

LOCATION

Country: France

Town: Mont-de-Marsan (MdM), capital of the Landes department in Nouvelle-Aquitaine in southwestern France.

Base: Base aérienne 118 (BA118) Mont de Marsan, France

Other info to Consider:

- Family (non-dependents) can visit and stay 90 days **without a visa** (Schengen Area).

POPULATION

Size: A small regional capital with a population of approximately 31,000, 140 km south of Bordeaux

Ethnicity: 80% French Nationals, 20% others

LANGUAGE(S)

Official language: French with a Gascon dialect (part of the Langue d'Oc)

Prevalence of French or English speaking: The official language is French. Some locals in the service industry speak English.

COST OF LIVING

Exchange rate to consider: Euro

QUALITY OF LIFE

Climate and potential for severe weather, natural disasters:

- It has a temperate coastal climate characterized by cool, wet winters and warm summers, with variable climactic conditions. The majority of rain falls over the winter.

Laws and culture:

- Speed limits are 130 km/hr on motorways and 50 km/hr in cities/towns.
- Driving is faster than what we are used to, and driving lanes (as well as vehicles) are smaller than what we are used to.
- Parking spaces in Mont-de-Marsan are mostly parallel parking spaces. All parking spaces are generally very tight.
- Most of the roads you will encounter are of the highest quality, and the motorways – though often tolled – are a very efficient way of travelling between cities.
- Penalties for drinking and driving are severe. The legal blood alcohol limit is 0.05%.
- It is illegal to completely cover your face in public places in France. However, the following are exceptions:
 - Clothing is required or authorized by law (e.g. a full helmet for a motorcycle)
 - The dress is justified by health reasons or professional reasons (e.g. protective mask)
 - The outfit is part of sports practices, festivals or artistic or traditional events.

This ban includes fully covering your face in the international arrivals area at airports. Failure to comply can lead to a heavy fine. There are no exemptions for tourists or religious reasons.

Safety and security:

- While it is a safe city, look out for pickpockets as in any European city.
- Crime is increasing due to high rates of youth unemployment. Use caution when riding the subway.
- There is a threat of terrorism in Europe. Terrorists have carried out attacks in several European cities. In France, separate attacks causing multiple deaths and injuries have taken place. The attacks, whether opportunistic or premeditated, targeted public spaces, including an entertainment venue, restaurants and tourist sites. Further attacks in Europe are likely.

Level of isolation:

- Language challenges can cause a high level of isolation, particularly among spouses.
- One Canadian family in this location.

HOUSING

- Member to rent housing in Mont-de-Marsan.
- There is a high turnover due to military moves; therefore, there it's expected to be a reasonable selection.
- Note that only one month's notice to move is required, so the key time to visit homes is from the end of May to early June.
- It is very highly recommended to AVOID your HHT during the first two weeks of May. There are three statutory holidays and the cultural norm in France is to bridge days (faire le pont). Therefore, business days will be largely reduced and selection and services will be very poor, possibly even closed.

EMPLOYMENT

Are there employment opportunities for spouses?

- Due to tax and legal implications, spousal employment in the economy is not a realistic option.
- Language abilities in French would be a condition for employment.
- There are very limited employment opportunities available through CFMWS, families should plan to be a single-income family for the duration of the posting.

Op tempo: The op tempo will vary greatly depending on the position. TD is possible.

HEALTH CARE

Access: France ranks among the World Health Organization's top 10 countries for quality health services.

- The Canadian Medical Clinic in Geilenkirchen is responsible for the healthcare of all Canadian military members in Europe and can be accessed.
- All bills associated with the care of dependents are the member's personal responsibility and are to be claimed through PSHCP

Special needs:

- Yes, depending on the language required (English/French), area of specialization and degree of support needed.
- It is highly advised that the family consult with Medical Screening Officer in Canada and/or the Canadian Element to ensure that the required services are readily available in either English or French before accepting a posting.

Consideration for pregnancy/birthing:

- Health care for pregnancy and birthing is available in Mont-de-Marsan.

Dental:

- Dental care can be accessed in town. You are required to pay upfront, and you can then claim your expenses.

SCHOOLING

- There are no English language schools indicated for this posting.
- There are no internationally accredited schools in the Mont de Marsan region; the closest international school is in Bordeaux (135 km).
- It is very strongly recommended that the member fully discuss school options with CEM to gain a better understanding of options, costs and benefits which can be reimbursed.
- A university is available in Bordeaux, (135KM)

Curriculum vs. Canadian curriculum:

- Curriculum varies depending on the choice of school.
- Canadian history or geography is not offered at any school.

Resources for special needs children:

- Special needs services are depending on the choice of school, language required (English/French), area of specialization and degree of support needed, it may be very limited.

CHILDCARE

- Largely available in Mont-de-Marsan.
- The BA118 does not offer any kind of childcare for its personnel.

TRANSPORTATION

- Airport: Mont-de-Marsan is l'aéroport de Pau (PUF), 75 km south, Bordeaux (BOD), 130 km north, Toulouse (TLS), 175 km east.

- Very good train system. Good biking to work and walking everywhere.
- Bus services are available across the town and are offered by TMA

RESOURCES AND AMENITIES

Is there a Military Family Services centre available in that location?

- No, but remote services are available from MFS(E) Casteau/SHAPE located in Mons, Belgium.

Psychosocial/mental health resources:

- Not at the post, and the MFS(E) SW is for dependents only. The CAF SW/Mental Health Team for members and families is located in Geilenkirchen, Germany. The chaplain is located in Belgium.

Communications (e.g. quality of Internet connection):

- Good, reliable, and widely offered.

ACTIVITIES

Access to sports or other leisure activities:

- Depends on the area, but most do offer a wide variety. English might be limited.

Availability of playgrounds:

- Yes. Many parks in residential areas also have walking parks.

RESTRICTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are common-law relationships recognized? Yes.

Are same-sex couples recognized? Yes.

Medications that are illegal in the country:

- Cannabis is illegal in France.

Other Considerations:

- Pharmacy has most need medications. Sometimes language might be an issue.
- Difficult finding distilled water for CPAP machines.
- Animals entering France need to be microchipped and have a valid rabies vaccine.
- Some dog breeds are banned, such as Staffordshire Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier (Pit Bull Terrier), Japanese Tosa Inu, and Boerbul Mastiff, or will have restrictions imposed. It is the member's duty to verify.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- European Commission Country Reports (2022)
https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2022-european-semester-country-reports_en
- Canadian Travel Advisories
<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>
- CIA World Factbooks (One pager from the US)
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/france>
- Living Abroad (from Gov.UK)
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/living-in-france>
- Consumer Price Index (CPI)
<https://data.imf.org/?sk=4FFB52B2-3653-409A-B471-D47B46D904B5>

For more comprehensive information, please feel free to reach out to the resources below:

- MFS(E) Social Worker, Andrea Liss: liss.andrea@cfmws.com
- CAF Social Worker: GKMedicalClinic@forces.gc.ca
- MFS(E) Shape: + 32 (0) 44 65 5962, MFSE.Shape@cfmws.com
- MFS(E) Regional Office: +49 (0) 2451 717 173, MFS.Europe@cfmws.com