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> France

Service of documents: official transmission of legal documents



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European Judicial Network
(in civil and commercial matters)

1 What does the legal term "service of documents" mean in practical terms? Why are there specific rules regarding the "service of documents"?

Article 651 of the Code of Civil Procedure (Code de procédure civile) provides that 'Documents shall be brought to the knowledge of the interested parties by service thereof.'

Documents may be served:

- by hand delivery. The document is served by a commissioner of justice (Article 651(2) of the Code of Civil Procedure). The lawfulness of the service is governed by strict general conditions and by formalities laid down in Articles 653 et seq. of the Code of Civil Procedure, such as the hours and days on which a document may be served.
- by ordinary letter (Articles 665 to 670-3 of the Code of Civil Procedure). In this case, the documents are served by registered post with acknowledge of receipt or by direct delivery of the document to the addressee against signature or receipt.
- between lawyers (Articles 671 to 673 of the Code of Civil Procedure). This applies where a lawyer has to serve a document on their colleague.

Link to the provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure on the service of documents: click: [HERE](#)

2 Which documents need to be served formally?

There is no exhaustive list of documents which must be officially served. All important documents in civil proceedings must in principle be brought to the attention of the other party in order to comply with the adversarial principle. Certain provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure specify the documents to be served. The documents in question are those which allow legal proceedings to be brought, conducted or suspended, or a judgment to be enforced (examples: subpoena, conclusion, judgment).

3 Who is responsible for serving a document?

Commissioners of justice have a monopoly on serving documents in the sense that they are the only officials authorised to do so. In exercising their monopoly, they may call on sworn clerks, for whom they retain civil liability.

Documents may be served by ordinary letter by anyone in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Code of Civil Procedure (Articles 665 et seq. of the Code of Civil Procedure). In particular, certain legal documents are served by the registrar of a court (e.g. a summons of the parties to a hearing, service of a judgment on non-

contentious matters).

4 Address enquiries

4.1 Does the requested authority in this Member State on its own initiative, try and establish the whereabouts of the addressee of the documents to be served if the address indicated is not correct ? See also notification under Article 7(2)(c) of the Service of Documents Regulation.

Where a French authority (public ministry or commissioner of justice) is required to serve a document from abroad and it has been established that the person no longer resides at the address indicated, it is for this authority to take the necessary steps in order to identify the exact domicile address of the person concerned.

For this purpose, the public prosecutor may consult various registers and in particular the social security registers. The information communicated relates to the debtor's address, the debtor's employer's address and the institutions with which an account has been opened in the debtor's name, to the exclusion of any other information.

In addition, under civil enforcement proceedings, [Article L. 152-1 of the Civil Enforcement Proceedings Code](#) provides for direct access by commissioners of justice to information held by government administrations or departments and public authorities and enterprises and bodies controlled by the administrative authority.

4.2 Do foreign judicial authorities and/or parties to judicial proceedings have access to registers or services in this Member State enabling the establishment of the person's current address? If yes, which registers or services exist and what procedure must be followed? What fee, if any, should be paid?

With the exception of information in the public domain (telephone directory, for example), foreign judicial authorities or parties to legal proceedings do not have access to registers containing personal data, such as the debtor's address.

Under French law, such access is possible only under civil enforcement proceedings, or in judicial proceedings, by decision of the court.

4.3 What type of assistance in address enquiries from other Member States do the authorities of this Member State provide under Article 7(1) of the Service of Documents Regulation? See also notification under Article 7(1) of the Service of Documents Regulation.

France does not have an authority responsible for searching for an address or a population register. Persons wishing to serve a document in France should consult the following information websites:

- to search for a private individual's address:
 - Public service: <https://www.service-public.fr/>
 - Phone directory: [Pages Blanches - annuaire particuliers gratuit](#)
- to search for a company's address:
 - Infogreffe: <https://www.infogreffe.fr/>
 - INPI: <https://www.inpi.fr/>

For documents instituting proceedings and enforcement orders, applicants may also consult the competent commissioner of justice for the court of appeal in which the addressee had their last known domicile. All information on commissioners of justice can be obtained from the National Chamber of Commissioners of Justice:

Telephone: + 33 1 49 70 12 90

Site internet: [CNCJ - National Chamber of Commissioners of Justice - Official website](#) • [Chambre nationale des commissaires de justice](#)

5 How is the document normally served in practice? Are there alternative methods which may be used (other than substituted service referred to in point 7 below)?

- Service by ordinary letter: The letter is served in a sealed envelope, sent either by post or by delivery against receipt or signature (Article 667 of the Code of Civil Procedure). The service must contain all the particulars relating to the surname and first names or to the company or business name of the sender, as well as their domicile or registered office. The same information is required for the recipient (Articles 665 of the Code of Civil Procedure). All these particulars are required on pain of nullity of the service (Article 693 of the Code of Civil Procedure). If the arrangements for service of a document are not specified, it shall be by registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt where it triggers a period leading up to a time limit. For certain matters, provisions state that the service of 'simple notices' sent by the registrar may also be 'by any means', i.e. by simple letter, verbal invitation, fax, e-mail or SMS, in accordance with the conditions specified by the provisions applicable to electronic communication.

- Place of service:

Where the addressee is a natural person, service is effected at their place of residence, or in any other place if handed over personally. Service at the person's elected domicile is also possible where permitted or required by law.

If the person concerned is a legal entity, service is effected at its place of business or, failing that, personally to one of its members with authorisation to receive it.

- Date of service:

For the person effecting the service, the date is that on which the letter was sent, which is shown on the stamp of the issuing office. For the person on whom the service is effected, the date is that of receipt of the letter. In the case of a registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt, this date corresponds to the one affixed by the postal administration when the letter is handed over to its addressee.

Service may be effected by electronic means, provided that the addressee has given prior consent (Articles 748-1 et seq. of the Code of Civil Procedure).

- Service between lawyers is applicable when a lawyer has to serve a document on a colleague (Articles 671 to 673 of the Code of Civil Procedure). It always takes place within the courthouse in one of two ways: formal service (which requires the intervention of a commissioner of justice who affixes their stamp and signature on the document and on the copy) or direct service (which is undertaken by the lawyer of one party handing over two copies of the document to the lawyer of another party, with the latter handing back one of the copies dated and stamped).

Service between lawyers may be carried out electronically.

- Formal service is carried out by a commissioner of justice within the jurisdiction of the ordinary court of first instance [*tribunal judiciaire*] of their place of residence.

In practice, unless the judge gives permission, formal service may be carried out only on working days and not before 06:00 or after 21:00.

Article 663 of the Code of Civil Procedure lists a certain number of particulars which must appear on the two originals of the deeds of the judicial commissioner. Any irregularity is subject to the penalty of nullity of the service (Article 693 of the Code of Civil Procedure).

The principle is that the document must be served on the person of the addressee. Failing that, where this method of service is not possible, the document may be served at the domicile or residence (the document is then delivered to any person present at the domicile of the addressee if they agree to receive it). If this second method is also not possible, but the commissioner of justice has been able to ascertain the domicile or residence of the addressee, service is effected by filing the document at the office of the commissioner of justice who drew

it up (in this case, the commissioner of justice leaves an attempted-delivery notice indicating that the document must be collected from their office as soon as possible). If the person upon whom the document must be served has no known domicile, residence or workplace, service is effected in the form of an unsuccessful search report (the commissioner of justice then sends a copy of the report to the last known address of the document addressee by registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt, attaching a copy of the document served, and informing the addressee by simple letter that this formality has been completed).

Hand delivery is still a possibility even where the law would have provided for another form of notification (e.g. by ordinary procedure).

Under certain conditions, service may also be effected electronically (cf. point 6)

6 Is electronic service of documents (service of judicial or extrajudicial documents through remote means of electronic communication, such as e-mail, internet based secured application, fax, sms etc.) permitted in civil proceedings? If so, for which types of proceedings is this method provided for? Are there restrictions with regard to the availability/access of this method of service of documents depending on who the addressee is (legal professional, legal person, company or other business actor, etc.)?

Article 748-1 of the Code of Civil Procedure provides that the dispatch, delivery and service of procedural documents, papers, notices, warnings or summonses, reports, official reports and copies and enforceable originals of court judgments may be effected electronically, subject to fulfilment of the following three requirements:

- The consent of the addressee unless special provisions require the use of this means of communication (Article [748-2 Code of Civil Procedure](#));
- Delivery against electronic acknowledgement of receipt by the addressee or electronic notice of availability sent to the addressee (Article [748-3 CPC](#));
- The use of a technical process included in Decree of 29 August 2025 establishing the list of authorised electronic means of communication. These authorised means guarantee in particular reliable identification of the parties, the integrity of the documents sent, and the security and confidentiality of the exchanges (Article [748-6 subparagraph 1 CPC](#)).

E-mails and SMS are not authorised electronic communication channels.

These provisions apply to all jurisdictions.

As regards specifically the service of documents by commissioners of justice, these can therefore be effected by electronic means using the Securact platform placed under the supervision of the National Chamber of Commissioners of Justice. Except where electronic service is required by law, prior consent of the document's addressee must be obtained by the National Chamber of Court Enforcement Officers. It keeps a record of all consent obtained, to which all commissioners of justice have access.

However, by derogation, where it is provided that a notice, summons or receipt is sent by the registrar to a party by any means, by ordinary letter, or by registered letter without acknowledgement of receipt:

- Article 748-8 of the Code of Civil Procedure allows the registrar to communicate with a party through the *Portail du justiciable* (Portal for citizens involved in legal proceedings) of the Ministry of Justice, provided that the party has given prior consent;
- Article 748-9 of the Code of Civil Procedure allows the registrar to communicate to legal persons governed by private law, State administrations, local and regional authorities, public administrative establishments, social security bodies and other bodies entrusted with the management of an administrative public service, where they have given prior consent, by e-mail under conditions ensuring the confidentiality of the information transmitted.

Service between lawyers can also be effected by the e-Barreau platform, which is also used to conduct procedural exchanges between lawyers and courts.

6.1 What type of electronic service within the meaning of Article 19(1) of the Service of Documents Regulation are available in this Member State where service is to be effected directly on a person, who has a known address for service in another Member State?

No specific provisions have been adopted for persons who have elected domicile in another Member State. The rules laid down in Articles 748-1 et seq. of the Code of Procedure apply.

6.2 Has this Member State in accordance with Article 19(2) of the Service of Documents Regulation specified additional conditions under which it will accept electronic service via e-mail referred to in Article 19(1)(b) of that Regulation? See also notification under Article 19(2) of the Service of Documents Regulation.

National law does not authorise the service of a document by simple e-mail. France authorises service by electronic means subject to the conditions listed in point 6.

7 'Substituted' service

7.1 Does the law of this Member State allow for other methods of service in cases where it has not been possible to serve the documents to the addressee (e.g. notification to the home address, to the bailiff office, by postal service, or by poster advertising)?

If service by court registrar is unsuccessful, the registrar asks the parties to deliver the document by hand (Article 670-1 of the Code of Civil Procedure).

If service in person is unsuccessful, service to the home address or, failing this, to the place of residence will be attempted. The document is then delivered to any person present at the addressee's domicile who agrees to receive the document.

If the latter method is also not possible, but the commissioner of justice has been able to ascertain the domicile or residence of the addressee, service is effected by filing the document at the office of the commissioner of justice who drew it up. In this case, the commissioner of justice leaves an attempted-delivery notice indicating that the document must be collected from their office as soon as possible.

Lastly, if the person on whom the document must be served has no known domicile, residence or workplace, service is effected by means of an unsuccessful search report. The commissioner of justice then sends a copy of the report to the last known address of the document addressee by registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt, attaching a copy of the document served, and informing the addressee by simple letter that this formality has been completed.

7.2 If other methods are applied, when are the documents deemed to have been served?

Formal service is deemed to have taken place on the day it has been effected on the person, at their domicile or residence. Since formal service by handing over the document at the commissioner's office is 'effected at the domicile', it is the attempted-delivery notice which determines the date of service and not the handing over of the copy to the commissioner of justice's office. In the case of an unsuccessful search report, the date of service is the date on which this report was drawn up. The rules for determining the date of formal service apply even if a notice has to be sent.

In the case of service by ordinary letter, the date of delivery is that of receipt or signature. If the document is served by registered letter, the date of receipt is that which is affixed by the postal service when the letter was handed to the addressee (Article 669 of the Code of Civil Procedure).

7.3 If another method of service is the deposit of the documents in a particular place (e.g. at a

post office) how is the addressee informed of that deposit?

- In the case of service by registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt: if the addressee is absent when the postman comes, an attempted-delivery notice is left stating that the document may be collected at the post office within 15 days following the day after the attempted-delivery notice was left.
- If the document is served, after the commissioner of justice has ensured that the address on the proof of service is correct but that personal service was not possible, they leave an attempted-delivery notice in the letterbox requesting that the addressee collect the copy of the document from their office (Article 656 of the Code of Civil Procedure).

7.4 If the addressee refuses to accept service of the documents, what are the consequences? Are the documents regarded as effectively served if the refusal wasn't legitimate?

The agreement of the person concerned, who is the addressee of the document, is not a requirement for the document to be delivered to them. Therefore, in cases where the document addressee does not wish to receive the document presented to them by the commissioner of justice, this does not prevent its formal service on the person concerned. In fact, it would be impossible for the commissioner of justice to force the addressee to take the document if that person refused to do so; it suffices for the commissioner of justice to deposit the copy at the home of the addressee when they have found this person at home. In this way, formal service is valid even if the addressee refuses the copy and the commissioner of justice places it on a piece of furniture (Paris Court of Appeal, 12 December 1906, S. 1907. 2.109).

8 Are there specific rules for the service of a European order for payment, and if so, please specify these rules and procedures, including any relevant legal provisions?

Article 12§5 of the [European Regulation](#) states that the court is to ensure that the payment order be served on the defendant in accordance with national law, in accordance with the minimum standards laid down in Articles 13, 14 and 15 of the Regulation.

Where a French court issues an EOP and the defendant is domiciled in France, the Code of Civil Procedure supplements the provisions of European law.

The European order for payment (EOP) issued by a French court must be served on each of the defendants on the initiative of the applicant ([Article 1424-5 of the Code of Civil Procedure](#)). Service of the EOP is effected by a commissioner of justice. All methods of service are permitted (in person, at the domicile or residence, or filed at the office) with the exception of service effected by an unsuccessful search report, on the basis of Article 659 of the CPC ([Article 14 2. of the Regulation](#) and [Circular of 26 May 2009](#)).

On pain of nullity, the document of service must contain - in addition to the information prescribed for documents of the commissioners of justice - the information provided for in Article 1424-5 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

This information is as follows:

- the name of the court before which opposition is to be filed;
- an indication of the time period and of the forms in which opposition must be lodged;
- the warning that, if no opposition is lodged within the specified period, calculated in accordance with Council Regulation (EEC, EURATOM) No 1182/71 of 3 June 1971 determining the rules applicable to periods, dates and time limits, all legal avenues may be used to force the defendant to pay the sums claimed;
- information provided to the defendant concerning their right to apply for a review of the European order for payment before the court which issued it, upon expiry of the opposition period, in the exceptional cases provided for in Article 20 of Regulation (EC) No 1896/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 creating a European order for payment procedure.

In the event of service on the person of the defendant, the commissioner of justice must orally convey the information classified as important using the EOP form. A reference to the completion of this formality is included in the document of service ([Article 1424-6 of the CPC](#)).

Lastly, the commissioner of justice must give a copy of the document of service to the court which issued the

EOP ([Article 1424-7 of the CPC](#)).

If service is to take place in another Member State: the documents must be sent to that other Member State in accordance with [Regulation \(EU\) No 2020/1784 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the service in the Member States of judicial and extrajudicial documents in civil or commercial matters \(recast of Regulation \(EC\) No 1393/2007\)](#).

9 Postal service from abroad (Article 18 of the Service of Documents Regulation)

9.1 If the postal service delivers a document sent from abroad to an addressee in this Member State in a situation where acknowledgment of receipt is required (Article 18 of the Service of Documents Regulation), does the postal service deliver the document only to the addressee himself/herself or may it, in accordance with national rules of postal delivery, deliver the document also to another person at the same address?

In the context of service by registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt, the postal service responsible for delivering the letter with acknowledgement of receipt may, in principle, deliver it only to the person to whom it is addressed, unless the addressee has authorised a third person to receive such documents.

9.2 Under the rules of postal delivery in this Member State how can the service of documents from abroad, under Article 18 of the Service of Documents Regulation, be effected if neither the addressee nor any other person authorised to receive the delivery (if possible under national rules of postal delivery – see above) has been reached at the address of delivery?

If it was not possible to deliver the document to the addressee because the address of delivery is incorrect, service is then considered to have been irregular. The document is then returned to sender. Service of the document must be repeated by means of hand delivery by a commissioner of justice.

9.3 Does the post office allow a specific period of time for collection of the documents before sending the documents back as undelivered? If yes, how is the addressee informed that there is mail for him to collect at the post office?

Where the addressee of the document is absent from their domicile, the postman leaves an attempted-delivery notice in their letterbox informing them that they can collect the letter from the post office over a period of 15 days from the day after the attempted-delivery notice was left.

After this deadline, the letter is returned to sender.

10 Is there any written proof that the document has been served?

Where service is effected by registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt, the postman hands over the letter to the addressee against signature of the acknowledgement of receipt. This acknowledgement of receipt is sent to the sender as proof that the document has been handed over personally. If, for example, the addressee has not collected the letter at the post office or if the address is incorrect, after the expiry of a 15-day period following the notice of attempted delivery, the sender also receives the acknowledgement of failure to deliver the document.

When the document is served, the commissioner of justice indicates on the copy the conditions under which the delivery was carried out, if it was not served on a person (Article 655 of the Code of Civil Procedure).

The commissioner of justice also indicates in the report the person to whom they were able to deliver the document and informs the principal.

Where the service is effected by electronic means, an acknowledgement of receipt serves as proof of delivery of the document.

11 What happens if something goes wrong and the addressee does not receive the document or the service is effected in violation of the law (e.g. the document is served on a third person)? Can the service of the document nevertheless be valid (e.g. can violations of the law be remedied) or must a new effort to serve the document be made?

Pursuant to the Article 670 of the Code of Civil Procedure, service by registered letter with acknowledgement of receipt is deemed to have been effected at the domicile or residence if the acknowledgement of receipt is signed by a person with authorisation to do so. Such service may have effects on how the judgment is classified (as deemed to have been given after hearing both parties - *réputée contradictoire* - or by default - *par défaut* - if the person has not appeared), but it is valid nonetheless.

In the other cases, i.e. if the address of the service by registered letter is incorrect or if the addressee has not collected the letter at the post office, the court registrar must ask the other party to deliver it by hand. This step makes it possible to regularise the service of the document.

Likewise, the commissioner of justice can deliver the document to a person other than its addressee, for example to a member of the family present at the domicile. In this case, a copy of the document is left with the third party in a sealed envelope, and the commissioner of justice indicates on the service report the name of the person who received the document (Articles 655 and 657 of the same Code). In this case, service is lawful and deemed to have been effected at the domicile.

Irregularity of service of the document means that it has no value and cannot give rise to any right. In particular, it does not allow time-limits for appeals to start to run. Nevertheless, irregularity of service does not necessarily mean that it is legally null and void: only the court may declare the service null and void if it finds that the proven irregularity adversely affected the document's addressee (Article 114 of the Code of Civil Procedure).

The voluntary submission of the parties was abolished by Article 1 of Decree No 2019-1333 of 11 December 2019 reforming the civil procedure.

12 If the addressee refuses to accept a document based on the language used (Article 12 of the Service of Documents Regulation) and the court or authority seised of the legal proceedings decides upon verification that the refusal was not justified, is there a specific legal remedy to challenge that decision?

French law does not provide for specific remedies to challenge the decision of the court or authority to which this case has been referred. Ordinary law therefore applies.

13 Do I have to pay for service of a document, and if so, how much? Is there a difference where the document is to be served under domestic law and where the request for service originates from another Member State? See also notification under Article 15 of the Service of Documents Regulation, concerning service of a document from another Member State.

- The costs of service of a document by registered letter amount to the cost of sending a registered letter addressed from France to a destination in France (with the minimal postage), i.e. EUR 5.74 for a letter of up to 20 grams, which is the rate valid at 1 January 2025.
- The cost of service by a commissioner is regulated. Their tariff is set in [Articles A444-10 to A444-52](#) of the Commercial Code and is reassessed regularly. The cost of service varies according to the nature of the document and any amounts due, but generally does not exceed EUR 50 (where an enforcement measure

is not involved).

However, the costs of formal service of a document from another country are fixed at a flat rate of EUR 48.85 ([Article A444-28 of the Commercial Code - service No 116](#) - tariff in force since 1 March 2024).

Additional costs apply if the document is to be served in an overseas territory (Article A444-10 of the Commercial Code). Thus, for documents to be served in the overseas departments and communities, the fee (or tariff) is increased.

For the other overseas territories, applicants can contact the Department for Mutual Assistance, Private and European Law (entraide-notifications.dacs@justice.gouv.fr).

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