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EU Long-Term Resident Card in France: How Long Can You Be Away?

To qualify for France's "EU long-term resident" card, no single absence may exceed 6 consecutive months, and total absences must stay under 10 months over five years. Once granted, the card is lost only after more than 3 consecutive years outside the European Union, or 6 consecutive years outside France.

Business travel, long family stays, temporary postings abroad: absences come up in almost every file we handle. Poorly planned, they can delay access to this ten-year permit by several years, or cost you the status altogether. Here are the rules that apply before and after the card is issued.

Before applying: proving five years of continuous residence

Article L. 426-17 of the French Immigration Code (CESEDA) requires at least five years of lawful and continuous residence in France. Absences are tolerated within two cumulative limits, taken from Article 4 of Directive 2003/109/EC:

- **no more than 6 consecutive months** for any single absence;
- **no more than 10 months in total** over the five-year period.

Exceeding these limits does not close the door for good, but it resets the count. You must then wait until you can show a new, compliant five-year window. This is often a matter of months, and it is far better identified before filing than after a refusal.

A more flexible regime for EU Blue Card holders. They may combine periods of residence in several Member States. Their absences from the EU are then allowed up to 12 consecutive months and 18 months in total.

Note: absences are not the only requirement. Applicants must also show three things:

- stable, regular and sufficient resources, at least equal to the French minimum wage;
- health insurance;
- since 1 January 2026, compliance with the republican integration requirements.

After the card is granted: three ways to lose the status

The card is valid for ten years. Under Article L. 411-5 CESEDA, it lapses in three situations:

1. **More than 3 consecutive years outside the territory of the European Union.**
2. **6 consecutive years outside France**, even if you stay in another Member State.
3. **Acquiring EU long-term resident status in another Member State.**

The same situations are grounds for withdrawal of the card (Article R. 432-3, 7° CESEDA). At renewal, the prefecture usually asks for a sworn statement covering all three cases.

In practice, a resident who moves to Belgium for four years keeps the French card. The same resident living four years outside the EU loses it, unless an extension was granted.

Permit	Absence from France	Absence from the EU
Standard resident card (10 years)	Lost after more than 3 consecutive years	Lost after more than 3 consecutive years
EU long-term resident card	Lost after 6 consecutive years	Lost after more than 3 consecutive years

The "EU long-term resident" status is therefore far more protective for people who move around within the Union.

Extending the three-year limit

The three-year limit can be extended. The request must be made **before leaving France or while staying abroad**. This is the key precaution before a long stay outside the EU. Apply before you leave, with evidence of your plans: employment contract, assignment, studies, family or medical reasons.

An EU reform in the pipeline

Directive 2003/109/EC sets a minimum standard of 12 months' absence from the EU. France, as the directive allows, has adopted a more favourable three-year limit. A recast of the directive, still under negotiation, proposes raising the EU standard to 24 months. At the date of this article, it has not been finally adopted.

Our practical advice

- **Keep an accurate record of your absences** (exit and entry dates, tickets, passport stamps): the burden of proof lies with the applicant.
- **Have your reference period checked before filing**, especially if you travel frequently.
- **Request an extension before any long stay outside the EU.**
- **Plan ahead before settling in another Member State.** Beyond three months, you will need a residence permit there. And acquiring long-term resident status in that country ends your French status.

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Frequently asked questions

Is two months' holiday a year a problem?

Not under the 6-consecutive-month rule. But over five years it adds up to 10 months, which is the maximum. Any further absence could then tip the application.

Do absences from France spent elsewhere in the EU count before applying?

Yes, they are absences from French territory. For the application, what matters is presence in France, except under the specific EU Blue Card regime.

My card lapsed because of absence: is that final?

The status is lost, but a new permit may be available depending on your situation. A case-by-case review is needed.

For more than twenty years, LexCase has advised foreign nationals and their employers on French residence matters. For advice on your situation, contact **Raphaël Apelbaum**, Partner, Immigration & International Mobility.

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This article reflects the law as of 1 November 2026. It does not constitute legal advice.