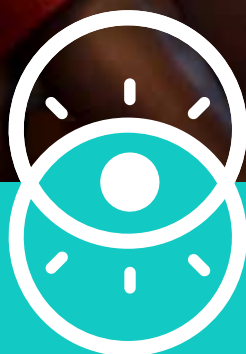


FRANCE



I GET
YOU

Promoting best practices to prevent racism
and xenophobia towards forced migrants
through community building

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prevent racism and xenophobia
towards forced migrants through
community building**



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Cover photo
Neighbour Martine, helps Manuel,
a refugee boy from Iraq, to learn
French in her home in Taize,
France. (Still taken from the
French / Get You video:
Denis Bosnic / JRS Europe)



I GET YOU FRANCE

National chapter no.3 of the European / Get You report

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Introduction

In 2015, many French NGOs and civil society organisations responded with a spirit of welcome and renewed creativity in designing initiatives that were tailored to the needs of newcomers to the country. When 80,075 people applied for asylum in France in 2015,¹ the main challenge for civil society organizations was to answer numerous calls from local French citizens with offers to volunteer their time and talents to contribute to initiatives and help to welcome refugees coming to France. Jesuit Refugee Service France (JRS France) has worked, since its founding in 2009, to create connections between asylum seekers and French people to encourage links and relationships. In the past years, JRS France, has witnessed the tremendous outpouring of support from many citizens who have contributed to supporting and building friendships with refugees, and *I Get You* has been a concerted effort to learn more about various community building initiatives (CBI) in France who provide local citizens and newcomers with the chance to support and get to know one another.

While many existing civil society organizations adapted their activities since 2015, many new organisations were also founded, focusing on bringing locals and refugees together in mutual exchanges. In France, hospitality and offering opportunities for encounter became the main pillars on which civil society organisations based their work. At the same time, new organisations offered unique models of providing support to refugees and forced migrants, not only offering help – such as administrative support, food distribution, and French classes – but also creating social links, and acknowledging that forced migrants need to be empowered in their

own lives to be autonomous and fulfil desires to be volunteers and organisers themselves. *I Get You* has seen in France that forced migrants are most involved when given the opportunity to participate and take an active leadership role in initiatives, especially when it comes to cultural and sports programmes they feel passionate about.

I Get You focuses on sharing the experiences and best practices of the CBIs in France that we have seen create strong links between people coming from different countries, backgrounds, cultures, on an equal and reciprocal basis. Across France, CBIs promote social inclusion and facilitate integration. With simple meetings between people who previously perceived others as very different or foreign from themselves, preconceived prejudices dissolve. In this way, *I Get You* has witnessed how CBIs contribute to fighting racism and xenophobia through simple, efficient and mutual meetings and actions where both locals and forced migrants take part.

1.1 CONTEXT: RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA TOWARDS FORCED MIGRANTS IN FRANCE

For several years in France, a certain political rhetoric has confused terrorism with asylum and refugees with delinquents. This contributes to the proliferation of racist and xenophobic language in French society. This discourse is fuelled by prejudice, such as: migrants are invading us, they take work from the French, they come here to profit from our economic allowances. In this context, there is a widespread falsely held belief that most requests for asylum are not really filed by people in need of protection, but rather by those trying to take advantage of the system. In

¹ Ministre de l'Intérieur. *Immigration, asile, accueil et accompagnement des étrangers en France*. <https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Info-ressources/Donnees-statistiques/Donnees-de-l-immigration-de-l-asile-et-de-l-acces-a-la-nationalite-francaise/Archives/Statistiques-publiees-en-juillet-2016/Les-demandes-d-asile-statistiques>

2016, only 38 percent of the requests for asylum in France actually received protection.²

The situation in France is directly related to European asylum policy, about which there are many concerns. Today in France, one third of asylum seekers fall under the jurisdiction of the Dublin Regulation. The prospect of a future revision of this law could worsen the situation in Greece and Italy – the countries that bear the frontline responsibility of receiving people seeking safety to the shores of Europe and providing for their basic needs. In France, the majority of those affected by the Dublin Regulation do not want to be sent back to their first country of entry in Europe, and these so-called Dubliners find themselves in precarious situations and are at risk for destitution and social isolation.

In the summer of 2017, President Macron announced that he wished that asylum applications be examined in Niger and Chad in addition creating a hotspot in Libya continuing the trend of the Europe's externalisation of protection policies,³ as if the borders of Europe could be pushed further south for asylum seekers.

1.1.1 Insufficient Reception for Asylum Seekers

A reform of the asylum procedure took place in July 2015 resulting in a new national asylum law (CESEDA).⁴ There have been marked improvements but many problems remain in terms of deadlines to register asylum applications, accommodation proposals, and allowances for asylum seekers.

In 2016, about 50 percent of asylum seekers who applied for emergency housing received access to accommodations.⁵ In regards to asylum seekers' allowances, delays of several months forced many to the verge of starvation. The situation

in Paris is quite revealing as asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Sudan, and Eritrea camp out in the streets of the city and have been regularly evacuated over the past two years. In addition, the situation in Calais remains very tense. In June 2017, human rights organisations in Calais monitoring the situation alerted authorities of the egregious and fundamental violations of human rights of migrants. They denounced the inhumane living conditions for the migrants, in addition to continual harassment by police.⁶

The inability to create interpersonal ties because of their limited knowledge of French language, has led to the social exclusion of forced migrants and refugees in society and encouraged xenophobia towards them among the general population. In spite of its crucial importance, the state does not provide French language courses to asylum seekers. In this case, asylum seekers rely on community associations for language learning help. For refugees, French language courses are organized only when they have their refugee card, from six months to one year after obtaining their status of refugee. Clearly, these language courses come too late in the integration process and are of a basic level (A1). French language courses are also not adapted for the diversity of educational backgrounds of refugees. According to a recent report criticizing the linguistic policy, 35 percent of migrants pursuing French language courses do not successfully master this basic language courses offered.⁷

An additional obstacle is access to the labour market for forced migrants in France. The EU Reception Conditions Directive provides that Member States shall ensure that applicants have access to the labour market no later than 9 months from the date when the application for international protection was lodged if a first instance decision by the competent authority has

² OPFRA. *Le rapport d'activité 2016*.

https://www.ofpra.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rapport_dactivite_ofpra_2016_1.pdf

³ France 24. 'Hotspots' in Libya: French President Macron's troubling announcement. 28 July 2017.

<http://www.france24.com/en/20170728-hotspots-libya-french-president-macron-announcement-migrant-crisis-refugees>

⁴ Loi n° 2015-925 du 29 juillet 2015 relative à la réforme du droit d'asile. 30 July 2015.

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2015/7/29/INTX1412525L/jo>

⁵ Alternatives Economique. 1 June 2016.

<https://www.alternatives-economiques.fr/>

⁶ Le Monde. *Migrants à Calais : le défenseur des droits dénonce des atteintes « d'une inédite gravité »*. 14 June 2017.

http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2017/06/14/migrants-a-calais-le-defenseur-des-droits-denonce-des-atteintes-d-une-inedite-gravite_5144387_3224.html#8B8mXLdkwhSAxDz.99

⁷ Karoutchi, Roger. *Migrants: les échecs de l'apprentissage du français et des valeurs civiques*. 19 July 2017.

<https://www.senat.fr/rap/r16-660/r16-6601.pdf>

not been taken.⁸ Further, the Directive provides that Member States shall decide the conditions for granting access to the labour market for the applicant, in accordance with their national law, while ensuring that applicants have effective access to the labour market. In France, access to the labour market is allowed if OFPRA has not ruled on the asylum application within 9 months from the registration of the application; however, asylum seekers need to apply for a working permit according to the law applicable to third-country national workers. This means that to obtain such a permit they have to fulfil specific criteria, such as providing proof of a job offer or an employment contract. In practice it is extremely difficult to obtain a working permit, as the administration in charge of issuing working permits (the DIRECCTE) only issued one for an asylum seeker in 2015.

1.1.2 Mobilizing Citizens and Associations to Fill Gaps

In response to the poor reception conditions for forced migrants in France and the lack of effective response from the authorities, many citizens are organizing their actions. More than 400 organizations met in January 2017 to sign the Solidarity Delinquent Manifesto, which calls to end the criminalization of acts of solidarity of citizens towards migrants.⁹ In addition, private citizens have also attempted to help forced migrants in France using their own means. Such was the case for Cédric Herrou a farmer who became “a symbol of ordinary Europeans who have taken action to aid migrants fleeing war or poverty,” were prosecuted for hosting migrants, including minors, at his home in the border valley of La Roya.¹⁰ He was discharged by the court on 10 February 2017 but after condemned by the supreme court.

In France, there is no specific policy for the integration of refugees, particularly with regard to employment and housing. In response to

witnessing refugees living on the streets and being unable to find a decent job or reunite with their families through swift family reunification procedures, initiatives in France provide social assistance, help in accessing the labour market and legal assistance even to those with protected statuses.

1.1.3 Racism in France

There is a hierarchy in minorities victims of racism, according to the National Advisory Commission on Human Rights. They state, “Jews, blacks and Asians remain the minorities accepted, the least accepted Muslims, with the exception of the Roma and travellers, [are] by far the most rejected.”¹¹

According to the National Advisory Commission on Human Rights, in terms of acts, 2016 shows a significant decrease in the number of reported incidents to the security forces; however, close to one out of three French people declare to have been subjected to racist behaviour at least once over the last five years. Despite the decrease, racist acts persist. For example, a migrant reception centre was set on fire in October 2016, one day before asylum seekers were supposed to be accommodated there after the dismantling of the camp in Calais.¹²

⁸ The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. *Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast)*. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013L0033>

⁹ <http://www.delinquantssolidaires.org/le-manifeste/>

¹⁰ BBC News. *French farmer Cedric Herrou fined for helping migrants*. 10 February 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38930619>

¹¹ Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme (CNCDH). *La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie*. 2016. (page 141). http://www.cncdh.fr/sites/default/files/cncdh_rapport_2016_bat.pdf

¹² Moccozet, Stéphane. *Franceinfo. Le Centre d'Accueil Destiné aux Migrants Incendié*. 24 October 2016. <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/auvergne-rhone-alpes/puy-de-dome/loubeyrat-63-centre-accueil-migrants-incendies-1115325.html>



1

06

"François and Nicole really attempted to offer me a comforting and welcoming place to start putting myself back together. It needs energy, time and patience—from me and from them—to finally complete the procedures with the French administration. They registered me for French lessons. Mutual trust came little by little, as communication improved, thanks to the French lessons and a lot of good will.

During the administrative procedures, we are not allowed to work or do an internship or start a training course. We stay home waiting for a document that will arrive - we don't know when! I went to the mailbox every hour. It is the reason why refugees do not speak French very well in general. It is logical: no language = no integration = no possibility for a new life!

I want to work and I appreciate doing it to meet people, improve my language skills, and earn a better living. I just signed an employment agreement at a restaurant as a cook of flammenkuche, after completing my probationary period and a fixed-term contract. Thanks to my job, I could afford a one-bedroom apartment next to the place where the university proposes French lessons to Syrian refugees. Later on, I would like to open a Syrian mezzé bar where people could discover traditional dishes, without forgetting the Syrian alcohol which goes with it! But I know it might be difficult given the complexity of my situation."

📷 Team from the CBI Les Cuistots Migrateurs serve food from different countries at a food market in Belleville, Paris (Photo: Les Cuistots Migrateurs)



Methodology

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I Get You is a European project coordinated by JRS Europe and developed in 9 different countries, JRS France was responsible for implementing the project – according to the methodology – in France. The research into the work of Community Building Initiatives (CBIs) that promote social inclusion as a way to tackle racism and xenophobia did not cover the many initiatives in France providing that provide emergency or material help for forced migrants – organisations that often provide the services that public authorities could not satisfy.

The project implementation took two years and the project designed two consecutive phases: a mapping and quantitative phase, and a qualitative phase which allowed to have a broad image of what is currently being done in France in welcoming and creating links with forced migrants and refugees with the local society. In France, we started by mapping 55 CBIs in different geographic areas – in the capital, in both large and small cities, and in rural areas. These initiatives completed the mapping survey to find quantitative information on the size of the initiative, the funding

it received, the target participants, the profile of the volunteers, and the activities put in place. The results appeared French Mapping Report available on the *I Get You* website.¹³

In the qualitative phase of the research, 17 CBIs were selected to be interviewed. These 17 CBIs were selected on criteria such as geographic location, diversity of activities, time since creation, and availability and willingness to be interviewed. In each CBI, 3 individual, semi-directed interviews were conducted with one member of staff, one volunteer, and one forced migrant, separately. Interviews were carried out in French, or with Arabic translation in 2 cases.

The main limitation of the methodology in France was the availability of the CBIs to participate in the research. In some cases, the staff of the initiative was unable to complete the questionnaire or meet with us due to time constraints, whether in the mapping phase, which excluded them from the research, or for the interviews in the qualitative phase.

1 <http://www.igetyou-jrs.org/france/>

Data Findings

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08

3.1 SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS FROM MAPPING PHASE

The results show that 89 percent of CBIs are small structures working at the local level, with none or small amounts of funding of less than 1000 Euros per year. Because of the limited funding, initiatives are mainly supported by volunteers. The beneficiaries – even though most CBIs tend to erase the distinction between “beneficiaries” and “volunteers” to propose common activities – are mainly men who are asylum seekers or refugees present in France. In 80 percent of the cases, forced migrants have been present in France for less than two years. The integration process is still going on, and many services, such as housing, administrative help, language classes and socio-cultural activities provided by the CBIs are crucial.

Regarding the local French citizens who are volunteers, 32 percent of the volunteers are retired adults. Because of this, *I Get You* has noticed that several CBIs have made concerted efforts since 2015 to involve more young adults, in the age range of 18-30 years old; however, this remains a challenge for CBIs because of NGOs in France mainly attracts retired adults.¹⁴

The inclusion of migrant women in the activities is also a challenge, some CBIs overcame this by proposing activities “Entre Femmes” (between women), or offering to watch children while the mothers go to French classes. CBIs in France focus on additional activities to strengthen relationship building. Some of these activities listed by the CBIs mapped include theatre, dance, cultural excursions and sports.

3.2 RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE PHASE

The elements found during *I Get You* in France show that CBIs are present all over the country, from big cities where a significant number of refugees are arriving, to small villages where there is anywhere between 5 to 10 refugees living. While all CBIs are unique, it appears that CBIs are often the first friendly, welcoming structure for refugees after the emergency support structures. These initiatives provide a space and opportunity for discussion and a better mutual understanding with the local population. In many of the CBIs, 2015 represented a turning point either in their foundation, restructuring or adaptation in activities to respond to the changing needs of the people involved. Often, at the time of the interview, the staff and volunteers were still formalizing the activities in the best possible way.

Importance of Interactions and Meetings

The main way CBIs promote change in local communities is through interactions between locals and forced migrants in common activities. As a forced migrant from Sudan refugee who was welcomed in the village of Taizé, in Burgundy, told us, “Refugees don’t only need food, they need many things. I found another family, a new family, and new brothers.”

A CBI where this is particularly important is Réseau Chrétien Immigrés (RCI), an association in Paris that helps forced migrants with administrative procedures. RCI trains volunteers in legal and administrative procedures and has a space where forced migrants can come for advice and follow-ups on their situations. What is striking is not only the assistance provided, but the welcoming spirit, as a woman originally from the Ivory Coast said, “It

¹⁴ France Bénévolat. *Les enjeux d’une transition réussie entre le travail et la retraite*. 8 October 2004. https://www.francebenevolat.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/France_benevolat.pdf



📷 Group photo from the JRS youth project in Lille. (Photo: JRS France)

gives me courage when I come, and I see Madame Céline. The Préfecture is the one deciding, but it doesn't help me with the paperwork! It warms my heart to be welcomed here, and she helps me to be patient." In CBIs, the simplicity that comes with friendly meetings, makes intangible difference for those involved – especially the forced migrants who may previously had negative experiences dealing with administrative authorities.

CBIs recognised the importance of relationship building on an equal basis without necessarily providing any tangible service or aid for the forced migrant is an important aspect of their work. The forced migrants involved in CBIs also noticed this way of working. A refugee involved with the CBI Singa a citizen's movement started in Paris, said, "In the different associations, they always look at you as a refugee, either they teach you the language, or they do housing, or administrative help, but it's always with other refugees. And you stay a refugee. Here in Singa, I went to a family and after a week or two, I forgot that I was a stranger, I forgot about my problems. That was the best for my integration."

Understanding Culture

CBIs often provide services, but more than that, they offer space and time for cultural exchange through regular interaction between locals and forced migrants. A study conducted by the UNHCR in France in 2013 revealed that three years after obtaining refugee status, over 12 percent still had no links with French people.¹⁵ Those involved in CBIs seek to change this. For Nina, a staff member with the CBI Autremonde, the first objective teaching objectives in the French classes they offer is to understand social and cultural codes. She said, "For us, everything goes through the social link. You cannot understand the codes of a society if you are not confronted on a regular basis to people mastering that code, coming from that code."

Similarly, JRS France's Welcome Jeunes initiative was created to help young forced migrants better understand the social habits of their French peers. Young adults, whether they are refugees or French, meet on a regular basis to do activities together, such as theatre and yoga classes, museum visits, football games and hikes. By trying to abolish

¹⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in France*. September 2013. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/524aa9a94.html>

those distinctions between beneficiaries and helpers, the programme seeks to create a space of mutual understanding. An activity called “Le mot pour dire” (the word to say) allows participants to have a simple language exchange. For example, one young man originally from Afghanistan and another from France will spend 90 minutes teaching basic Afghan words and talking about Afghanistan. These exchanges can lead to simple insights of the connectedness of the two cultures, but also more profound debates discussing themes like the environment or communications emerge. The goal here, as in other CBIs, is to promote mutual understanding across languages and cultures, and to learn about and confront in positive ways the differences.

Changing Perspectives through Stories

I Get You learned, through talking to volunteers involved in CBIs, that the interaction had somehow changed their views about forced migrants – in most cases. This is because of what they have learned about the direct experience and storytelling of the forced migrants that they have met. These stories were personal, intimate and sometimes violent that displayed the lack of choice you have when forced to flee your home. A volunteer from Accueil Demandeurs d’Asile in Grenoble explained, “It questions our perception. In the case of one woman who was living in Conakry, Guinea, for example, we could ask: ‘Why didn’t you just change town?’ But it is not so easy, especially for a woman. You have to question all your identities, the social weight you carry, your customs, it shakes you. We have come to slowly understand the weight of the environment.”

A French teacher in Coup de Pouce Université, an organization in Lyon that started by helping foreign students and now offers a specific program for asylum seekers, explains the difficulty in navigating lessons because of the different life experiences and references that forced migrants bring. She explained, “I am always careful not to ask what simple things can remind them of, because I don’t know their past, and I don’t want to make them feel uncomfortable. It can be a shame because sometimes they might want to do it, and we don’t take the time for it. In the group, we take cautions before introducing some subjects. And we always end up talking about cultural differences, but it cannot be the subject of a course for me.”

Interculturalism

In local communities, the efforts of CBIs helps to both keep the cultural and religious traditions of forced migrants’ country of origin alive as well as to introduce them to local cultures. The Ordre de Malte France welcomes refugee families from Iraq in Tours. The Iraqi Christian community has integrated in the local parishes and with local families, and once a month they have a Christian service in Arabic. As one refugee involved explained, “It would be wrong to isolate, we are not isolated, that’s why we don’t do every week. But once a month we recreate a small Iraq, so that we keep something from our country.”

Coordinators and organisers of CBIs acknowledge that cultural exchange is an important aspect of creating inclusive communities. They see that the easiest ways to raise awareness about the culture of different people is through organising simple meetings. In Autremonde, there are common cultural activities for the different groups of vulnerable people who receive services from the CBI – both forced migrants and refugees as well as people affected by poverty in eastern Paris. After a few meetings between these two groups, the coordinators realised that the groups held some prejudices towards the others. So they planned the “accueil de jour” (daily welcome) where the groups came together for coffee, tea and playing cards, and this simple meeting has had tangible results in breaking down the preconceived prejudices.

Providing a Safe Space

In many CBIs, the different social and cultural programmes they provide, offer not only a chance to build a friendship or get some help with something they need, but also a “safe space” in which they can feel comfortable. Nina from Autremonde told us, “If they go out of the class and have not learned anything, but have spent two hours in a safe space and have trustful interpersonal links, then the objective is accomplished. That being said, it is better if they have also learned something!”

Similar observations were raised in other CBIs, such as the CISED Centre for foreign students, where the director noticed how many young people claimed that it is one of the rare places where they feel safe.

Most of the CBIs aim to help forced migrants to become independent in France. Benjamin the policy officer at Ordre de Malte France, described to us their philosophy of service: to explain and describe but never to make a decision for a refugee. He explained further, "It's not about filling their fridge all the time. It would give a biased picture of what is life in France. We explain that we will be there to support, but that we want them to be able to live here on their own. After a few months, we take some distance slowly."

Brothers from the Taizé community welcomed a group of 11 refugees from Sudan and Afghanistan, organizing a network of neighbours who planned French classes and provided individual support for them. After a year of this experience, one of the brother's explained the slow process of detachment, "Some received their refugee status. Those are young people who want to grow up. We believe it is essential not to create unnecessary dependences. Being welcomed here must be a step in their path. We don't ask anyone to leave but once they receive the status we talk with them on how they see the future." The path towards inclusion seems to be more efficient when it is built on empowering refugees and helping them to utilise knowledge and skills they already have, such as the powerful resilience and resourcefulness they have acquired from previous experiences and their migration journeys.

Mentorship Models

Out of the 17 CBIs interviewed, 8 provide mentoring for forced migrants based on one-to-one interaction, through models like duos, pairs, tutors, and coaching. The frequency and the purpose of the meetings between the local person and the forced migrant, range from weekly meetings to providing accommodation in one's home for a period of time or accompaniment throughout the entire legal process of acquiring refugee status.

JRS France has an initiative to welcome asylum seekers who are not provided accommodation by the state and set-up, through the guidance of a tutor, holistic support needed to be initially included in society. The asylum seeker enters a network of families for a period of 6 to 9 months, changing families every 6 weeks. During that period, the tutor accompanies him or her, and

ensures that everything is going well in the host families who provide the accommodation. The tutors are volunteers who can be young adults, couples, or retired persons. One tutor described her experience saying, "The relationship I have with the asylum seeker I tutor allows her to have contact with a young French adult. It helps her with her integration in the society, and I provide moral support and friendship during her adventure in France."

Every refugee who applies for refugee status in France has an enormous amount of paperwork and the burden of relating with many different people in institutions that hardly make sense to them. In response to this, some CBI have provided both accommodation and logistical support throughout the bureaucratic processes of acquiring the correct documentation. When forced migrants are paired with local individuals or families, *I Get You* has seen these administrative burdens lighten because of the know-how and language skills that the local can provide to the migrant. Often, the local French people involved discover administrative procedures they had no idea existed!

Participation and Activities

In the CBI Cèdre, an initiative started by the Secours Catholique, socio-cultural activities complement administrative support in the asylum process. Hélène, the coordinator of the service explained, "Everyone can be part of organising all the activities. We also organize activities outside our centre." In Cèdre 10 percent of the current volunteers are or have been asylum seekers, and they appreciate that they are able to help and not only be helped. As one of the forced migrants said, "I am a volunteer because I don't have a job, I want to spend my time properly, I also want learn new things. I am very happy to be able to help someone. I help with translations sometimes, and welcoming new people who need help."

The space and time that CBIs offer to refugees and local citizens furthers the creation of equal and mutual relationships. For example, Is There Anybody is a students' and young professionals' organization in Grenoble that organizes meals and activities with migrants through local religious communities. The activities with forced migrants started in 2015 and are growing. Both locals and migrants, come for the meals and partake in new activities, such as hiking in the mountains, trips to museums and movies, and forming a musical

band. One of the volunteers explains the reasons he joined, “Not everyone can welcome someone in their own home; here, there is a space and time to meet each other.”

In Paris, JRS France’s Welcome Jeunes initiative reflects a participatory spirit among those involved. Every week the participants meet and organize new activities, making no difference between locals and migrants, and all are responsible for the smooth running of the programme’s activities.

Facilitating Access to the Labour Market

Some CBIs specialise in helping forced migrants to access the labour market, recognising this as one of the first steps in the integration process. Cecile, the coordinator of Kodiko explains, “We need to welcome people by opening them the job market, it’s the ultimate phase of the welcome. The paperwork, the housing, it is very important, but we will not be able to say that we welcomed people if we did not help them find a job, and furthermore a job that corresponds to their abilities, not just a bread and butter job.”

While CBIs work in different ways, the purpose is to help forced migrants build up their skills and find a job that matches these skills. Kodiko developed a mentoring activity that allows refugees to understand the job market in order to compensate for the tendency of forced migrants to be employed in sectors for which they are overqualified. A staff member explained, “Our

idea is to change the vision of the job market in France that many refugees have. Often, they think that because they had three refusals, it is not useful to apply anymore. They think they won’t find a job because in their countries it was very different.”

CBIs specialised in helping forced migrants find jobs also work best when they collaborate with local employers by creating an online network of those who are ready to hire forced migrants and refugees. For example, Action Emploi Réfugiés matches forced migrants with those employers they know are looking for particular qualifications that a certain person may have. A partner of this initiative said, “We assume from the beginning that refugees are autonomous. They have the capacity to deal with their own life. And then it’s their autonomy, or their need of autonomy, that draws them towards us. Either they send us a résumé and register on our website, either they don’t.” The staff at Action Emploi Réfugiés encourage people to apply for jobs that matches their profiles and raise awareness about the steps involved in the job search. It also opens new doors, as the coordinator Soraya mentioned, “Some employers were not aware that hiring refugees was legal.” Action Emploi Réfugiés has had positive outcomes already, as the director told us, “Some employers who hired refugees come back to us, they all tell that the refugee is doing the same job as the others, at the same level. It’s not about just giving them jobs, we want to show that refugees have the same talents.”

Inspiring Community Building Initiatives

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From the 17 CBIs that took part in the qualitative research phase, JRS France selected five based on the evaluation of the qualitative interviews against the Delphi criteria.

KODIKO

Kodiko brings refugees and employees from big companies together in a mentoring relationship. A refugee and a local citizen who works for a high-profile company are placed together in a duo based on their similar interests or choice of profession. They meet on a regular basis in the workplace of the local employee and work towards helping the refugee mentee gain a better understanding of the job market in France.

This initiative strengthens the feeling of welcome in France because of the new friendships that are formed through the duos. Because Kodiko offers support navigating the job market, acquiring support on the recognition of their qualifications and finding places to learn or improve their French, the CBI helps refugees to integrate not only in the labour market but by extension in the larger French society. Participants also gain confidence through coaching and encouragement, and they are more at ease with the job search in a new country.

CÈDRE & SESAME

Cèdre located in Paris and Sesame located in Lyon are initiatives started by Secours Catholique. They provide help with administrative and legal procedures, but also socio-cultural activities, involving both locals and forced migrants to participate and organise them. All forced migrants involved can propose and create a new activity, such as brunches with food from different countries, painting, and exhibits. This transforms the social interaction and improves community building across cultures.

Cèdre and Sesame are both extremely welcoming places where migrants can come during the day,

stressing the values of hospitality and participant of all involved. They provides warm and familiar spaces of encounter, where the participants' dignity is respected by placing the responsibility of activities in their hands.

AUTREMONDE

Autremonde, an initiative located in East Paris, is a local association strongly anchored in a network of local partners. On a daily basis, it welcomes forced migrants, provides French classes, assists with job searching and provides further accompaniment to people on the path toward integration. The project also organises cultural activities onsite at their location and trips out into the city. These activities are open to migrants, volunteers, and locals welcomed by the association in the program for vulnerable people.

This CBI highlights the essential role of volunteers bolstered by a team of experienced staff members. The volunteers create real bonds with the persons they teach. It is an initiative that is open not only to refugees or forced migrants, but serves as a target group other people from vulnerable backgrounds.

TAIZÉ

Taizé is a religious community that welcomed and hosted several asylum seekers, both individuals and families. Taizé has involved several local neighbours – by assigning one local family or individual to every forced migrant family or individual – from villages around the community to provide assistance through support and service provision for the forced migrants who are accommodated there. These services include French classes and administrative accompaniment.

The individualised support and accompaniment that forced migrants have been provided with through the structure set up by Taizé has led to excellent outcomes for those involved, such as advancement in administrative procedures,

starting trainings or apprenticeship, finding jobs and starting studies. The ability to involve neighbours coming from different educational and religious backgrounds created a positive intercultural dynamic based on the dignity of those involved.

FÉDÉRATION ENTRAIDE PROTESTANTE

This CBI organizes accommodation for refugee families with local families who have extra space in their own home or another house where the refugee family can live on their own for a period of time. In addition to the hosting families, 20 more local volunteers are involved in the CBI to assist in welcoming the newly arrived families.

Because of the successful way they were able to organise their volunteers, both those hosting and those providing additional support, this CBI was able to include forced migrants into the local community in a sustainable way that has contributed to the long-term integration of the newcomers and the local society.

CHRISTINE



*VOLUNTEERED WITH HER FAMILY TO MENTOR THROUGHOUT THE INTEGRATION PROCESS
ONE YOUNG REFUGEE, WHO WAS WELCOMED IN THE TAIZÉ COMMUNITY*

“At first, we accompanied them everywhere. We needed to go with them to Pôle Emploi – the national employment office. Today, everything requires an internet access. The administrative jargon is cutting them off. And they don’t fit into the categories. For example, to take the driving license you need a diploma that French kids take at school. It’s really hard to collect all the documents required. They could not have gone further in the process if only one association had accompanied them. That’s why shortly after they received their status they are so advanced. It’s impossible to make it on their own; they don’t even understand the emails they receive from the administration. It’s a language problem and a social problem. You need an Internet connection to get one paper, a phone to get a code for a paper... it’s a never ending circle.”

Policy Recommendations

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The experience of *I Get You* shows that in order to develop migrants' empowerment, to promote fruitful exchanges with nationals and succeed in the process of inclusion and protection, public authorities must take specific measures in the fields of national language learning and education, work, access to protection and housing. Many of the initiatives mapped by *I Get You* are active in these fields. The following recommendations are drawn from their experiences.

FOR THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT

Work towards a Common European Asylum Systems that guarantees access to protection, work, language courses, education and for asylum seekers by supporting within the Council of the EU:

- a recast of Dublin Regulation that takes into account the needs and preferences of

the asylum seekers when determining the Member State responsible for the examination of an asylum application.

- the European Parliament's proposal for the recast Reception Conditions Directive in order to grant asylum seekers access to labour market no later than two months from the date when the asylum application was made.
- the European Parliament's proposal for the recast Reception Conditions Directive in order to create an obligation for Member States to provide asylum seekers with effective access to language courses from the moment they make an asylum application.
- the European Commission's proposal for the Qualification Regulation in order to have a clear obligation on the part of Member States to provide in their national laws procedures for

📷 Issa (R) was welcomed by a family in Nantes (Photo: *I Get You* / JRS France)



the assessment, validation and accreditation of prior learning and experience in the absence of documentary evidence.

Concerning national legislation:

- Suppress the requirement of a working permit for asylum seekers when they obtain the right to work (currently nine months after they made the asylum application, if they no decision has been taken on their application yet) in order to guarantee effective access to work for asylum seekers.
- Modify the relevant legislation in order to include the provision of language courses as a minimal reception condition in the reception of asylum seekers
- Modify the relevant legislation (art. L.622-1 CESEDA) in order to end the criminalisation of humanitarian aid provision by volunteers. Only people who help illegal entry or stay of people in return of financial gain should be prosecuted.

Concerning policy priorities and implementation:

Foster a culture of hospitality in the society by:

- Ensuring basic rights, such as health care, urgent accommodation, to rejected asylum seekers and asylum-seekers in the Dublin procedure.
- End the criminalisation of humanitarian aid provision by volunteers. Public authorities must support humanitarian action and guarantee fundamental rights of forced migrants.

Ensure the provision of tailor-made assistance to forced migrants by:

- Ensuring psychosocial and legal assistance in all reception facilities. The CADA system (Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers), that provides for this, should be seen as the model to further develop the reception for asylum seekers in France.
- Appointing contact persons for asylum seekers to turn to when they need help in finding their way through the numerous administrative structures and procedures, such as the asylum procedure or the national health system.

- Providing adequate training to all social assistants and civil servants who come in contact with forced migrants in all the relevant administrations
- Making sure that French language courses are provided in all reception centres for asylum seekers
- Encouraging institutions of vocational training or higher education and libraries to offer forced migrants opportunities to learn French.

Promote the empowerment and autonomy of forced migrants by:

- Supporting the work of asylum seekers in the fields of translating, mentoring, and helping other asylum seekers through administrative procedures.
- Support initiatives and projects in which forced migrants are active participants or organisers at the same level as locals. Our research shows that these situations are the most beneficial for forced migrants' empowerment.

Maximise the impact of the implementation of policies on social inclusion by leveraging on the experience of citizens' initiatives, in particular:

- Reinforce the communication and cooperation between administration and community building initiatives by appointing contact persons charged of *IntaComprendre Pour Apprendre* is an example mapped by *I Get You* that should be supported.
- Coordinate with civil society, associations and employers in orders to establish networks of people that can help migrants to access jobs and enterprises that are willing to train and employ migrants. Successful citizens' initiatives mapped by *I Get You*, such as *Action Emploi Réfugiés*, can serve as good practice to duplicate.

Concerning funding:

Encourage and support the work of citizen's initiatives in the long term by:

- Providing funding for citizens' initiatives to find physical spaces where forced migrants and volunteers can meet.

- Providing professional training for volunteers or funding for initiatives in order to organise independent professional training for their volunteers.
- Allocating funds to initiatives that create spaces for intercultural exchanges. Initiatives such as JRS France's Welcome Jeunes' language exchanges, that offer the possibility to discuss cultural differences and similarities, can be taken as an example.

Invest in a qualitative asylum and reception system by:

- Allocating sufficient budgets to ensure accommodation for all asylum seekers according to the EU Reception Conditions Directive and the French asylum legislation (CESEDA).
- Allocating sufficient budget to increase the personal working in the welcoming centres of asylum seekers (PADA) and at the prefectures in order to make sure that asylum applications are registered within three days as foreseen by the CESEDA law.

XAVIER



MENTOR, KODIKO

"I don't know if it can change things, but it is above all a human encounter. My mentee and I work as a two-person team, on an equal footing. There are concrete things that I bring because he doesn't know France. And he discovers the company through me, through Kodiko, and the workshops that are organized.

But I learn a lot from him too. To get to know the other, we learned to socialize; I am attentive to his needs and demands. We've met six times, and I told him I would put some pressure on his shoulders so that he undertakes research actions. He arrived in France only recently, so we have to take that into account.

I didn't need this experience to feel in solidarity with the suffering countries. I feel that things are closing up and I did not want to be part of this locking up. It is but a modest contribution to show that I don't accept this closure and I don't want to stay in fear. Contact with a foreign person and a different culture is an incredible wealth. We have to preserve a space of freedom."



Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and others who are forcibly displaced.

Jrseurope.org

Igetyou-jrs.org