

Export to France



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1. General information

Economic landscape

- **Macron's Economic Policies:** President Macron's economic agenda focus on reforms aimed at liberalizing the economy, including labor market reforms and tax cut for businesses.
- **COVID-19 Recovery:** Like many countries, France is navigating the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, with measures such as stimulus packages and support for affected industries.
- **Unemployment:** Despite efforts to reform labor laws, unemployment remains a persistent issue in France, particularly among youth and in certain regions.
- **Green Economy:** There's a growing emphasis on transitioning towards a greener economy, with investments in renewable energy, sustainable transportation, and eco-friendly technologies.
- **Trade Relations:** France maintains significant trade relations within the European Union, including Belgium, and globally, with ongoing negotiations and agreements influencing its economic landscape.
- After suffering one of the sharpest economic contractions among EU countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the French economy has recovered strongly.
- For 2023 as a whole, the IMF has estimated growth at 1% of GDP.
- However, in the first quarter of 2023, domestic demand remained subdued due to high inflation and tighter financial conditions, offsetting government support initiatives and resilient wages that maintained household purchasing power.
- The French government decided to extend the electricity price cap until early 2025.
- After peaking in early 2023, inflation eased over the course of the year, averaging 5.6%. In 2023, with inflation still high (+5.2% in 2023 as in 2022) and a context marked by the sharp rise in the ECB's key interest rates, GDP growth would be 0.7%.

Political landscape:

- **Macron's Presidency:** President Emmanuel Macron continues to lead France, balancing between centrist policies and challenges from both the left and the right.
- **Social Unrest:** France has a history of social unrest, with recent protests over issues such as pension reform, labor laws, and social inequality.
- **European Integration:** France plays a key role in the European Union, advocating for closer integration on issues such as defense, immigration, and economic policy.
- **Nationalism vs. Globalism:** There's an ongoing debate in France, as in many Western countries, between nationalist sentiments and support in global cooperation and multilateralism.
- **Immigration:** Immigration remains a politically sensitive issue in France, with debates over integration, border control, and the country's role in providing asylum.

Key tendencies in the French Economic sector:

- **GDP,** approximately 2,806 to 3,000 billion euros per year, placing France among the world's largest economies.
- **Services sector** contributes the most to GDP, representing around 75% of the French economy.
- **Foreign investment:** France attracts significant foreign investment, with a stock of foreign direct investment (FDI) often exceeding 1.5 billion euros.
- **Exports and imports:** France is one of the world's largest exporters of manufactured goods, agricultural products and services. It also maintains important trade relations with other countries in the European Union and beyond.



- Agriculture: Although representing a relatively small share of GDP (around 1.5% to 2%), French agriculture is recognized for its quality and diversity, with significant exports in areas such as wine, cheese and agricultural products.

Important aspects for prospecting companies

- Entrepreneurship is a key element of French economic growth. It significantly stimulates creativity, economic expansion and job creation.
- The government encourages entrepreneurship through R&D tax credits and tax breaks for recruiting new workers. It is a loyal ally, actively encouraging them to innovate and grow.
- The French business landscape is made up partly of 3.9 million SMEs, contributing 58% of the country's GDP, and micro-enterprises, employing up to 10 people, numbering around 2.79 million.
- The French government actively encourages innovation and growth.
- Initiatives such as tax breaks, funding programs and support for incubators and gas pedals pave the way for business development.
- France enjoys a favorable economic climate. On average, it takes just 3.5 days to set up a business in France. This is shorter than in Germany (10.5 days) or the UK (4.5 days).
- Taxation: Although the French tax system is renowned for its complexity, companies have everything to gain from it. Tax breaks, financing programs and support for incubators and gas pedals pave the way for entrepreneurial development.
- Access to financing: traditional bank loans, venture capital investments and government-backed financial aid are just some of the financing options available in France.
- France's thriving entrepreneurial landscape, with a total activity rate of 7.7%, makes it a leading global platform for startups.
- Talented workforce: France has a highly skilled and educated workforce, an essential ingredient for business innovation and growth.
- The French entrepreneurial ecosystem is a powerhouse, teeming with startups, incubators, gas pedals and venture capital firms. These entities provide crucial support at every stage of the journey, offering workspace, mentoring and networking opportunities.



2. Additional indicators

Economic indicators

Find the main socio-economic indicators for this country, as well as its trade with Brussels and Belgium, in the publication "[Brussels and the world – Country statistics](#)" on analytics.brussels, hub.brussels' online data library.

The "[Brussels and the world - General statistics](#)" publication also provides data on trade between the Brussels-Capital Region and the rest of the world, by continent and by major world region. The same type of data is also available for the various regions of Belgium, as well as for Belgium as a whole.

Social and environmental indicators

If you'd like to know where your country stands in terms of social, environmental and economic issues, access a series of [composite indicators from the European Commission](#), structured according to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals¹ and the European Commission's 6 priority policy areas².

Free trade agreements

European agreements have a major impact on market accessibility and trade with certain countries. The links below, published by the European Commission, will provide you with all the information you need on free trade agreements and trade barriers. Existing agreements, those that have not yet been ratified and those that are expected to be ratified, can be consulted here:

- [Free trade agreements](#)
- [Trade barriers](#)

¹No poverty, Zero hunger, Good health and well-being, Quality education, Gender equality, Clean water and sanitation, Clean and affordable energy, Decent work and economic growth, Industry, innovation and infrastructure, Reduced inequalities, Sustainable cities and communities, Sustainable consumption and production, Measures to combat climate change, Water life, Land life, Peace, justice and effective institutions, Partnerships to achieve the goals.

² A green pact for Europe, An economy serving people, A Europe fit for the digital age, A stronger Europe on the world stage, Promoting our European way of life, A new impetus for European democracy.



3. On-site: a step-by-step guide

First contacts

Prospecting

- Business culture: Understanding French business culture is essential. The French often value personal relationships and mutual trust. A formal and respectful approach is generally appreciated.
- Language: Although many French people speak English, it is often beneficial to master some French to facilitate business interactions.
- Competition: Analyze the market to understand local competition. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors in order to adapt your prospecting strategy.
- Networking: Networking is important in France. Attending professional events, trade shows, and industry associations can help you make valuable contacts.
- Follow-up: Make sure you follow up with your contacts and maintain long-term relationships. Regular follow-up is often appreciated and can lead to additional business opportunities.
- To develop prospecting, it is possible to call on different types of professionals, such as wholesaler-resellers or sales agents.

For the Northern French market specifically

The Hauts-de-France market is favorable and open to new exporters: Northern France is a natural market for first-time and new exporters from Brussels. A dynamic region, it's very easy to get to (just 30 minutes by train) and "Belgium"-formatted. Geographical and cultural proximity naturally leads Brussels residents to the Hauts-de-France region, which boasts a lively and varied economic fabric.

The European Metropolis of Lille (MEL) is the decision-making and business center, surrounded by a number of large conurbations: Valenciennes, with its automotive industry, Dunkirk, with its chemical industry, and all the way to Arras, form a dense logistics zone, to which two major seaports contribute: Dunkirk, with its freight traffic, and Boulogne-sur-Mer, France's leading fishing port.

Exporting

Not to be overlooked: this is a [useful link](#) to ensure that you follow the correct procedures, as the French administration can be very fussy in this area, and there are substantial fines for non-compliance.

Payments

Since 01/01/2009, French law has set the maximum payment deadline at the end of the month. Beware of exceptions. The payment deadline must be mentioned on the invoice, under "general conditions" or "special conditions".

To learn more about invoicing and payment, [visit the following website](#).

In France, as in Belgium, professional payments are generally made by:

- Bank transfers
- Checks



- Debits
- Credit and debit cards
- Online payment platforms
- Electronic regulations
- Cash

To find out more about payments and invoicing, visit the [following](#) site.

Company types

- **Société Anonyme (SA):** Large company whose shares are listed on the stock exchange, requiring capital of at least €37,000 and at least 7 shareholders.
- **Société par Actions Simplifiée (SAS):** Flexible company with at least one shareholder and no minimum capital required. Management can be structured according to the statutes.
- **Société à Responsabilité Limitée (SARL):** Small or medium-sized business with at least one partner and no minimum capital required (but generally €1). Liability is limited to the capital contributed.
- **Société en Nom Collectif (SNC):** General partnership where the partners are jointly and severally liable for the debts of the company, with no minimum capital required.
- **Société Européenne (SE):** A company under EU law. It has its own legal framework and operates as a single economic operator throughout the European Union (EU).
- **Société Coopérative de Production (SCOP):** Cooperative enterprise where employees hold a significant share of ownership and participate in decisions.
- **Société en Commandite par Actions (SCA) :** A form of commercial company. It is made up of 2 distinct types of partners, general partners and limited partners.
- **Société en Commandite Simple (SCS) :** A complex social form that is not very widespread. Its organization between general partners and limited partners offers a clear distribution of roles which makes it a strategic choice for those seeking a balance between responsibility and investment.
- **Entreprise Unipersonnelle à Responsabilité Limitée (EURL):** A limited liability company (SARL), which is made up of only one partner.
- **Entrepreneur Individuel (EI):** Can be chosen for any type of liberal activity, particularly the legal, judicial and health professions. It constitutes the most common mode of operation of small businesses.
- **Autoentrepreneur (Self-Employment):** Small individual business with simplified accounting and income thresholds to respect. Self-employment always operates within the framework of an individual business (EI). The difference lies in the tax regime.

Support and subsidies

Discover all subsidies for Brussels businesses on the Brussels Economy and Employment website.



Interesting markets for a first export

For France in general

Food sector

The agri-food industry constitutes the leading French industrial sector both in terms of turnover and employment. The agri-food sector weighs its weight in the country's economy. It represents the 3rd largest trade surplus in France and contributes to 3.5% of the national GDP.

France being a very large market compared to Belgium, it is necessary to feed 68 million inhabitants. It is a country of tradition, with enormous needs, and with a culinary culture, and tradition of gastronomy.

It is a competitive market, but the Brussels expertise in food tech complements the already omnipresent French market and products.

Digital sector

The digital sector represents approximately 6.9% of France's GDP, according to a study carried out by the audit firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in collaboration with the professional union France Digitale. This figure underlines the growing importance of the digital sector in the French economy, contributing significantly to the creation of wealth and the country's economic growth.

France, like Belgium, is implementing economic transition policies at the heart of debates and actions. As proof: more than 98% of companies with more than 20 employees are pursuing a digital transformation policy.

The digital sector includes : technologies and AI, fintech, e-commerce, IT, project management, conception and design...

Health sector

The health sector represents 10% of GDP (i.e. 170 billion euros), 3rd position in the French economy. It is a very important and financed sector in France, with world-leading hospitals and a worldwide recognition of subject mastery.

Every year, multiple trade shows are held in France, with a specific focus on health and health technologies, with the biggest one being Santexpo.

Construction sector

The construction sector represents 8% of French GDP. Turnover estimated at 150 billion euros.

With the strong growth in rural exodus which pushes the French population to settle in large cities, there is a strong need for housing and infrastructure in large urban centers. Numerous constructions, most of them sustainable, are emerging in large cities and the outskirts. There is an increasing focus on smart cities and sustainability issues.

France is a major construction market with major players looking for innovative solutions.

With the "Grand Paris Express" project, which aims to develop new metro lines connecting the Parisian suburbs and the center, these once again attractive suburban regions will require new construction of shopping centers, new businesses and housing.

Fashion/ICC sector

The fashion sector represents 2.7% of French GDP.

The largest fashion houses in the world find their headquarters in France. France very often embodies the country of the art of living and luxury. France is perceived as the country of big



brands but it is also recognized for the exceptional quality of its artisans and small creators, their know-how and the quality of their products.

Additional markets for Northern France specifically

Audiovisual

La Plaine Images cluster of excellence: digital imaging and creative industries at the service of an ecosystem entirely dedicated to images and creative industries: video games, animation, audiovisual, computer-generated images, cinema, augmented reality, 3D, tactile and gestural interactions, serious games... Located on a 5-hectare rehabilitated former industrial site, Plaine Images offers a district entirely dedicated to creative industries: audiovisual - gaming - AR/VR - Design (virtual reality, video games, serious games/e-learning, animation, digital marketing, events...).

Cybersecurity :FIC (International Cybersecurity Forum)

This is a European event dealing with cybersecurity, launched in 2007 by the Gendarmerie Nationale and held annually in Lille. The FIC is a forum open to the entire ecosystem of digital security and trust, but it is also a business show dedicated to public and private players in cybersecurity.

Healthcare

The Eurasanté cluster of excellence, a park at the cutting edge of the biology, health and nutrition sector, is Europe's largest university hospital campus. Spanning 170 hectares, it is home to a successful alliance of teaching, research and companies specializing in the fields of health, biotechnology and nutrition. It currently brings together 1100 companies and organizations employing over 3200 people.

E-health is a fast-growing field, encompassing a vast array of applications for information and telecommunication technologies in the healthcare sector. This care system is expanding rapidly in terms of innovation.

Agenda of trade shows and fairs in Paris : <https://parisjetaime.com/convention/article/salons-professionnels-et-foires-a-paris-a1194>

Agenda of trade shows and fairs in France : <https://tradedfest.io/fr/selection/meilleurs-foires-et-salons-en-france>



4. Business culture

Corporate culture:

- Importance of hierarchy: French companies often have a clear hierarchical structure, with defined levels of responsibility.
- Work-life balance: The French place importance on work-life balance, with regulated working hours and generous paid leave.

Holidays:

- Public Holidays: Public holidays include January 1, Easter Monday, May 1, May 8, Ascension Thursday, Pentecost Monday, July 14, August 15, November 1, November 11, December 25.
- Paid vacation: Workers are entitled to a certain number of paid vacation days per year, usually around five weeks (or 25 days).

Attire:

- Professional and elegant: In professional environments, formal attire is often appropriate, with suits, tailoring or elegant clothing depending on the context.

Working hours:

- The legal working time in France is 35 hours per week, although some sectors and companies may have different hours.
- The lunch break is usually quite long, with lunch breaks of one to two hours common.

Communication:

- Direct and formal: Communication in France can be direct and formal, with precise language and common polite expressions.
- Importance of Politeness: Polite expressions such as "Hello," "Thank you," and "Please" are important in professional interactions.



5. What can we do for you?

Local contact points

The General Delegates and Local Representatives of the Region employed by hub.brussels are official representatives of the Brussels Government abroad, they support Brussels companies that want to export, and search and prospect for new investors.

They have the information, expertise and in-depth knowledge about the specifics of different foreign markets. Based on that knowledge, they help to refine and fine-tune your export plans, with advice on regulations, competition, market entry conditions, permits, etc. Furthermore, they can support you with your questions regarding exports, certain sectors within the jurisdiction, contacts with intermediaries, business culture, and much more.



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Consulat Général de France en Belgique

Boulevard du Régent 42,

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consulat@consulfrance-bruxelles.org

<https://bruxelles.consulfrance.org/>

CCI France Belgique

Avenue des Arts, 19 A/D

1000 Bruxelles

<https://ccifrancebelgique.be/>

Chambre de Commerce et d'industrie de Région Haut de France

299 boulevard de Leeds

59031 Lille cedex

<https://hautsdefrance.cci.fr/>

World Trade Center Lille & Arras

299 boulevard de Leeds

59031 Lille cedex

<https://wtc-lille.com/>

Useful websites to delve into

Bpifrance (<https://www.bpifrance.fr/>) : a French public investment bank, whose mission is the financing and development of businesses.

Business France (<https://www.businessfrance.fr/>): supports French companies with export services.

CCI Ile-de-France (<https://www.cci-paris-idf.fr/fr/>): the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Choose Paris Region (<https://www.chooseparisregion.org/fr/>): the business attractiveness agency for the Ile-de-France Region.

INSEE (<https://www.insee.fr/fr/accueil>): the national institute of statistics and economic studies.

Invest in France (<https://investinfrance.fr/fr/>): a government agency, linked to Business France, brings together all the important information to know in order to establish a business in France.



Team France Export (<https://www.teamfrance-export.fr/>): supports companies internationally, it is the merger between Business France, the CCI France, and Bpifrance.

Supplementary websites

- INSEE analyse et diffusion des informations économiques
- Société.com leader de l'information financière légale gratuite des entreprises françaises
- Entrepreneurs site officiel d'information administrative pour les entreprises
- Guichet Unique portail internet sécurisé pour toute déclaration de création d'entreprises
- BPI France soutient l'action en faveur de la création d'entreprise et l'entrepreneuriat sur l'ensemble du territoire
- NFI Nord France Invest agence de promotion économique qui accompagne gratuitement et de façon confidentiel les entreprises qui souhaitent s'implanter dans les Hauts-de-France
- Hello Lille Agence d'attractivité de la Métropole Européenne de Lille (MEL)

