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Legal translators/interpreters

France

Here you will find information on finding an interpreter, to act in court proceedings, or a translator, if necessary via an official website.

How to find a translator in France

The documentation and analysis service at the Court of Cassation publishes the following on its website:

a list in PDF format of experts approved by the Court of Cassation. It also contains links to the websites of some courts of appeal. The list of experts approved by the Court of Cassation is produced annually by the management panel (*bureau*) of the Court;

lists of experts produced by each court of appeal, featuring experts registered under the headings of translation and interpreting. The lists of court experts produced by the courts of appeal are updated by the courts of appeal and sent to the Court of Cassation at varying intervals.

The Court of Cassation does not, strictly speaking, have a database of all translators and interpreters.

Lists containing the names, contact details, dates of birth and specialist fields of experts are available for 36 courts of appeal.

Do you have to pay to search for a translator or interpreter?

No, access to the websites is unrestricted.

Context and historical background of translator directories in France

Historical background

The first official lists of experts for criminal cases were introduced into the French judicial system by an Act of 30 November 1892.

There were also unofficial lists of people with technical knowledge who were most often designated in civil cases.

Act (*loi*) No 71-498 of 29 June 1971 introduced a single list for each of the courts of appeal in the ordinary court system, for both civil and criminal cases, with experts being listed by their specialist field. The list was updated and amended annually. Registrations were renewable annually but in practice renewed automatically for experts who had not incurred any serious criticism. A national list of experts, produced by the management panel of the Court of Cassation and run along similar lines, was also introduced.

Registration conditions

Registration on the lists of court experts was the subject of in-depth reform under Act No 2004-130 of 11 February 2004 and Order No 2004-1463 of 23 December 2004. Before 1 March each year, applications for registration on the lists of courts of appeal are submitted to the State Counsel (*procureur général*) at the regional court of the court of appeal. The State Counsel examines applications and then refers them to the Principal State Counsel (*procureur général*), who submits them to the first president of the court of appeal.

The lists are produced annually during the first half of November by the general assembly of adjudicating judges (*assemblée générale des magistrats du siège*) at the court of appeal, which takes account of the court's needs in its areas of jurisdiction.

Initial registration on the lists of the courts of appeal is for a probationary period of three years, at the end of which an assessment is made of the person's experience and whether they have the legal knowledge they need to carry out their tasks properly, with a view to possible re-registration by submitting a fresh application. The applicant's file is reconsidered, and an opinion is given by a committee of experts and judges, after which the expert may be re-registered for a period of five years.

Order No 2012-1451 of 24 December 2012 clarified criteria already mentioned in Order No 2004-1463 of 23 December 2004. Applications are to be considered in the light of the qualifications and professional experience of the applicant, which may have been acquired in an EU Member State other than France, and of the interest shown by the applicant in working with the justice system.

Only experts who have either been registered on a court of appeal list for five consecutive years or who can prove that their qualifications are recognised in a Member State of the European Union other than France – acquired notably by carrying out in that State, for at least five years, activities of such a nature as to provide the courts with technical information in the course of their judicial activity – may be registered on the national list.

Registration on the national list is for a seven-year period.

As regards the procedure for registration and re-registration on this list, the public prosecutor at the Court of Cassation receives these applications, which must be sent before 1 March, examines them and seeks the opinion of the first president and the public prosecutor at the court of appeal where the individual concerned is registered. In the first half of December, the management panel of the Court of Cassation then draws up the national list, without any intervention by the public prosecutor's office.

Nomenclature of headings in the lists of experts

Pursuant to Article 1 of Order No 2004-1463 of 23 December 2004, an order (*arrêté*) of the Minister for Justice dated 10 June 2005 established for the whole of France a harmonised nomenclature for the headings in the lists of court experts. The list is divided into branches (*branches*, which are economic sectors such as agriculture, health, industry, etc.), headings (*rubriques*, for professional disciplines such as medicine and surgery), and specialist fields (*spécialités*, refining the professional disciplines, such as allergology, digestive surgery, etc.). An 'H' branch for interpreting and translation comprises an interpreting heading ('H1') and a translation heading ('H2'), which are subdivided into specialist fields by groups of languages (Romance languages, Germanic languages, Slavic languages, etc.). The specialist fields are defined widely enough to include any spoken or written language. There is also a heading ('H3') for sign language and cued speech.

For this new harmonised nomenclature of expert specialist fields, therefore, translators and interpreters have been kept on the general lists of court experts, while having their own specific heading. Although giving expert opinions in the narrow sense of the term is not their primary role, translators and interpreters, like other court experts, assist the courts on an occasional basis and may, if necessary, be designated as technical specialists to take part in the inquiry itself, under Article 232 of the new Code of Civil Procedure, for example by providing a professional opinion.

For these reasons, it was not considered necessary, at the time of the 2004 reform, to make separate arrangements for interpreters and translators and to register them on separate lists.

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