occitanie: Southern France at Its Most Diverse



Stretching from the Mediterranean coast to the foothills of the Pyrenees, Occitanie is one of France's most varied and rewarding regions. Created in 2016 from the former regions of Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées, Occitanie offers an exceptional blend of history, landscapes, and lifestyle that appeals strongly to international residents and long-term visitors.

The region boasts a rich cultural heritage shaped by Roman rule, medieval kingdoms, and the distinctive Occitan language, which is still celebrated today through festivals, music, and local traditions. Cities such as Toulouse, known as La Ville Rose for its terracotta architecture, and Montpellier, a youthful and dynamic Mediterranean hub, combine historic charm with modern innovation.

Nature lovers are drawn to Occitanie's extraordinary diversity: sandy beaches along the Mediterranean, rolling vineyards, dramatic gorges, and mountain scenery in both the Pyrenees and the southern Massif Central. Outdoor activities range from sailing and cycling to hiking and skiing, often within a short drive of each other.

Occitanie is also renowned for its quality of life. The region enjoys a mild climate, excellent local produce, and a strong sense of community. With comparatively affordable property prices, reliable transport links, and a welcoming attitude toward international residents, Occitanie continues to attract those seeking an authentic French experience with space to breathe and room to explore.

4 bed House in Montpezat de Quercy. 308,000€ FAI



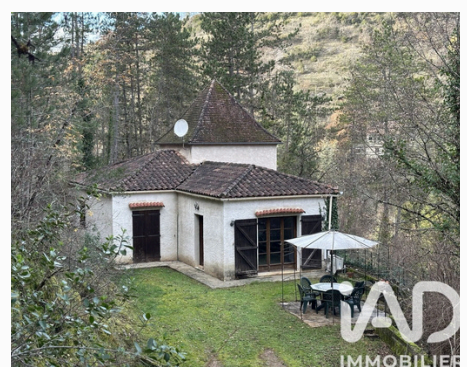
Ready to move into, this property is ideally located in a quiet neighbourhood and makes a perfect family home, with a primary school and leisure park just a short walk away. Set on an elevated plot with far-reaching views, the house is arranged over three spacious floors.

5 bed House in Montfaucon 240,000€ FAI



Situated in the heart of Montfaucon, this character house has been completely renovated with taste and refinement. Set over three floors: 5 bedrooms, 3 shower rooms, 1 bathroom and 3 WCs. The house also has a terrace offering 46m<sup>2</sup> of outdoor space.

2 bed House in Cahors 120,000€ FAI



SINGLE-STORY HOUSE WITH BASEMENT AND GARDEN. Located in the Saint-Georges district of Cahors (46000). Built in 2004, the house offers around 78 sqm of living space. It sits on a plot of approximately 8,700 sqm, with about 300 sqm of usable outdoor area.



## NEW RULES ABOUT LANGUAGE LEVELS FOR CARTES DE SEJOUR 2026

Because of the new immigration law which was passed last year\*, there has been a lot of discussion in the press and on social media about the new language level requirements for obtaining a carte de séjour, in particular the Permanent Resident Carte (Carte de resident de Long Durée - EU).

Here is a summary of what is going to change in terms of language requirements for immigrants to France, under the latest immigration law:

### **Who is NOT concerned by the new rules?**

- If you are on a visitor's visa and you are renewing your residency annually, but you have not reached the end of your 5 years of continuous residency, you are not yet concerned by any form of language assessment under the new law.
- Passeport Talent visas and cartes de séjour are also not concerned by any form of language assessment whilst the visa is running. This may not remain the case if you want to change your visa status. An exception to this may be the newly created talent visa for medical personnel, whose language requirements I have not yet been able to verify.
- People who arrive in France as an EU spouse or family member are not assessed for their language level when they make a carte de séjour application.

**If you are over the age of 65, you are not, at the present time, concerned by the new rules about your language level in French.**

**People who hold a five year WARP (Withdrawal Agreement Residency Permit) card are not concerned by the new rules about the French language requirements when renewing their card in 2025 or 2026.**

Any changes or developments about the above will be reported in a later post.

### **The groups of cardholders who are most affected by the new rules:**

The intention behind the new language rules is to facilitate the integration of immigrants, in particular as regards their entry into the work force. One of the groups of card-holders, therefore, most concerned by the new rules in the first five years of their residency are those entering the work force who hold residency via Entrepreneur/Profession Libérale or Salarié cards.

These cardholders will not be concerned by the new measures in the same way as people requesting a Permanent Resident Card after five years in France on a visitor's card, because, during their OFII visit in the first year of residency, their language skills will be assessed and, if found lacking, they will be given free French lessons to remedy this situation. So, for the two above-mentioned groups, this issue is usually dealt with to some extent during the first year or two of residency.

Under the old rules, however, if you did the maximum quota of French lessons (600 hours) without reaching the appropriate level, you were still allowed to keep your card, on the basis of your commitment and respect for the terms of your Contrat d'Intégration Republicain. Under the new rules, what happens if you do not have the required level of French after 600 hours is not clear to my satisfaction. I shall be following this question up in a future newsletter.

Besides this, under the old rules, the level required to fulfil your OFII obligations for the Entrepreneur/Profession Libérale or Salarié card was A1. It is A2 under the new rules. Then, to obtain a Permanent Resident Card at the end of your first five years of continuous residence in France, you will need to upgrade your French level again, to a B1 level.

**The language levels and how they are assessed** Continue reading ↓

## The language levels and how they are assessed. Continue reading ↓

The language levels used to measure the level of French for immigration purposes are based on a European wide standardised level known as CECRL (Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues – The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). The exams that are most often required for immigration purposes are the TCF (Test de Connaissance du Français) and TEF (Test d'Évaluation du Français). These exams can be passed in accredited language schools and at chambers of commerce in France and abroad.

Here is a more developed explanation in English for anyone wanting more detail about this : [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - Wikipedia](#)

As regards the grading system, it is the reverse of the anglo-saxon system which has A being the best and C a pass. Under the CECRL system, A is the lowest level and C is the highest, with each grade being divided into 2 categories, 1 and 2. Category 2 is higher than category 1.

### How to gain a bit of time to comply with your OFII obligations:

If you arrive in France on, for example, an Entrepreneur/Profession Libérale or Salarié visa, or if you are previously resident on another card, change your status to a carte de séjour Entrepreneur/Profession Libérale or Salarié and you already have a recognised certificate for the appropriate level, it is likely that you will not be asked to do the French lessons proposed by the OFII. This can free up a lot of time during a period when you may also be setting up your business or settling into a new job. Anticipating all this can save you a considerable amount of time.

### So, concretely, what is changing?

- Multi-year residence cards valid for two to four years (carte de séjour pluriannuelle) which previously required an A1 level, now require an A2 level. (This is already in place for an Entrepreneur/Profession Libérale card)
- Long-term resident card – EU (carte de resident longue durée – UE), which is valid for ten years and which previously required level A2, now requires level B1.

### When will the new measures be implemented?

According to my best information as of the date of going to print, these new measures will come into force at the latest, at the beginning of 2026.

Sarah MacGILCHRIST – FrenchVisas - 22/11/2025

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References:

[Article L413-7 - Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile - Légifrance](#)

[Arrêté du 22 juillet 2025 relatif aux formations civique et linguistique prescrites aux étrangers signataires du contrat d'intégration républicaine en France - Légifrance](#)

[Resident card: how can you justify your knowledge of French? | Service Public](#)

\* «La loi pour contrôler l'immigration, améliorer l'intégration promulguée le 26 janvier 2024» - The law to control immigration, to improve integration, passed on 26th January 2024.



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## Eu Passport holders - Healthcare requirements

Under the EU Freedom of Movement rules, you need to have health care and sufficient funds (the amount required depends on the country you are going to, and there is no fixed amount in France) to not become a burden on the host country.

These two criteria are rarely checked up on if you come to France as an EU passport-holding retiree or early retiree, unless you are hosting a spouse or family member who will be applying for a carte de séjour. In that case, it will be necessary to provide proof of funds for both parties for the carte de séjour applicant to obtain their card.

The onus is on the host to show that the requirements are met, not the family member. For the financial resources, the French authorities often use the RSA threshold (minimum social assistance level) as the reference, not the minimum wage. Both the host and the guest must have proper health care (i.e. not travel insurance).



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## New Driving Regulations : From December 2025

Speeding at more than 50km/h over the speed limit will now become a criminal offence, risking a 3,750€ fine, three months in prison and the loss of your driving licence. This is part of a new set of driving regulations coming into force that will be explored in greater detail in the next newsletter.

If you have got this far, thanks for reading our first newsletter.

We hope it will be the first of many.

Wishing you all a Happy New Year 2026  
and good luck with your French projects!