

Article

Subject : Rumours of the demise of the French *taxe d'habitation* appear, for the moment, to be greatly exaggerated.

Date : Updated on 19th April, 2023.

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La *taxe d'habitation*. Are you affected by the new French administration's online service "*Biens immobiliers*" available on « *mon espace* » on impots.gouv.fr ? If you own a property in France, care is now needed.

As from 1st January 2023, a new declaration has been introduced by [article 1418 du code général des impôts](#) which requires owners of buildings, whether these be individuals or corporate to file on line to obtain the *dégrèvement* or exemption of their principal residence from *la taxe d'habitation*, which remains in force for all secondary residences.

As part of the gradual removal of principal residences in France from the scope of *la taxe d'habitation* (occupier's rate), the French administration has been putting into place a data gathering tool in order to evaluate both the actual state of recovery of tax on immovable property, but also the potential tax return on immovable property generally. The position is therefore in a state of flux with new details being added to the overall tax code linking that information to the different taxes involved: these are not limited to rates, but to, for example, the 3% annual tax on immovable property entities and information for income tax and capital gains tax.

The *taxe d'habitation* therefore has not been repealed over secondary residences. The *dégrèvement* is meant to apply only to principal residences.

There is a fundamental principle of French tax law that the framework and content of the declarations concerned in fact defines the application of the tax concerned. Here the declarative régime appears to attempt to separate the exempt wheat from the chaff of properties falling outside the exemption, of which the owner has retained *la jouissance* whilst appearing to be occupied.

However, the change goes further than that. Where the owner has retained the *jouissance* (i.e. the *usufruit* of the premises, but has allowed a third party or parties to occupy the premises under a lease or other arrangement (i.e. the premises are not their principal residence), the declaration still has to be filed.

Note that the declaration is filed by internet where the French owner's principal residence is equipped with an internet access. Where there is no internet connection to their principal residence, paper declarations will be needed by the taxpayers concerned, but there are none printed or available .

Article 1418	Translation
<p><i>I. Les propriétaires de locaux affectés à l'habitation sont tenus de déclarer à l'administration fiscale, avant le 1^{er} juillet de chaque année, les informations relatives, s'ils s'en réservent la jouissance, à la nature de l'occupation de ces locaux ou, s'ils sont occupés par des tiers, à l'identité du ou des occupants desdits locaux, selon des modalités fixées par décret. Sont dispensés de cette déclaration les propriétaires des locaux pour lesquels aucun changement dans les informations transmises n'est intervenu depuis la dernière déclaration.</i></p>	<p>I. Owners of residential properties are required to file with the tax administration before the 1st July of each year, if they have kept the legal possession and enjoyment (<i>jouissance</i>) the information concerning the occupation of these premises, or if these are occupied by third parties, the identity of the occupiers of the said premises according to the procedure laid down by decree Are exempt from this declaration, the owners of properties for which no change in the information sent has taken place since the last declaration.</p>
<p><i>II. Cette déclaration est souscrite par voie électronique par les propriétaires dont la résidence principale est équipée d'un accès à internet. Ceux de ces propriétaires qui indiquent à l'administration ne pas être en mesure de souscrire cette déclaration par voie électronique ainsi que les propriétaires dont la résidence principale n'est pas équipée d'un accès à internet utilisent les autres moyens mis à leur disposition par l'administration.</i></p>	<p>II. This declaration is sent by internet, by owners whose principal residence is equipped with an internet connection. Those owners who indicate to the administration that they are unable to file this declaration by internet and those owners whose principal residence is not equipped with an internet connection use the other means put at their disposal by the administration.</p>
<p><i>Ndlr : Les dispositions du présent article s'appliquent à compter des impositions établies au titre de 2023 (Loi 2019-1479 du 28 décembre 2019 art. 16, VII-E).</i></p>	<p><i>Note confirming that the declaration applies as from tax year 2023</i></p>

As a result, all “owners” under this definition have until 30th June 2023 to declare to the French tax administration the category/type of occupation of the residential buildings which they own. To enable

that a new online service has been installed on impots.gouv.fr in the *Espace Particulier* under the Tab (*onglet*) « *Biens immobiliers* ». To access the declaration, you would need to be able to create a space as a non-resident. The dividing line between a French resident taxpayer and a non-resident leasing out their French property and paying French income tax is becoming potentially diminished.

This declarative obligation affects all owners, resident or not, whether these be *propriétaires, nus-propriétaires* (whether in individed ownership or not) and *usufruitiers* (albeit that these are not owners under French law, but have the *jouissance* of the property under a real right). It also affects *sociétés civiles immobilières* (SCI) who, as these *sociétés* are French, can make their declaration on their secure *espace sécurisé « professionnel »* on impots.gouv.fr, after connecting and registering on the service « *Gérer mes biens immobiliers (GMBI)* »

What happens to foreign companies owning property in France is a separate issue as is the treatment of non-resident *usufruitiers* who rent the property out using the legal right to do so under the *jouissance* conferred by the *usufruit* right *in rem*. The grant of a lease over a French property in French terms confers the legal *jouissance* of the property to a third party for a specific term. Confirmation of the territorial extent and scope of the declarative responsibility and the extent, if any, to which whether non-residents are affected is awaited.

If a building has been, acquired recently and the immovable transaction executed through a *notaire* it is possible that a property will not yet appear under the Tab « *Biens immobiliers* » in a French individual's « *espace Particulier* ». The purchase deed drafted by the *notaire* needs to have been published as registered by the *services de la publicité foncière* for the purchaser to be identified as the owner. In this case, French taxpayers will not need to act as their *espace personnel* will be automatically updated when the acquisition of the property is published on the register.

However, the declarative obligation raises at least two questions: how does this affect non-resident owners of what are generally second homes and how would it affect indirect ownership through foreign corporates or other entities such as trusts or even French *translucid* companies other than *société civiles immobilières*?

Article 1418 CGI is very specific to French individual “owners” or those owning through a civil company – an SCI. It arguably does not cater well for non-resident owners, whether they have internet connection to their principal residence abroad or not. To be clear, a *usufruitier* is not a *propriétaire* but an “owner” of an immovable right *in rem*, which article 1418 caters for by indirect reference to the legal *jouissance* which the *usufruitier* is possessed under articles 578 and 948 *Code civil*:

Article 578

L'usufruit est le droit de jouir des choses dont un autre a la propriété, comme le propriétaire lui-même, mais à la charge d'en conserver la substance.

Article 948.

Il est permis au donateur de faire la réserve à son profit ou de disposer, au profit d'un autre, de la jouissance ou de l'usufruit des biens meubles ou immeubles donnés."

For the moment, there seems to be little movement or progress towards any clarification or formal change in the current filing requirements for non-resident direct or indirect owners of properties in France occupied by lessees or by other third parties. Article 1418 CGI relies heavily on the notion of a French principal residence, which implies French fiscal residence under article 4 of the same *Code général des impôts*.

Article 1770 CGI sets penalty for non-declaration or incomplete or inexact declarations according at 150 € by each property concerned. However, where a different penalty or one of a higher amount is due on the same facts or for other reasons the 150€ will not be charged.

So, if you own a secondary resident in France and are non-resident you will to create your *espace particulier*, unless you already have one. To do that you will need the thirteen digit fiscal reference number which can be provided by your local tax office, in other words that of the nearest office to your property.

The setting up of the *espace particulier* is relatively simple. The administration have set up a short description of how to do it, which can be viewed and downloaded in English: see

<https://presse.economie.gouv.fr/download/?id=106153&pn=533%20-%20CP%20-%20Du%20nouveau%20dans%20votre%20espace%20%C2%AB%20G%C3%A9rer%20mes%20biens%20immobiliers%20%C2%BB%20sur%20impots.gouv.fr-pdf>

However, you will need to check that your property is attributed to your fiscal number and therefore to your *espace particulier* by the system.

So, watch this space, as there might be attempts at an extension of the declarative framework by decree and the future ramifications as far as information available to the French tax administration as far as secondary homes are concerned could be important.

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