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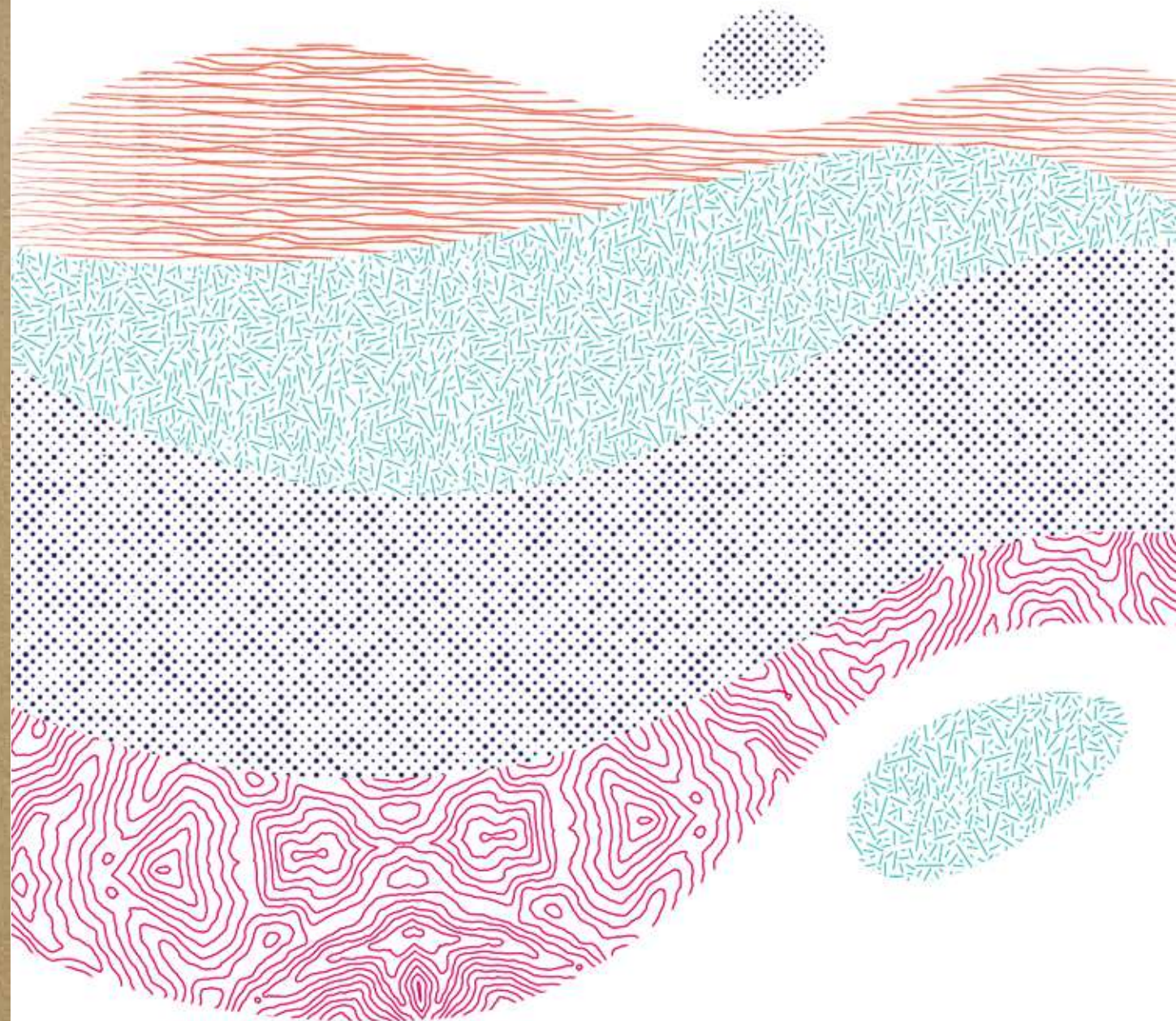
10
YEARS

OF RESEARCH
GOING TO THE HEART OF
VULNERABILITIES

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Strengthening Social Bonds

Social bonds are fundamental to the core objectives of the Red Cross. They are not a specific focus of research per se for the Foundation but are taken into account in the Foundation's cross-cutting approach to all of its activities. Social bonds are an essential consideration for researchers engaged in social and humanitarian actions when they examine the factors that contribute to disruption, exclusion, isolation, and the mechanisms of cohesion and solidarity.

Social bonds have been at the foundation of sociology since its inception, but their significance has evolved. The term is "used today to designate a desire to live together, to connect dispersed individuals, and to strive for greater social cohesion as a whole".¹ In recent years, however, there has been a greater focus on the crisis or breakdown in social bonds rather than their strengthening. Numerous studies have highlighted loneliness and social isolation, which impact a growing number of people, including up to 20% of the French population.² Such withdrawal mechanisms are strongly associated with precarious situations that can affect anyone (young people, single-parent families, children, the elderly or the infirm). The absence of personal relationships, the difficulty of asserting one's rights, or having to endure inequities can erode the bonds of trust and respect that individuals forge, affecting people's health. These withdrawal mechanisms can lead to situations of complete exclusion, such as homelessness, which is hard to quantify.³

The public health crisis and the recent COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns have highlighted the significance of social bonds. Maintaining them or dealing with the consequences when broken is not always a top priority in the humanitarian and social work sectors. However, social bonds can serve as an adequate safeguard against many social and public health issues and as a lever to alleviate vulnerability. Stronger social bonds are conducive to envisioning new forms of solidarity, commitment, and integration that directly oppose isolation and exclusion. Moreover, as demonstrated by the research of Serge PAUGAM, social bonds provide protection and recognition to individuals.⁴ From this, new questions arise: How can relief be reconceived to recreate social bonds? How can social bonds be made to protect individuals while providing recognition? What practices can be applied to make these ideas a reality?

Finally, beyond the efforts undertaken by social or humanitarian aid associations on behalf of individuals in general, the concept of social bonds also extends to volunteers themselves. Their volunteer work is a catalyst for creating social

ties, and searching for these ties may even be the essence of their dedication. The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 epidemic prompted many people to get involved in non-profit organisations, especially during lockdown, and this underscores, as with other crises, the manifold social benefits that volunteering provides volunteers. But how does this aspect of commitment evolve? How is it experienced in different countries? How do humanitarian organisations account for these issues in times of crisis to effectively address the needs of both beneficiaries and volunteers?

TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING: The Breakdown in Social Bonds

1. ISOLATION AND “AGEING WELL”

“I can see that the matahiapo (“seniors”, in Tahitian) are being neglected nowadays. Their families have often abandoned them. When I see this, I wonder... what about me? Who’s going to look after me?”⁵

Asther, 58, a resident of the Austral Islands, interviewed by **Lauriane DOS SANTOS**

In France, the elderly are disproportionately afflicted by social isolation, which became apparent during the COVID-19 crisis. The Foundation has contacted specialised research programmes on this issue on multiple occasions. Researcher **Lauriane DOS SANTOS** contacted public authorities in French Polynesia to inquire about their experience of policies for senior care. This overseas territory’s population has been steadily ageing since 1980, and measures have been taken to encourage the elderly to continue living at home to be cared for by their family. Lauriane Dos Santos identifies three social risks inherent in this type of family care: confining an elderly family member at home exposes the individual to a greater health risk; the family may neglect the elderly person at home; families in precarious situations can become “economic predators” by taking advantage of the individual’s old age social benefits.

The researcher’s study emphasises the significance of the older person as a figure perceived as a social, economic, and symbolic resource within the family. This individual, involved in intergenerational transmission and a participant in the family’s economy and society in general, fulfils a social function by ensuring protection against precarity and sustaining numerous social ties. The findings of this research gathered from feedback from older people, institutional personnel, and family caregivers, therefore argue in favour of the Polynesian concept of ageing well.

Sociologist **Louis BRAVERMAN** is also an advocate of ageing well. Noting the consequences of the absence of social relations among the elderly, the researcher tested the experiment called “EHPAD outside the walls” (Établissement d’hébergement pour personnes âgées dépendantes – the French nursing home) and examined the effectiveness of this home-care support plan in combating isolation. Through his investigation of two medico-social support systems for the elderly cared for at home, he describes the factors for ageing well, particularly that of residing at home, which brings a profound sense of security and well-being. In addition, it secures the beneficiaries in their environment while ensuring a continuum of health services – whether physical or emotional – thereby fostering social ties. To conclude, the researcher emphasises that “ageing well at home” should eventually lead to public policies that more vigorously promote the social participation of the elderly.

Recently, the Red Cross Foundation has funded projects addressing the social isolation of exiles, particularly Ukrainians. In line with the concept of “ageing well”, sociologist **Ludovic JOXE** examined the continuity of care during times of crisis and the specificities of this situation. His objective is to investigate the mechanisms

of health prevention and the relevance of “care pathways” during international displacements. Just as the ageing experience can change according to the context and modes of care, it can also vary according to the population. **Armelle KLEIN**, who also received funding for her research in 2022, described the unique experience of elderly Ukrainian refugees. Her work carried out in a crisis context, centred on the experience of becoming uprooted and vulnerable in later life.



Armelle KLEIN
Doctor in Sociology

A wide range of diverse situations became readily apparent after my first interviews. But the elderly were all disoriented and in a state of confusion. This is why the issue of social bonds appears especially sensitive: how does one maintain existing ties with family members, friends, and fellow citizens? When people arrive as a family, what are the opportunities for forming new social ties? Do people eventually find the resources and the means to keep in touch with their home country?”⁶

Sociologist **Emmanuel NIYONSABA** attempted to answer this final query in his research on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) by elderly immigrants. By taking into account the specificities of this population, he showed that the daily use of ICT offers many advantages, especially maintaining affective ties, cultural ties, and, more broadly, relations with the home country.

“I call my nephew, who always has a phone, and when I need to, I have him put my mother on the line. She [my mother] often says, “Turn on the TV so that I can see you” (laughing); anyway, it’s the video, and that’s what she calls television.”

Mr. LS, 66, recounting his conversation with his mother residing in Côte d’Ivoire. Account gathered by Emmanuel NIYONSABA

ICT functions as a resource for support and well-being. However, unstable digital access, unaffordability, and other limitations, such as insecure housing conditions, restrict its use. Elderly migrants must devise alternative strategies and employ different tactics to navigate these challenges and avoid becoming socially isolated.

2. SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND HOMELESSNESS

People who find themselves in a state of extreme precarity without any shelter or permanent accommodation are subject to exclusion and are denied the right to meet fundamental needs, such as sanitary living conditions, a balanced diet, and access to medical care. A few studies have examined the processes that contribute to homelessness and the subsequent social and health consequences and have found that changes in one’s capacity to “self-maintain” lead to ever greater social exclusion.

From this observation, sociologist **Thibaut BESOZZI** found it noteworthy to identify the issues associated with homelessness. The homeless must put up with marginalisation and stigmatisation from politicians, the media, healthy members of society, and even social professionals and volunteers, impacting their relationship with their body image and personal health. The investigator observed and documented aesthetic care sessions in a halfway home in Nancy, France, as part of a social support programme. While this type of care responds to requests by the homeless for physical care, it also influences their perception of their own body, outward appearance, and sense of self. This survey thus provides insight into how psycho-corporal care can contribute to greater self-esteem and dignity.

In her study funded by the Foundation in France, **Julie DUFLOS**, a Doctor in the Science and Techniques of Physical and Sports Activities, also seeks to understand the benefits and the limitations of programmes for the homeless. Her interest lies in having young homeless people use physical activities and sports to combat social isolation. Her research examines an innovative socio-sports approach in Arras, France, and evaluates its capacity to help marginalised and homeless people achieve self-realisation and well-being. Developing one’s self-identity is a critical consideration in physical and social survival. **Ayoko Akouavi DOGBE FOLI** investigates the unique experience of unaccompanied minors (UMs) who have immigrated to France without a relative or legal guardian in their new country. Supported by child welfare services (ASE), if they qualify as minors, they can also experience homelessness. This research project explores the construction of the person they have become in this setting by delineating their psychosocial realities and self-representations across several temporal dimensions: past, present, and future.

The final topic concerns helping the homeless find accommodation and reintegrate into society. **Stéphanie ESPEJO ZEBALLOS** studied the effects of their long-term living situations during the COVID-19 lockdowns by considering their specific circumstances and the variety of case patterns. Her ethnographic research at the Centre d'Hébergement et Aide aux Sans-abri (CHAPSA) in Nanterre examined how COVID-19 restrictions altered the centre's operations. The author emphasises the benefits of long-term care, which includes routine medical check-ups and socio-educational activities. This programme, created during the COVID-19 crisis, allowed residents time to consider personal projects and initiate various administrative procedures before the transition. Stéphanie Espejo ZEBALLOS' research emphasises the importance of listening and providing support, which have improved the mutual relationship between CHAPSA staff and residents and accelerated the discharge of some. This promising fieldwork and subsequent analysis offer the opportunity to reflect on the support for the homeless population and on innovative ways of enhancing social ties.

3. IMPLEMENTING THE SOCIAL BOND

Experiencing a situation of precarity or social and territorial inequalities weakens social bonds. Furthermore, relational isolation impacts one's living situation and mental well-being. Solidarity initiatives are implemented to prevent these effects. In addition to providing shelter and meeting essential needs, they offer isolated people recognition by creating social interactions that enable them to surmount stigma and prejudice. They restore dignity and self-esteem, thereby reducing instances of severed social ties, marginalisation, and exclusion.

The Red Cross Foundation has supported numerous research projects that aim to comprehend the characteristics of this experience and its impact on social bonds. **Thibaut BESOZZI**'s work has documented and demonstrated the benefits of socio-aesthetics: the combination of physical care with psychological treatment and support that enables individuals to regain their dignity. The life stories of Caron, Pépette, and Karine, as told to the researcher, exemplify the effects of socio-aesthetics on the body, self-esteem, and ability to integrate socially. Socio-aesthetic approaches act on social bonding by focusing on people's needs and recognising one's identity. This has spawned initiatives like "beauty trucks" and mobile cosmetic care vehicles.

Anthropologist **Emmanuelle DURAND** investigated the processes of restoration and recognition by looking into the utilitarian and practical aspects of apparel worn by people living in precarious conditions, with a specific emphasis on exiles. Through an ethnographical study and workshops held in the Vesti-boutiques of the Red Cross, she examined people's representations of clothing, their image of clothing, and the symbolic rapport and their affective and creative bond with it. This study should help better understand the relationship between the material constraints of these people in relation to their standard of living and the symbolic significance of their desires and preferences. As for the particular case of exiles, her research investigates the value systems, the scope of feelings, and the cultural codes associated with clothing both in the home country of origin and in France, the host country. Regarding survival strategies and situations of precarity, poverty, and/or exile, these findings provide an understanding of the significance of symbols for weaving relationships of recognition, listening, and care. Thus, clothing is a crucial factor in the recreation of social bonds.



This project is designed to explore the symbolic, affective, and creative relationships around clothing while considering the interplay between the material constraints relating to one's standard of living on the one hand, and the symbolic scope of desires and preferences on the other."

Emmanuelle DURAND
Doctor in Anthropology

Along the same line of thought, non-profit organisations have launched other initiatives involving handyman services or repair activities, as it has been demonstrated that these activities benefit social ties. In 2023, in response to a proposal from the Bénévo'Lab programme, the Foundation issued a call for applications to fund research projects on the "Mobile Humanitarian Repair Lab", a specially converted vehicle that was to be parked in areas where people are informally housed (squats, slums, camps, emergency shelters). The study examined the outcome of handyman activities and the impact of repair services on an individual's self-esteem and mental health. These issues leave room for thought on how these methods can be improved upon or more greatly delineated from a scientific standpoint while considering local specificities and the needs of the people concerned.

In addition, during the COVID-19 epidemic and the lockdowns, when many people found themselves socially isolated and suffering from loneliness, the “Red Cross at Home” programme was developed in metropolitan France and selected overseas regions not only to deliver food relief but also to foster social ties with isolated individuals. During the first lockdown in the spring of 2020, an investigation team affiliated with the Maurice Halbwachs Centre looked into this programme. In a general context of deteriorating social ties, the authors emphasised the benefits of listening to and recognising people’s needs and real-life circumstances. They described the challenges encountered by volunteers when confronting precarity and social isolation while giving their perspective and expressing their commitment. These volunteers articulated their “sense of being” and the symbolic benefits they gained from their assignment. According to this research, support and care relationships offer reciprocal benefits. As a conduit of social ties, this volunteering is a topical research matter of interest to researchers and humanitarians.



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ACTING MORE EFFECTIVELY: Working With and Learning About Volunteers

Volunteers commit themselves to serving others while pursuing an ideal of social justice despite the discomforts of their new battlefield. “Only those who possess the audacity to believe they can change the world do so,” said Henry DUNANT, founder of the Red Cross. Many volunteers possess the audacity to act and commit themselves proactively to the transformations of society and devote themselves civically or even politically.⁸

Volunteerism constitutes one of the fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and millions of volunteers serve as the foundation and the most significant source of inspiration and innovation for these organisations. Every day in France, 70,000 French Red Cross volunteers intervene in various sectors: social action, disaster and rescue operations, risk prevention, psychological support, etc. Whether they are teaching lifesaving techniques, conducting outreach efforts to meet the homeless, giving first aid, acting as youth leaders, or fundraising for even a day, they each, in their own way and in accordance with the Movement’s objective, contribute “to the prevention and alleviation of human suffering,” in accordance with its Principle of Humanity.

Like many other global organisations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement must address several issues regarding its volunteer policy. Recent emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the crisis in Ukraine, have demonstrated the limitations of volunteerism and have brought to the fore-specific issues pertaining to the notion of commitment, whether it has to do with the safeguarding of the physical and mental health of volunteers during times of conflict and emergencies, or the management of new forms of volunteerism, particularly by “spontaneous” volunteers.

In a broader sense, these events have accelerated a shift set into motion some years ago, namely the emergence of ever-younger volunteers, applying for assignments

that are often shorter, more diverse, more practical, and increasingly “digital” or remote. Where, how, and why do volunteers get involved today? How do we keep them motivated and committed to our actions? What new forms of volunteering are helpful for the 21st century? These are a few of the many questions the Movement is asking itself.

In response, in close collaboration with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Foundation has compiled a comprehensive literature review of scientific research on volunteering. Coordinated by sociologist **Dan Ferrand BECHMANN** and **Louise BAUMANN**, a PhD student in human geography, this review highlights the low volume of existing scientific and academic research in France on the subject “despite the large number and the preponderant and vital role of volunteers in our organisations”⁹. In different contexts, at different levels and with various points of view, research is necessary to document and analyse the concept of volunteering and its implications, realities, and determinants of commitment in different contexts. This is the Foundation’s rationale for indirectly or directly supporting the numerous projects on this issue.

1. UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER COMMITMENTS

The manners in which volunteers get involved, the prevailing ethical considerations, and the symbolic status of the volunteers themselves are research topics related to the various dynamics of volunteering. In her research, Benedicte BONZI examines the drivers of commitment, the priorities of volunteers, and the disruptions that lead to disengagement. Her findings highlight the volunteers’ sense of usefulness, the desire to acquire emergency response skills, and the transcendental dimension at the heart of their dedication. She demonstrates that volunteering is perceived as a means of being, achieving, and participating in a shared endeavour. However, even if this perception mobilises individuals and motivates them to help others, their desire to be useful is not always fulfilled.

“Volunteers disengage themselves when they realise that they have to be satisfied with only helping one person when they are certain that more can be done.”¹⁰

Extract from an article by researcher Bénédicte BONZI

Bénédicte BONZI identifies four causes of disengagement: the duration of the commitment, an emergency related to a social protection system in crisis, a growing sense of discomfort and guilt when confronted with certain situations, and internal disagreements with the mode of governance. The study reveals the underlying tension between volunteerism and utilitarianism: the clash between commitment to others and oneself. This tension is evident in many citizen initiatives.

2. CITIZEN INITIATIVES PROMOTING HOSPITALITY

While hospitality covers both the notions of giving and reciprocity, it also includes the social and political means necessary for its implementation. Among the various definitions of this concept are the acts of receiving and sheltering individuals regardless of nationality. However, the conditions exiles require for survival are contingent on overcoming the difficulties they face in integrating into their host country and coping with unwelcome practices. In response to this, many citizen initiatives have emerged to ensure a more dignified reception of new arrivals, and this has reignited concerns regarding volunteerism and commitment.

Marjorie GERBIER-AUBLANC has reported on her involvement in these citizen initiatives for people in exile in the Calais and Paris camps. Her work examines the different forms of commitment and mechanisms of solidarity. She describes commitment as a make-do organisational process generated from “collective improvisation”. In practical terms, “citizen solidarity” is a matter of flexible grassroots coordination. Those who practice it are not selected formally and are trained based on their experience. The actions undertaken through these commitments are initially guided by “ethics of recognition”, which entails forming bonds with migrants by closely listening to what they have to say and valuing their capacity for action. However, the practical application of this and its associated ethical commitment have implications for the day-to-day lives of volunteers. Their voice is drowned out by the rationales of instrumentalisation and/or stigmatisation. The sense of pressure and the lack of breathing space produces a feeling of physical and mental exhaustion. Moreover, situations in which they have given their total commitment may require them to intervene without the requisite skills to achieve an outcome, which has been criticised.

Jordan PINEL sought to gain insight into citizen solidarity in the case of Ukrainian refugees arriving in France outside metropolitan areas. His observations focus on the accommodation and housing assistance provided to them and examine the viability of this aid, particularly in rural areas. His research sheds light on the relationship between civil society as a provider and an institutional actor to determine how these bonds can be developed to facilitate the reception of migrants and the provision of humanitarian aid, particularly in rural areas and small towns, as well as on the outskirts of medium-sized towns.

The issue of hospitality is also central to **Sadio SOUKOUNA**'s research. She has reported on the empowerment trajectories of Malian refugees in Burkina Faso and the significance of social networks within their communities. Her ethnographic work describes exiles' abilities and active role in their trajectory and hospitality organisation. She also reports on the role of Malian refugees in Burkina Faso as intermediaries of humanitarian action. A role that contributes to their recognition and that they also assume for job training or improving survival conditions. In a context of power dynamics, tension, and inequalities stemming from their participation, her research reports on the practices and strategies employed by exiles to circumvent "migration triage systems, rules, and standards imposed by policies and institutions overseeing the asylum process in Burkina Faso"¹.

Leila DRIF's project reports on the issues of migrants who volunteer. After conducting a field survey on volunteer programmes in Lebanon by and for Syrian refugees², she investigates the specificities of migrants volunteering in the French reception system. She formulates an approach centred on the social aspect of integrating these volunteers/migrants and the relationships they forge within their respective non-profit organisations. From this, several themes emerge, such as the significance and implementation of the power to act, "peer-helping", and the dual role of volunteer/beneficiary. These are the research avenues that she explores in her fieldwork.

3. VOLUNTEER ACTION IN A TIME OF CRISIS

In response to the COVID-19 crisis and its social consequences, many citizens opted to engage in or intensify their participation in volunteer activities. However, the pandemic had a significant impact on the commitment of volunteers and their health and well-being. To comprehend, analyse, and anticipate these impacts affecting volunteers in France and abroad, the Foundation issued a call for applications under the title "Volunteers in an Epidemic Context" in March 2020.

Émilie MOSNIER raises concerns about the psychological impact of this crisis on Red Cross volunteers operating on the front line. Her research describes adaptive strategies and their relationship to social representations, the risk of professional exhaustion, and flagging volunteer commitment. By comparing the consequences and developments of the health and social crises triggered by the COVID-19 epidemic in Marseille and French Guiana, she underscores the significance of the sense of usefulness in a volunteer's dedication. For some volunteers, the sense of usefulness during the crisis has helped justify their commitment. At the same time, she observes a degree of volunteer overinvestment associated with a collective defence process. Health and social emergencies have led to a feeling of powerlessness called "compassion fatigue".

Annabelle JACCARD has also investigated the psychosocial impact of the health crisis on Red Crescent volunteers in the Comoros. She examined the direct repercussions of the COVID-19 epidemic and pointed to the volunteers' need for psychosocial support. Her field survey on the three Comoran islands exposes the existence of acute post-traumatic stress and social and relational malaise due to the general context of precarity. The health crisis had a substantial impact on volunteers. They were required to devise ways to cope with internal conflicts, community rejection, the lack of compensation despite promises, and harsh survival conditions.

Political scientist **Foued NASRI** examined volunteer actions and practices in French suburbs during the lockdowns. He observed and studied the distribution of food relief within and outside the scope of conventional non-profit organisations in

some Lyon suburbs. He wanted to grasp the dynamics of local support networks and their interaction with various humanitarian organisations. As part of his fieldwork, he reviewed the character and scope of these initiatives and the issues surrounding collective action and food relief. His results notably cast light on critical instrumental public figures who embody various organisations. The researcher describes the paradoxical relationship between the many volunteers required for food distributions and their absence from public view.

Considering the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on non-profit and humanitarian practices, geographer **Anaïs TROUSSELLE** focused specifically on activities designed to help migrants during the lockdowns. She conducted a collaborative survey to determine how support structures for migrant populations in France have adapted to this specific context. Her work describes how these practices have changed due to the pandemic. A more limited scope of action, the more significant burden of emergencies, the sudden emergence of precarity, the deterioration and disruption of social bonds, and the breakdown of dialogue between beneficiaries and non-profit organisations have given rise to multiple adaptation strategies. These organisations then relied on using digital applications and inter-associative networks. Several windfall effects associated with funding were also identified. However, the overload of activities and the prioritisation of emergencies hampered their work. Added to these were difficulties in maintaining connections with outside parties, exacerbated relationships between those in a position of authority and subordinates, and complex relations with administrators.

“Those working for non-profit organisations may have experienced neglect from their supervisors or public authorities while operating in the field. However, before the pandemic, they already had to contend with a rigid migratory policy that limited the scope of their actions.”¹³

Extract from an article by Anaïs TROUSSELLE

According to Anaïs TROUSSELLE’s participatory survey, collaboration is beneficial for advancing knowledge and deliberation with volunteers and those affiliated with non-profit organisations. The author argues that the importance of listening, as was demonstrated in the survey, should be used by non-profits to enhance their support activities through greater collaboration with research.

FOCUS

Strengthening the Link Between Research, Society and Volunteer Engagement: Bénévo’Lab

Volunteers and employees work on the front lines daily to alleviate suffering as part of the French Red Cross’ mission. They are better placed to inform management of their operational challenges in the field. In 2020, the Foundation and the French Red Cross introduced the Bénévo’Lab programme to respond to their concerns and support them scientifically.

Each year, the Foundation calls all French Red Cross volunteers to solicit their ideas and identify the potential issues that the social sciences could explore. The most relevant proposals are then selected to be compiled into a research project by a researcher engaged by the Foundation to work alongside volunteers and offer insights on case situations for the development of new practices.

“Bénévo’Lab allows you to step back, observe and analyse the experience of the country’s Red Cross volunteers and learn from their suggestions. In this manner, you can leverage their experience, which can eventually benefit all volunteers.”

Benoit PRIEUR, French Red Cross volunteer and awardee of the Bénévo’Lab programme

Since 2020, the Red Cross Foundation has launched four editions of its Bénévo’Lab programme and has received dozens of proposals from French Red Cross volunteers and employees on various topics. Seven research projects have received grants and have been conducted in collaboration with volunteers.

Since 2023, the Foundation has been developing a partnership with the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme de Montpellier (MSH-Sud) to address more subjects in collaboration with teacher-researchers and students.

RESEARCHER FOCUS

Feedback
on Bénévo'Lab

Thibaut BESOZZI's research was conducted as part of the Bénévo'Lab programme to determine whether homeless people could benefit from socio-aesthetic care and help them regain their physical health and sense of self.

Following the 2021 call for proposals issued to all French Red Cross volunteers and employees, a project submitted by Ibtissame AZRAIBI, a volunteer from Montauban, investigating the conditions for the successful socio-aesthetic care of homeless people was selected and subsequently presented to the scientific community, calling on them to take part in the project. To ensure, through this volunteer project, that those who carry out day-to-day fieldwork could benefit from the research findings and thus provide better services to those in need, Thibaut BESOZZI, the researcher for this call for proposals, collaborated directly with the volunteer who conceived this initiative.

"It had a novel format that was unfamiliar to me, even though, in the context of my research, I've always wanted to work with operatives, whether institutional staff or volunteer workers. However, I've rarely worked with volunteers."

What initially intrigued me was the possibility of gaining easy access to the field, thanks to Ibtissame, whom I had met in Toulouse and Montauban. A beautician by trade, she had experience providing professional beauty treatments and working as a Red Cross volunteer for many years, where she conducts outreach to the homeless, works in day-care centres, and provides aesthetic treatment care to the homeless who request it while living in shelters. Ibtissame allowed me to watch her. I observed her in practice to determine how her aesthetic care affects the homeless in their relationships and terms of their physical body.

*Research for all

What stands out next is how we co-constructed the research project with this volunteer. When conducting research and practising ethnography, we are aware that there is theoretical knowledge and conceptual knowledge from books and understanding that we call "practical", "indigenous", or even "from experience". Through our conversations, Ibtissame was able to benefit me with her professional knowledge and her experience in structuring the inquiries relating to this research project. Of course, this raised some issues. One must find common ground between theoretical and practical knowledge. One must discover how things connect so that a common path can lead toward mutual understanding. Some things must be decoded in a certain way. But thanks to her, I could understand upstream what prompted her inquiries and what she expected from this research. I could carry out this work without being disconnected from the practical application of her interventions in the field.

Finally, this experience has allowed me to discuss my investigation and review the results with Ibtissame. From the beginning to the results, we co-construct both upstream and downstream."



Thibaut BESOZZI
Doctor in Sociology

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