Differentiated Registration Fees for Non-EU Students in France

This document addresses the main questions raised by **Decree No. 2026-385 of May 19, 2026**, regarding the exemption modalities for registration fees for foreign students enrolled in public higher education institutions under the authority of the Minister of Higher Education.

This decree amends Articles R. 719-49 to R. 719-50 of the Education Code. It includes provisions for all students enrolled in public higher education institutions under the authority of the Minister of Higher Education, including French students, nationals of the European Union, the EEA, or the Swiss Confederation. However, it has major implications for the exemption modalities for international students.

I. General Overview

01. Why this new decree?

This decree aims to align and regulate the possibilities for exempting differentiated registration fees paid by non-European foreign students in higher education institutions under the authority of the Minister of Higher Education.

Since the introduction of differentiated fees in 2019, institutions had broad discretion to grant exemptions based on general, categorical, or individual student circumstances. This led to widespread exemptions that undermined the objectives of the 2019 reform.

This text refocuses exemptions on the following cases: the student's personal situation, recipients of French government scholarships, and cooperation agreements with reciprocity.

The dual objective is to enable institutions to have sufficient resources to improve the reception of international students while preserving protections for those most in need.

02. When does the decree come into effect?

The decree came into effect and has been applicable since May 21, 2026, the day after its publication in the *Journal Officiel de la République Française* on May 20, 2026.

03. Are there changes for French nationals or EU students?

For these students, only the exemption quota has been modified.

Under the previous system, these students shared a global ceiling of 10% for individual exemptions with non-EU students. However, a large portion of this ceiling was used for non-EU students, to the detriment of Category I students.

Under the new system, each category now has its own ceiling of 20%, temporarily increased to 30% for 2026-2027 and 25% for 2027-2028. The exemption rate applicable to Category I students is thus doubled (or even tripled on a transitional basis), and the exemptions granted to them are no longer in competition with those for non-EU students.

04. Do registration fees remain modest for foreign students?

Yes. The decree itself does not change the amounts already applied, which comply with the principle of modest costs for public higher education. However, these amounts may be subject to modification, as before (see point 5).

In its decision No. 2019-809 QPC of October 11, 2019, the Constitutional Council ruled that the constitutional requirement of free public higher education does not prevent the collection of modest registration fees, taking into account, where appropriate, the financial capacity of students.

The fees paid by students remain lower than the actual cost of their education.

Additionally, the possibility of exemption is maintained for certain students, based on an examination by the host institution of their individual situation.

05. Which exemptions are maintained as of right?

The methods for calculating the amount of differentiated fees have not changed. The amounts can be consulted and downloaded from this link:

Amount of tuition fees for the 2026-2027 academic year - public institutions under the authority of the Minister of Higher Education (PDF - 123.62 KB)

The update of the fees was carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Decree of April 19, 2019, on registration fees in public higher education institutions under the authority of the Minister of Higher Education (Article 2: indexing to the national consumer price index).

06. How will the decree apply to overseas territories?

The decree applies to the overseas departments, regions, and communities under the same conditions as in metropolitan France.

II. Scope of Application

07. Who is affected by this decree?

The decree applies to all students enrolled in public higher education institutions under the authority of the Minister of Higher Education, except those covered by Article R. 719-49, who are exempt by right (mainly recipients of higher education scholarships granted by the State (social criteria scholarships, French government scholarships, etc.), wards of the Nation, and wards of the Republic), which remains unchanged.

Regarding differentiated fees, two cases must be distinguished:

a) Not subject to differentiated fees (=> pay the same fees as French students):

- French nationals;
- Nationals of the EU, EEA, Monaco, Andorra, Quebec, or Switzerland;
- Doctoral students, users registered for the *Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches (HDR)*, and users registered in third-cycle programs in medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy, except for the short cycles explicitly mentioned in the Decree of April 19, 2019;

- Refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, and their children;
- Long-term residents in France and their minor children;
- Individuals fiscally domiciled in France for more than 2 years (attached to the tax household);
- Students in *Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Écoles (CPGE)*;
- Students in university diplomas and institution-specific diplomas, including engineering degrees, even if they include an integrated preparatory class (even if this category is subject to institution-specific fees rather than national fees).

b) Subject to differentiated fees:

- International students in mobility who do not fall under any of the above non-subjection situations (see point 29).

Regarding the individual exemption possibilities provided for in the new Article R. 719-50, the decree distinguishes two categories:

- **Category I:** French students, EU/EEA/Swiss nationals, or holders of certain residence permits (family members of an EU/EEA/Swiss citizen, long-term residents, etc.);
- **Category II:** All other students not in Category I (mainly non-EU students, subject to differentiated fees).

08. Does obtaining a French baccalaureate exempt student from differentiated fees?

Obtaining a French baccalaureate does not, in itself, create any special right to exemption. The student's situation will be examined based on the same criteria as other students, particularly their personal situation.

09. Are off-site programs excluded from the scope of differentiated fees?

A French institution may award a national diploma through a program organized abroad, including outside the EU, provided that this program is part of an international partnership in accordance with Articles D. 613-17 et seq. of the Education Code, that the French institution is authorized to award the diploma, and that the foreign partner is recognized in its country. An agreement must govern the pedagogical, evaluation, certification, and diploma award modalities.

It is therefore the agreement between the partner institutions that defines the registration fees payable by students. Exemption from these fees is possible if the agreement provides for reciprocity conditions as defined by the decree of the Minister of Higher Education.

Students enrolled in an off-site program or diploma are not excluded from the individual exemption possibilities provided for in Article R. 719-50. When they fall under the scope of this article, they may therefore request an exemption based on an examination of their personal situation, particularly regarding their resources.

10. How does this measure apply to doctoral students?

Doctoral students do not pay differentiated fees. Decree No. 2026-385 does not change this system.

The Decree of April 19, 2019, provides that users registered in doctoral programs, for the *Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches (HDR)*, and for diplomas awarded for third-cycle programs in medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy, except for short cycles, pay national fees.

Regarding individual exemptions, see point 29.

11. Do differentiated fees add to the continuing education rate?

No. When a student falls under continuing education, they are subject to the continuing education fee set by the institution.

Differentiated fees are therefore not added to this fee as an additional cost. They are not charged in addition to the continuing education fee already due by the trainee or the organization funding their training.

12. Are students in apprenticeship programs affected by differentiated fees?

No. Students enrolled in apprenticeship programs are not subject to differentiated fees.

In accordance with Article L. 6211-1 of the Labor Code, training is free for the apprentice and their legal representative. Differentiated fees cannot therefore be charged to the apprentice, even if they are a national of a country outside the EU.

Note: This is not an individual exemption under Article R. 719-50 of the Education Code. Apprentices should therefore not be counted in the numerator of individual exemptions (however, apprentices, as they remain students, must remain in the denominator).

13. Do students enrolled solely for the preparation of an institution-specific diploma fall under the differentiated fees exemption ceiling?

No. Students enrolled solely for the preparation of an institution-specific diploma, a university diploma, or a program organized under the sole responsibility of the institution do not fall under the differentiated fees exemption ceiling.

However, when a student is enrolled in both an institution-specific diploma and a national diploma subject to differentiated fees, their situation must be assessed based on the latter enrolment. In this case, the student is included in the ceiling if, for the national diploma being prepared, they are effectively subject to differentiated fees.

14. Are students enrolled in a "graduate school" or an integrated master's-doctoral program affected by differentiated fees?

Enrolment in a "graduate school," a university research school, or a similar structure does not, in itself, constitute a criterion for exemption or subjection. The diploma being prepared must be considered.

An international student enrolled in a master's program in a "graduate school" may therefore be subject to differentiated fees if they do not fall under any case of non-subjection or exemption.

However, when they enrol in a doctoral program, they are no longer subject to differentiated fees: doctoral students pay national fees (see point 10).

The transition from a master's to a doctoral program constitutes a change of cycle. An exemption maintained on a transitional basis during the master's cycle is therefore not automatically extended beyond this cycle (see transitional provisions, point 30).

15. Are students in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, or midwifery subject to differentiated fees? What happens in the event of a cycle change?

It is necessary to distinguish according to the diploma being prepared.

International students enrolled in the first or second cycle of health studies are subject to differentiated fees if they do not meet one of the conditions entitling them to national rates. They may, however, benefit, like other international mobility students, from automatic exemptions or an individual exemption granted due to their personal situation.

In the third cycle, doctoral students, users registered for the *Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches (HDR)*, and users registered in third-cycle programs in medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy are not subject to differentiated fees. However, this rule does not apply to the short cycles mentioned in the Decree of April 19, 2019. Thus, the following may be subject to differentiated fees: the State Diploma in Dental Surgery within the short third cycle, the State Diploma in Pharmacy within the short third cycle, and certain specialized complementary health studies diplomas. Regarding midwifery, the corresponding short cycle is not yet concerned: its inclusion in the scope of programs potentially subject to differentiated fees will only occur in 2028. In the event of a cycle change, the transitional maintenance of a previous exemption is valid only until the end of the current cycle. The student's situation must therefore be re-examined in light of the new diploma being prepared.

16. Are students enrolled in an engineering school affected by differentiated fees?

It is necessary to distinguish according to the nature of the diploma being prepared.

When enrolment is for a program organized under the sole responsibility of the institution, i.e., an institution-specific diploma, such as an engineering diploma, the applicable fees are set by the institution's board of directors. Differentiated fees therefore do not apply.

However, when a Category II student is enrolled in a program leading to a national diploma, they are subject to differentiated fees.

III. Automatic Exemptions

17. Which exemptions are maintained as of right?

The following categories of students continue to benefit from automatic and full exemption from registration fees (Art. R. 719-49 and R. 719-49-1):

- Recipients of higher education scholarships granted by the State, including social criteria scholarships (BCS) and French government scholarships (BGF) awarded by the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs;
- Wards of the Nation and wards of the Republic;
- Students covered by a cooperation agreement between institutions are exempt from differentiated fees if, by reciprocity, the same treatment is provided for French students in mobility at the partner institution(s).

These exemptions are not counted in the 20% ceiling (see below).

Students falling into the following categories, who were automatically exempt under the 2019 decree, may be exempt under the new decree based on an examination of their personal situation:

- Students taking distance learning courses from a state outside the European Economic Area;
- Hospitalized or detained students in a penitentiary or health institution authorized to receive detainees and taking distance learning courses.

18. What changes for cooperation agreements between institutions?

Previously, as long as an agreement provided for it, exemptions were possible without any other condition. Now, the agreement must provide for reciprocity between institutions.

The methods for assessing this reciprocity, provided for in Article R. 719-49-1 of the Education Code, are set by the Decree of July 22, 2026, published in the *Journal Officiel* on July 28, 2026.

19. What happens to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' exemption authority?

This authority, which was provided for in Article R. 719-50-1, was repealed by Decree No. 2026-385. It had not been used since October 2021.

French government scholarships awarded by diplomatic posts continue to automatically result in exemption from registration fees.

20. Does a student in Erasmus Mundus have to pay differentiated fees?

Student mobility under Erasmus Mundus takes place within the framework of a joint master's project set up by a consortium of institutions. The consortium sets specific participation fees for the project. For students receiving an Erasmus Mundus scholarship, these fees are covered by the scholarship.

21. Why are students with refugee status no longer mentioned at the same level as before in the text?

This change is due to the new structure of the text, which no longer lists categories in Article R. 719-50 but refers generally to the student's personal situation. It therefore does not represent a withdrawal of protection.

Beneficiaries of refugee status or subsidiary protection remain expressly identified by the Decree of April 19, 2019, among students subject to the national fee regime, as do individuals whose father, mother, or legal guardian benefits from this status or protection. They may also be fully exempt upon request and based on their personal situation.

IV. Individual Exemptions by Institutions

22. Which exemptions fall under the decision of the institutions?

The president of the institution retains the authority to exempt students upon individual request, but only due to their personal situation. Exemptions based on general or categorical reasons (e.g., the institution's strategic orientations) have been eliminated.

The exemption policies decided by the institutions' boards of directors remain valid only for exemptions that would have been granted or communicated to students before the new decree came into effect on May 21, 2026.

The new Article R. 719-50 distinguishes two categories of students: Category I (French students, EU/EEA/Swiss nationals, and assimilated students) and Category II (all other students not in Category I, mainly non-EU students).

Each category has its own ceiling for individual exemptions. The exemption may be total or partial.

On a transitional basis, the ceiling is set at 30% for 2026-2027 and 25% for 2027-2028. The 20% ceiling will apply from the 2028 academic year.

23. On what criteria can institutions assess students' individual exemption requests?

The decree text specifies only that these exemptions are granted at the student's request and due to their personal situation, particularly regarding their resources.

Presidents may decide on criteria related to the student's personal situation that would justify an exemption.

The text emphasizes the student's financial situation and any difficulties in this area. These may result from:

- Their family situation (family breakdown, special responsibilities, etc.);
- The situation in their country of origin (student from a country in crisis, etc.);
- A disability;
- Any other personal circumstance likely to justify a total or partial exemption.

An annual report on the exemptions granted must be presented to the institution's board of directors.

24. Doesn't individual exemption create inequality among students, as it is at the discretion of the institution's president?

No, as long as the decision is based on criteria related to the student's personal situation. The principle of equality does not prevent treating students in different situations differently, particularly regarding their resources.

The Constitutional Council also admits that registration fees may be charged in public higher education, provided they are modest and take into account, where appropriate, students' financial capacities (Cons. const., dec. No. 2019-809 QPC, October 11, 2019); the Council of State has adopted this analysis (CE, July 1, 2020, No. 430121).

The president's power is therefore not discretionary: it is exercised within a regulatory framework, is capped, is justified by the student's personal situation, and is subject to an annual report.

V. Transitional Provisions

25. What transitional measures are provided for students already enrolled?

The decree provides for three transitional measures:

- Students benefiting from an exemption for the 2025-2026 academic year remain governed by the old provisions until the end of their university cycle (entirety of a bachelor's or master's cycle), provided they continue their education in the same institution;
- Students who have already obtained an exemption for the 2026-2027 academic year before the decree was published retain this benefit until the end of their university cycle, provided they continue their education in the same institution;
- For the first two years following the decree's entry into force, institutions will have an increased exemption capacity. In 2026-2027, they may exempt 30% of students subject to differentiated fees. In 2027-2028, this rate will be 25%. It is from the 2028 academic year that the 20% exemption ceiling will truly apply.

26. Application of the measure to students in the middle of a cycle: what about those who stay in the same institution but change programs, and those who change institutions?

Students already benefiting from an exemption for the 2025-2026 academic year retain the benefit of the previous system until the end of the university cycle concerned, provided they continue the corresponding programs in the institution that granted them the exemption. Consequently:

- A student who stays in the same institution but changes programs automatically keeps the benefit of the exemption only if this change can be considered a continuation of the corresponding program; otherwise, a new request must be processed under the new system. It is up to the institution to assess, on a case-by-case basis, whether a bridge or change of program can be considered a continuation of the corresponding program. For example, moving from the first to the second year of a bachelor's degree in the same cycle and institution does not, in principle, call into question the maintenance of the exemption. Similarly, a bridge organized within the same cycle may allow the exemption to be maintained if it is part of the continuity of the student's path.
- In the event of a change of institution, the benefit of the exemption will not be maintained.

27. Do the fee information published before the decree came into effect on an institution's website, Parcoursup, or MonMaster entitle students to transitional maintenance of the exemption?

No. The fee information published on an institution's website, Parcoursup, or MonMaster is indicative and does not, in itself, constitute an individual exemption decision.

Only a duly published regulatory provision is enforceable against students. Furthermore, to benefit from the transitional maintenance provided for in Article 2 of the decree, the student must have effectively obtained an exemption before the decree came into effect, i.e., before May 21, 2026.

28. What about students already enrolled in a program but not benefiting from a prior exemption?

The transitional system benefits only students who had already obtained, before May 21, 2026, an exemption for the 2025-2026 or 2026-2027 academic year. This exemption is then maintained until the end of the current cycle, provided they continue the corresponding programs in the same institution.

A student already enrolled in a program but who had not obtained any exemption before May 21, 2026, does not fall under this transitional maintenance. If they wish to be exempted, their request must be examined under the new system, based on their personal situation and within the applicable ceiling.

29. Does the admission notification from Campus France count as an exemption for the 2026 academic year? Are these students counted in the 30% ceiling?

No. A simple admission notification sent via the *Études en France* procedure does not, in itself, constitute an exemption.

However, when an individual message sent via this procedure by the institution, or notified on its behalf, explicitly states that the student is exempt from registration fees for the 2026-2027 academic year, and that this exemption was obtained before the decree came into effect, as per its Article 2, then these students fall under the transitional system and are not counted as new individual exemptions under the 30% ceiling, as they remain governed by the old system for the duration of their cycle in the same institution.

In the absence of such an explicit exemption message before May 21, 2026, the student falls under the new system and may request an individual exemption based on their personal situation.

VI. Implementation and Support

30. What financial aid remains available for foreign students?

Depending on the student's situation, several aid systems remain available:

a) For international mobility students (subject to differentiated fees):

- French government scholarships (automatic exemption + monthly allowance);
- European or international programs, subject to eligibility (Erasmus+, Erasmus Mundus, etc.);
- Specific and emergency aid from the *CROUS* network, subject to eligibility conditions;
- CROUS housing and €1 meals;
- Individual exemption granted by the institution based on the student's personal situation.

b) For French students and students from the EU/EEA/Switzerland:

- Social criteria scholarships (BCS), subject to eligibility conditions;
- Housing assistance (APL);
- European programs (Erasmus+, etc.);

- CROUS housing and €1 meals.

c) For foreign students intending to remain in France (refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary or temporary protection, long-term residents, etc.):

- Social criteria scholarships (BCS), subject to eligibility conditions, including for refugee students or beneficiaries of temporary protection (Ukrainian students, in particular);
- Specific and emergency aid from CROUS;
- CROUS housing and €1 meals.

Additionally, holders of a student residence permit may work up to 60% of the annual working time.