

Survival Guide: Essential French Acronyms for Indian Students in France

Decoding French bureaucracy, one acronym at a time.



Introduction

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***CAF, CVEC, OFII, CPAM... is there
no end to this acronym jungle?***

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**Geetanjali
Shrivastava**

FOUNDER & CEO

 Ask Sétu

Welcome to France! You're about to enter a world of forms, deadlines, and mysterious letters. But here's the good news: most of these bureaucratic hurdles follow a predictable pattern.

Once you crack the acronym code, everything else falls into place.

This guide will:

- ✓ Demystify essential acronyms
- ✓ Provide step-by-step instructions
- ✓ Share real-life student tips
- ✓ Help you avoid common pitfalls



The Core Acronym Table

Acronym	Full Form	Why It Matters	When To Do It	What You'll Need
CVEC	Contribution à la Vie Étudiante et de Campus	Mandatory student fee for registration	Before university enrollment	Passport, student ID, credit card
CAF	Caisse d'Allocations Familiales	Provides housing aid (APL)	As soon as you get housing	Lease, RIB, visa, birth cert.
APL	Aide Personnalisée au Logement	Monthly rent aid via CAF	Part of CAF process	See above
OFII	Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration	Visa validation within 3 months	After arrival	Passport, visa, address proof
CPAM	Caisse Primaire d'Assurance Maladie	Registers you for French health insurance	After OFII validation	Birth cert (FR), address proof, visa
PUMA	Protection Universelle Maladie	The system providing universal health coverage	After CPAM registration	Auto-enrolled
CDS	Carte de Séjour	Needed after 1 year in France	2 months before VLS-TS expires	University cert, OFII docs, photos
VLS-TS	Visa Long Séjour valant Titre de Séjour	Your initial student visa + residence permit	Before arriving in France	Campus France approval
BU	Bibliothèque Universitaire	Free access to study spaces, resources	Once enrolled	Student card
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System	Measures your academic load	During semester planning	Transcript/marksheet
EDF	Électricité de France	Electricity provider for student housing	Immediately after moving in	French phone, address, bank account
CERFA	Standard French forms	Used for official applications (CAF, visa)	Varies	Provided by authorities
RIB	Relevé d'Identité Bancaire	Required for any payments (CAF, job, rent)	When you open a French account	Bank account
IBAN	International Bank Account Number	Standard account number used in EU	Needed for transfers	Provided by your bank



Housing & Financial Aid – CAF, APL & EDF

CAF (Caisse d'Allocations Familiales)

Purpose: Grants housing aid (APL) to help with rent.

Steps:

- Create an account on caf.fr
- Upload your lease, visa, RIB
- Track application progress online

Documents needed:

- Birth certificate (Legalised (apostilled) French translation)
- Proof of rent
- French bank details (RIB)



Tip:

Apply early! It can take 2–3 months to receive aid.

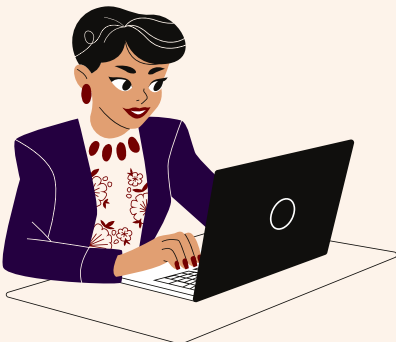
APL (Aide Personnalisée au Logement)

What it is: The actual housing aid money disbursed via CAF.

EDF (Électricité de France)

If your rental contract doesn't include electricity, register at edf.fr.

Choose automatic debit for peace of mind.



The CAF "plays an essential role in national solidarity, notably by providing financial aid, including housing aid for students living in France."





Enrolment & Campus Life - CVEC, BU, ECTS

CVEC (*Contribution Vie Étudiante et de Campus*)

What it is: A €103 fee for student services (health, sports, etc.)

How to pay:

- Register at the site messervices.etudiant.gouv.fr.
- Then connect to the dedicated CVEC site cvec.etudiant.gouv.fr.
- Enter the city in which you are studying and pay the CVEC with a debit or credit card.
- Download and retain the proof of payment,

Needed for: University enrollment, residence permit extensions

Checklist:

- Payment proof
- Include INE number (from your acceptance letter)

BU & ECTS

- BU = University library. Open late. Free Wi-Fi.
- ECTS = Academic credits system. 60/year = full-time load.

“The CVEC aims at "favouring the welcome and the social, sanitary, cultural and sportive support of students and to strengthen the preventive and educational actions for student health" ”



Immigration Essentials - VLS-TS & APS

1 VLS-TS Validation (Visa long séjour valant titre de séjour)

Your VLS-TS student visa must be validated online within 3 months of arriving in France. This step is mandatory to stay legally beyond that period.

- Go to: administration-etrangers-en-france.interieur.gouv.fr

You'll need:

- A valid email address
- Your visa details
- Your arrival date in France
- Your French address
- A payment method for the €50 taxe de séjour

After validation, you'll receive:

1. A login email for your personal account
2. A confirmation email with your validated visa proof (downloadable)

2 APS (Autorisation Provisoire de Séjour)

Once your studies are complete, apply for an APS (*Autorisation Provisoire de Séjour*) - a 12-month visa to look for jobs or start a business.

- Apply 2 months before your student visa expires.

Documents you'll need:

- Degree certificate, or attestation of success
- Proof of financial means
- Passport + visa copies
- Recent photos + residence proof



Health Coverage – CPAM, PUMA etc

France guarantees basic health coverage for all residents under PUMA (*Protection Universelle Maladie*). You're covered, once you register with CPAM (*Caisses Primaires d'Assurance Maladie*), .

✓ CPAM Registration

- Visit ameli.fr to register for French healthcare.
- You'll get your Numéro de sécurité sociale → then a Carte Vitale.

You'll need:

- Legalised (apostille) & translated birth certificate
- Proof of address
- Passport and visa

✓ Medical Services & Specialties

SAMU – Service d'Aide Médicale Urgente

- Dial 15 for emergency medical assistance.

CHU – Centre Hospitalier Universitaire

- University Hospital Center – large hospitals with research/teaching roles.

PS – Professionnel de Santé

- General term for healthcare professionals (doctors, dentists, nurses, etc.).



Banking Basics – RIB, IBAN, Opening a French Account

To receive CAF aid or refunds, you need:

- RIB (your account ID in France)
- IBAN (international version of RIB)

Open a student-friendly French account as soon as you land in France with our partner Bunq



Forms & Letters – CERFA, AR

CERFA Forms

What they are: Standardized French administrative forms. You'll use them for:

- CAF applications
- Carte de Séjour
- Housing contracts






Available from public websites or prefecture offices.

AR (Accusé de Réception = acknowledgment of receipt for registered letters)

What this means:

Use this when sending critical documents by post. It gives proof that the French authorities received your file.

Avoid These Mistakes!

-  Not paying CVEC = Blocked enrollment
-  Late CAF application = No housing aid for months
-  Forgetting to validate your VLS-TS = Visa invalid
-  No French translation of birth certificate = Health & visa delays
-  Not setting up CPAM = No Carte Vitale → You pay full health costs

Handy hack: Keep a shared Google Drive folder with scanned copies of:

- Passport
- Visa & validated VLS-TS / APS
- Birth certificate (in French)
- CVEC receipt
- Lease
- RIB

Must-Have Apps:

- Doctolib → Book doctor appointments
- Ameli → Track your health insurance
- CAF → Submit and track your housing aid
- Lydia / Paylib → Transfer money to friends
- Google Translate (life-saver)

Key Websites:

- service-public.fr – Official admin help
- etudiant.gouv.fr – Student services
- cvec.etudiant.gouv.fr
- ameli.fr – Health insurance





Got Any Questions? We've Got You Covered!

Navigating international education can be overwhelming. Ask Sétu combines cutting-edge AI with expert human guidance to make studying and working in France accessible, affordable, and successful for Indian students.

- ✓ Admissions
- ✓ Administration & Bureaucracy
- ✓ French Language Workshops
- ✓ Inter-cultural upskilling
- ✓ Career-readiness support

Join our WhatsApp Group!

A friendly, supportive space for Indian students in France.

- ✓ Connect with peers
- ✓ Get real-time tips
- ✓ Stay updated on events & deadlines
- ✓ Ask questions – no question is too small!

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