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Finding a lawyer

Except in cases of crime as defined under French law, the assistance of a lawyer is not compulsory but it is advisable.

Freedom to choose a lawyer is a fundamental principle.

You may freely choose a lawyer if you know one or you may ask for one to be appointed.

You may choose a lawyer by "word-of-mouth" if anyone you know is a lawyer or if a friend or relative recommends one.

You may consult the list of lawyers close to where you live, either at the *Tribunal d'instance* (Court of First Instance) in your town, at many town halls or at the Bar Association closest to where you live.

You may also look in the telephone directory or search on the Internet.

Several sites offer online directories of lawyers, broken down by specialist area:

- [Conseil National des Barreaux](#) (National Bar Council)
- [Paris Bar Association](#) (Paris Bar Association)
- [Ministère de la justice](#) (Ministry of Justice)

Many Bar Associations also have contact points in courts of law, town halls or *Maisons de justice et du Droit* (justice and law information centres).

If you are held in custody, you have several possibilities for choosing a lawyer.

Lists of lawyers are posted inside remand centres.

Associations working in the prison environment can advise you and help you to choose a lawyer. (International Prison Observatory, Association of Prison Visitors, etc.).

The consular services of your country of origin can help you to choose a lawyer.

You may also ask the President of the Bar Association in your territorial jurisdiction to nominate a lawyer to help you.

Paying your lawyer

If you retain a lawyer, you will have to pay fees. The lawyer's fees are established freely by agreement with you.

You may sign a fee agreement with the lawyer, who is entitled to ask you to put down deposits whilst your case is being dealt with.

However, if your means are below a certain ceiling, you may be able to obtain [legal aid](#) under certain conditions.

Depending on your income, the State can therefore cover all or part of the court-appointed lawyer's fees. If you are not entitled to legal aid, the court appointment becomes a personal appointment and you must then establish the

amount of fees with the lawyer.

If you are only entitled to partial legal aid, you must pay the balance of fees to the lawyer.

■ Last update: 18/08/2025

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