



Immersion in support structures for migrant populations in France: migrants and professionals facing SARS-CoV-2

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Les Papiers de la Fondation n° 35

March 2022

This research was conducted in response to the call for postdoctoral fellowships by the French Red Cross Foundation, and with the financial support of its partner, the Compagnie Fruitière Foundation.

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To cite this article:

LACRAMPE-CAMUS Itane, TROUSSELLE Anaïs, CORTES Geneviève, JOUHANNEAU Cécile, "Immersion in support structures for migrant populations in France: migrants and professionals facing SARS-CoV-2," French Red Cross Foundation, *Les Papiers de la Fondation*, n° 35, March 2022, 22 p.

Résumé

Compte tenu des démarches administratives complexes auxquelles elles étaient confrontées, et de leurs conditions de vie et de logement déjà précaires avant la pandémie, les populations migrantes ont été fortement impactées par la Covid-19. Face aux premières urgences liées à la crise sanitaire, et pour continuer leur mission d'aide, les associations présentes aux côtés des personnes migrantes ont alors redoublé d'efforts. L'objectif de cet article est de questionner les changements induits par la crise sanitaire dans les associations, et de comprendre comment les salarié.e.s et les bénévoles se sont réinventé.e.s au quotidien dans leurs pratiques professionnelles et d'engagement. Dans le même temps, notre étude interroge la pertinence des dispositifs de recherche participative en sciences humaines et sociales pour accompagner les acteurs sur le terrain dans un processus réflexif afin de renforcer leurs actions, organisation, et créer des espaces et des temps d'écoute pour ces personnes engagées et créatrices de savoir-faire innovants. Le développement d'une enquête participative avec trois équipes de bénévoles et/ou de salarié.e.s rattaché.e.s à des associations d'envergure nationale, a permis d'éclairer différents ajustements dans leurs actions quotidiennes et leur organisation en interne lors du 1^{er} confinement. Certaines adaptations dans leur manière de travailler leur ont permis d'engager de nouvelles réflexions pour améliorer leur dispositif d'accompagnement et le dialogue au sein des équipes. Toutefois, la crise sanitaire a également mis en évidence des ruptures dans leur organisation et au sein de leur réseau d'acteurs, illustrant notamment des rapports de domination entre associations et pouvoirs publics préexistants à la crise sanitaire.

Mots-clés : Covid-19, enquête participative, jeunes migrant.e.s, changement, bénévoles, travailleuses et travailleurs sociaux.

Abstract

Given the complex administrative procedures they had to deal with, and their already precarious living and housing conditions before the pandemic, migrant populations have been heavily impacted by Covid-19. Associations working alongside migrant people redoubled their efforts in the face of the first emergencies linked to the health crisis, and in order to continue their aid missions. The objective of this article is to examine the changes brought about by the health crisis in the associations, and to understand how employees and volunteers reinvent themselves daily in their professional practices and commitment. At the same time, our study evaluates the relevance of participatory research mechanisms in the humanities and social sciences to accompany actors in the field in a reflexive process in order to strengthen their actions and organisation, and to create spaces and times for listening to these committed people who create innovative know-how. The development of a participatory survey with three teams of volunteers and/or employees from national associations has enabled us to shed light on various adjustments in their daily actions and their internal organisation during the first lockdown. Certain adaptations in their way of working have enabled them to develop new reflections to improve their support system and the dialogue within the teams. However, the health crisis also highlighted disruptions in their organisation and within their network of actors, particularly the relationships of domination between associations and public authorities that existed before the health crisis.

Keywords: Covid-19, participatory survey, young migrants, change, volunteers, social workers.

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Introduction

Since the first Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in March 2020, migrant populations have emerged as a particularly vulnerable group,¹ facing food emergency situations,² lockdowns in precarious housing conditions,³ the closure of administrations and postponements of appointments to regularise their situation in the territory.⁴ At the same time, the use of a war-like vocabulary in the media and the public debate has contributed to associating the new virus with an exogenous shock which will inevitably lead to profound and lasting changes in our society.

In the context of the IMPCoV research project entitled "Immersion dans les structures d'accompagnement des populations migrantes en France: personnes migrantes, bénévoles et professionnel.le.s face au SARS-CoV-2," this double observation led us to ask ourselves about the effects of the pandemic on isolated young migrants (who arrived in France at a young age, whether they were minors or adults, without their families) and the members of associative structures who accompanied them. We analysed the functioning of associations in the context of the health crisis, their networks and their trajectories, as well as the pandemic experiences of young migrants, employees and volunteers. Although the public discourse has portrayed Covid-19 as a breakdown, considering the long-term perspective of migration policies and associations, can we observe changes in associative practices, or has the crisis merely exacerbated pre-existing logics? Whilst analysing the practices of protagonists in the field, the objective of this article is to question the way in which humanities and social science research can accompany volunteers and employees in creating spaces for exchange and the analysis of their practices.

Accompanying actors are faced with an increasingly restrictive and coercive migratory system,⁵ in which their actions are largely dependent on the evolution of migratory and political contexts.⁶

¹ Michel Agier et al., 2020, "Personnes migrantes en centres de rétention et campements. Désencamper pour protéger."

² Yeter Akyaz and Sophie Gisclard, 2020, *Auto Défense Alimentaire*.

³ Annabel Desgrées du Loû, 2020, "Être confinée en hôtel social ou en centre d'hébergement d'urgence."

⁴ Défenseur des droits, 2020 "Décision du Défenseur des droits n°2020-142;" Hinde Maghnouji, 2020 "Un dimanche interminable. Ce que le Covid-19 fait aux demandeurs d'asile."

⁵ Corentin Bailleul and Daniel Senovilla Hernández, 2016, *Dans l'intérêt supérieur de qui?*; Nicolas Fischer and Camille Hamidi, 2016, *Les politiques migratoires*; Serge Slama, 2018, "De la défaillance systémique à la 'policarisation' des conditions d'accueil des demandeurs d'asile en France."

⁶ Mathilde Pette, 2015, "Les associations dans l'impasse humanitaire."

Since their room for manoeuvre is reduced, they appear in many respects as "public policy adjustment variables," ensuring public service missions at a lower cost.⁷ In light of the paradoxes faced by volunteers and employees, several studies – including some conducted long before the health crisis – have emphasised their distress and their sense of powerlessness, especially for those in direct contact with unaccompanied minors (UAM).⁸ They express a need to step back from their daily actions, regretting "not having more time to reflect or discuss."⁹

Our research¹⁰ was conducted throughout 2021. We worked with three associations which help migrants in Montpellier: La Cimade, RESF34¹¹ and the Red Cross. We developed a participatory methodology as close as possible to the field, using tools to capitalise on experiences and to co-build knowledge. This approach led us to assume that in the face of a lasting crisis, and therefore one that is more demanding for associations, participatory research takes on its full meaning in order to accompany the strengthening of the social bond, the promotion of the commitment of volunteers and the recognition of the work of employees.

Our argument is structured in three parts. After having presented the functioning of the migratory system in which the associations evolve, the first part exposes our theoretical, analytical framework of changes in associative practices. The second part details the methodological protocol implemented in the field in Montpellier, and the third part explains how the analysis of the changes and our work in the field revealed the expectations and the renewed needs of the accompanying actors. These results are discussed in the conclusion.

Changes in associative practices in the context of Covid-19: which framework for analysis?

Starting from associative actors' reduced margins of manoeuvre

The analysis of changes in associative practices in the context of Covid-19 implies situating the scope of action and the missions of the relevant associative actors, both socially and politically.

The associations we worked with intervene in the field of social action for migrant people in France. They interact with the administrations which apply the immigration policies of asylum and reception, and which are responsible for ensuring the management and protection of foreign persons in the territory.

⁷ Matthieu Hély, 2012, "Le travail salarié associatif est-il une variable d'ajustement des politiques publiques?"

⁸ Nicolas Fischer, 2012, "Protéger les mineurs, contrôler les migrants"; Ministère de la Justice, 2020, "Rapport annuel d'activité 2019. Mineurs non accompagnés"; Isabelle Rigoni and Chantal Crenn, 2020, "Les mineurs isolés étrangers originaires d'Afrique sub-saharienne en Gironde. Protection de l'enfance, accès à l'éducation et à l'alimentation."

⁹ Mathilde Pette, 2015, "Les associations dans l'impasse humanitaire." p. 23.

¹⁰ Research financed by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme SUD, the French Red Cross Foundation, the Fonds de Dotation de la Compagnie Fruitière, UMR ART-Dev and NARRAU.

¹¹ Réseau Éducation Sans Frontière.

At the national and European level, the policies governing the entry and statuses of migrant persons are marked by "a logic of non-entries."¹² At the local level, the rules governing the practices of administrative agents involved in asylum and residence permit applications (in particular the prefectures¹³), are marked by a hierarchical mechanism between migrant people which is often linked to stereotypes and prejudices.¹⁴ There is a general suspicion of foreigners.¹⁵ In particular, UAM youth may be considered to be offenders whose minority is contested, resulting in "denial of access" when they are referred to protective measures, as well as discriminatory administrative and judicial practices which deny the fundamental rights of minors.¹⁶ These practices are to be read in view of the tensions between the State and the departments regarding their management.¹⁷ Being minors, these young people are the responsibility of the child protection system at the departmental level. However, due to the saturation of their reception facilities and their lack of resources, several departments are reluctant to take responsibility for their management.¹⁸

Faced with the lack of accommodation and the difficulties in accessing the rights of foreign persons, associations have multiple missions: administrative assistance, the search for accommodation solutions, the struggle for access to education, French courses, etc. Associations fill a void in public organisations that outsource so-called non-strategic sectors, in particular regarding the management of vulnerable groups.¹⁹ While they are often praised for their ability to meet social demand, their autonomy can be reduced, which is partly due to changes in their funding.

¹² Marion Tissier-Raffin, 2018, "Réinstallation – Admission humanitaire." p. 4.

¹³ Prefectures process asylum applications and residence permits, <http://www.info-droits-etrangers.org/sejourner-en-france/titres-de-sejour/presentation-des-differents-types-de-titres-de-sejour/> accessed on 18/11/2021.

¹⁴ Florence Greslier, 2007, "La Commission des Recours des Réfugiés ou 'l'intime conviction' face au recul du droit d'asile en France"; Aurore Mottet, 2021, "Les femmes et les enfants d'abord. Normes familiales, tri et réinstallation de réfugiés"; Alexis Spire, 2008, *Accueillir ou reconduire. Enquête sur les guichets de l'immigration*.

¹⁵ Xavier Crombé, 2019, "MIE/MNA".

¹⁶ Corentin Bailleul and Daniel Senovilla Hernández, 2016, *Dans l'intérêt supérieur de qui?*; Isabelle Fréchon and Lucy Marquet, "Les mineurs isolés étrangers. Les inégalités de prise en charge en protection de l'enfance."

¹⁷ Xavier Crombé, 2019, "MIE/MNA."

¹⁸ Sarah Przybyl, 2016, "Au cœur du dispositif de protection: processus d'adaptation et de renégociation du projet migratoire des mineurs isolés étrangers à Paris"; Éric Bocciarelli, 2017, "Mineurs non acceptés"; Xavier Crombé, 2019, "MIE/MNA."

¹⁹ Pierre-Edouard Weill, 2014, "Quand les associations font office de street-level bureaucracy. Le travail quotidien en faveur de l'accès au droit au logement opposable."

Private financing is increasing and public subsidies are decreasing in favour of financing by public commissions.²⁰ The logic of accompaniment via subsidies is giving way to one of steering and evaluation, which exacerbates competition between associations. The latter doubt the sustainability of their funding, move more towards short-term projects, and associations that rely on volunteers are struggling to sustain themselves.²¹ At the same time, the associative employees work in precarious conditions, with low wages and mainly short contracts.

Thus, faced with restrictive asylum and reception policies on the one hand, and with a hampered and supervised association functioning on the other, actors in contact with migrant people express a strong feeling of powerlessness, even of revolt in the face of the difficulties they encounter in carrying out their missions and the situations of extreme precariousness which they witness.²² Like members of other professions on the "front line of the fight against social exclusion," employees express their need for recognition.²³ Volunteers and employees are caught up in various paradoxes and try, in their activities, to remain in line with their ideals,²⁴ which the associative structure as a whole must also do. Three dimensions are constitutive of associations and must be articulated: the project, the organisation, and the action.²⁵ The project corresponds to the missions and ambitions of the association. The organisation refers to its internal functioning, be it teams of employees or volunteers. The actions are developed to carry out the project.

As part of the IMPCoV project, we questioned the impact of the health crisis on each of these three dimensions – project, organisation, and action – but also on the links between them. We sought to identify and qualify the types of change occurring at the organisational level and in the daily actions of the associative structures, paying particular attention to the different temporalities. The challenge was also to understand how the associative actors perceived these changes, whether or not they were in line with their project.

²⁰ Viviane Tchernonog, 2012, "Le secteur associatif et son financement."

"Associations may be subject to the law of public procurement in several cases. Pursuant to 2° of Article L. 1211-1 of the Code de la commande publique, an association is a contracting authority if it has been created specifically to satisfy general interest needs having a character other than industrial or commercial, on the condition that its activity is financed mainly by a contracting authority, that its management is subject to controls by a contracting authority or that its administrative, management or supervisory authority is composed of members, more than half of whom are appointed by a contracting authority. Because of the nature of their missions and their dependency on entities of public law, associations meeting these conditions are subject to the same rules and must therefore comply with the principles of public order." <https://www.code-commande-publique.com/associations-fondations-pouvoirs-adjudicateurs-externalisez-vos-marches/> accessed on 31/12/2021.

²¹ Matthieu Hély, 2009, *Les métamorphoses du monde associatif*.

²² Carolina Kobelinsky, 2012, "Il n'y a que l'expulsion à l'horizon"; Sarah Przybyl, 2017, "Où accueillir les mineurs non accompagnés en France?"

²³ Abraham Frassen, 1999, "Les travailleurs du non-marchand: héros et victimes."

²⁴ Isabelle Rigoni and Chantal Crenn, 2020, "Les mineurs isolés étrangers originaires d'Afrique subsaharienne en Gironde. Protection de l'enfance, accès à l'éducation et à l'alimentation."

²⁵ Julien Bernet et al., 2016, "La gestion des associations."

Constructing an analytical methodology of change

To examine the effects of Covid-19 and the changes brought about by the management of the pandemic, it was necessary to go beyond a presentist approach to phenomena²⁶ and a reading of the pandemic that is "centred on the present and experienced instantaneously."²⁷ We therefore considered the convolutions and intermingling of different temporalities in the analysis of processes of change by studying the trajectories of associations²⁸ and their networks. Associations are effectively entities that interact with different actors in a territorialised relational system, which can be marked by relationships of power and domination. The objective was to reconstruct trajectories and networks on a long enough timeline in order to capture the "before" and "during" of the health crisis.

We used the grid below to categorise the nature and impact of the changes. Firstly, in an evolving approach to replace the events that took place in the trajectories of associations and establish whether they caused adjustments, adaptations or breakdowns in practices. Secondly, in a forward-looking approach to analyse whether the associative actors believe that these changes are provisional, transitory or definitive.

Table 1: Categorisation of the analysis of change

<i>Temporal approach to change</i>	EVOLVING			PROSPECTIVE		
<i>Nature of change</i>	ADJUSTEMENT	ADAPTATION	BREAKDOWN	PROVISIONAL	TRANSITORY	DEFINITIVE
<i>Impact/manifestation of change</i>	Little or no change in practices / modification to ensure the continuity of associative action	Innovation in practices/ Seizing opportunities (windfall effects)	Suspension, blockage, immobilisation, interruption, delays, impediments	Reversible, momentary, alterable change, with possible backtracking	Momentary change, but which gives rise to new configurations / new methods of functioning	Irreversible, unalterable change, no backtracking possible

Based on this categorisation, the analysis of changes in associative practices allows us to estimate the effects of Covid-19 on volunteers and employees, whilst taking into account the structural limitations of the reception and support system in France in which associations play a part.

²⁶ François Hartog, 2003, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps.*

²⁷ Anne Rasmussen, Gabriel Girard, and Caroline Izambert, 2021, "Le temps long des épidémies."

²⁸ Claire Bidart, 2006, "Crises, décisions et temporalités"; Valentine Hélaridot, 2006, "Parcours professionnels et histoires de santé: une analyse sous l'angle des bifurcations."

Methodology

Three associations in Montpellier to help migrants

In our research, we favoured an entry into the field by means of associative structures. On the one hand, the narratives of volunteers and employees allowed us to situate the Covid-19 experience in the long timeframe of associative and public action in the field of reception and integration. On the other hand, the associations facilitated our meetings with young migrants.

Within the Montpellier community working with migrants, we worked with three collectives affiliated with national associations: the Red Cross, La Cimade and RESF. They differ in their methods of action and their seniority in the territory.

La Cimade's project²⁹ is to defend the rights of migrants and refugees, and to support them throughout the migration process. The group of 11 volunteers with whom we worked in Montpellier provided French classes to young UAMs in their accommodation. The young people were managed by another association appointed by the department. The La Cimade project was developed following an agreement with one of the association's educators working in the hotel and took place between September 2020 and June 2021. La Cimade volunteers worked in pairs and offered French classes and other activities (podcast workshops) to generate dialogue and social connections. Unlike the rest of the Montpellier team in La Cimade (working with adults), this group of volunteers was mostly composed of people who had had little or no associative experience before starting the mission with the young UAMs.

In Montpellier, La Cimade works closely with RESF34.³⁰ Created in 2006 at the initiative of La Cimade volunteers, this organisation, which was composed of approximately 45 active members at the time of the survey,³¹ shares the premises of the Cimade. Some volunteers are also members of several associations. The RESF34 project is to accompany young foreigners. Most of them are isolated in their administrative procedures, as well as in their access to education and accommodation. The organisation of RESF34 is different from other associations because the volunteer group operates in networks without hierarchies, with roles being attributed according to the skills and inclinations of each member. Each volunteer, having adhered to the network's common charter, is able to speak on behalf of RESF and take a position. The RESF34 volunteers welcome the public during weekly meetings and accompany young people on a case-by-case basis. They establish relationships of trust and take care of a small number of young people in an individualised way, particularly accompanying them in their educational or vocational training and in their access to housing.

²⁹ Association created in 1939.

³⁰ The Réseau Éducation Sans Frontières was created in 2004 in Paris by a collective of teachers and parents of students to support the regularisation of undocumented students.

³¹ Approximately fifteen members manage the weekly Wednesday opening hours.

Concerning the Red Cross,³² we worked with a pilot scheme for the resettlement of young refugees which aimed to accompany the aid-recipients throughout their integration journey in France.³³ Being under 25 years old, these young people encountered particular problems, which led the Direction Générale des Étrangers en France (DGEF) to want to develop specific programmes devoted to them within existing refugee resettlement programmes³⁴ funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The DGEF launched a joint reflection with the Red Cross to set up this pilot programme in Montpellier, which began in June 2019 and ended in June 2021 (the project was originally planned to last for 14 months, and was due to end in October 2020, but was extended as a result of the health crisis - we will come back to this later). The Red Cross put together a team of six employees composed of social workers, French teachers and specialists in occupational integration.³⁵ The team’s composition reflects the Red Cross’s desire to articulate French language learning and professional integration. The team built its own network in Montpellier in order to mobilise local resources to support mainly the cultural, social and professional integration of young people. We note that the novelty of the programme, “parachuted” into the Hérault by national management, to use the words of the team, induced an additional workload at the beginning of the scheme. In addition to its missions amongst young people, the team had to carve out a space for itself in the city, establish collaborations and create a dialogue with various stakeholders.

A participatory and qualitative methodology

Advocating a micro-social approach, the IMPCoV project focused on analysing the discourses and representations of the protagonists in the field (volunteers, employees, young migrants) and creating spaces for listening and exchanging practices. Our approach, combining participatory research, capitalisation and intermediation, was built with the protagonists and over the course of the data collection. This allowed us to reflect on the role of the researcher in participatory research and in a live research context.

We tried to establish a horizontal relationship between associative actors and researchers so that everyone benefited from their participation in the research project. We advocated for the equal recognition of everyone’s knowledge by seeking to eliminate asymmetries between researchers and participants.

³² Association, law of 1901, recognised public utility since 1945.

³³ The scheme welcomed 48 young people (43 Eritreans and five Somalis). These people arrived between July and December 2019 in Montpellier, and were housed in apartments in the private rental sector (apartments hosting an average of five young people – The Red Cross signed the rental leases).

³⁴ Resettlement programmes were set up by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the 1950s. Their objective is to recognise refugee status or subsidiary protection directly in the camps of migrant persons in the first countries of asylum, and to accompany the integration of these persons in the host countries.

³⁵ Initially the team was composed of 3 people, then it grew, and at the end of two people’s contracts, the Red Cross hired a new employee to conclude the last missions.

Firstly, we pursued an approach of co-construction of knowledge, or the production of so-called shared knowledge.³⁶ The objective was to involve the actors at the different stages of the research, from the elaboration of the methodological protocol to the analysis of our results. The restitution phase to the associations was therefore essential in this project, and it was built in several stages: i) collective restitution of the first results and discussion in the form of debates (these restitutions took place in November 2020) ; ii) gathering feedback on the written study report; and iii) organising times for exchange by means of a podcast, to which we will return later.³⁷ Secondly, individual contributions were not only analysed by the research team in order to answer our scientific questions, but also destined to become a catalyst for associative action.³⁸

Prior to the fieldwork, the methodological protocols and interview grids were sent to the contact persons of each association.³⁹ We called on them throughout the project to adapt our methods, and we relied on the associations' internal resources (RESF34, for example, shared reports on their activities) and existing mechanisms. With La Cimade, we added our methodological protocol to the podcast workshops which had already been set up by the volunteers with the young UAMs.

Striving to take the needs of the associative teams into account, we set up two kinds of collective workshops. The first workshops were aimed at collecting data.⁴⁰ They took the form of practical exercises and debates, and gave rise to collective productions⁴¹ with the Red Cross and RESF34 (mental map of actor systems and associations' trajectories). The second workshops aimed to present our results and debate them at the end of the project. The associations were convened separately to discuss issues specific to them.⁴²

³⁶ Chloé Buire, Lucile Garçon, and Esfandyar Torkaman Rad, 2019, "Partager la géographie. Regards croisés sur l'audiovisuel participatif."

³⁷ The IMPCoV project is embarking on a new phase of research based on these last two stages, a review of the written report and the podcast, in order to continue to develop new methods of participatory research.

³⁸ Cécile Fiorelli, Sophie Chaxel, and Pascale Moity Maïzi, 2014, "Les récits de vie: outils pour la compréhension et catalyseurs pour l'action."

³⁹ At the beginning of the research, when the relationship had just been created, the actors on the ground did not make any changes to the first documents sent. Little by little, as the relationship of trust became established, we learned to cooperate, and the employees and volunteers exchanged more about our scientific approach.

⁴⁰ In addition, we did not group the structures together so as not to exacerbate the biases inherent in this kind of exercise: distortions between different structures, asymmetries in the narratives, timidity towards the group, etc. Jenny Kitzinger, Ivana Markova, and Nikos Kalampalikis, 2004, "Qu'est-ce que les focus groups?"

⁴¹ Félix Lefebvre, Emmanuel Bonnet, and Florence Boyer, 2017, "Une méthode de cartographie participative des pratiques et représentations urbaines à Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)."

⁴² The ongoing health crisis also had an impact on this research, preventing us from conducting a collective workshop of this kind with the volunteers of La Cimade. French classes were cancelled for several weeks because of Covid-19 cases at the hotel where the youth were staying. Since our priority was to carry out focus groups with the UAM youth, as soon as possible, we prioritised them during the collective workshop with the volunteers.

Together with the Red Cross, we reflected on how to capitalise on the experiences of the pilot resettlement scheme in the context of the health crisis, and how to think about the aftermath. With RESF34, we reflected on the lessons to be learned from the management of the pandemic for migrants, as well as on the future of associative and activist activities. With La Cimade, the restitution workshop created a dialogue between the volunteers after the end of the project for FLI (French language integration) courses for UAM youth (some continued to be involved with La Cimade with adults, while others stopped), and enabled them to learn from their shared experience. These workshops put the discourses of employees and volunteers into perspective and, in general, enabled a reflection on the system of reception and accompaniment, its limits and its avenues of improvement, and on the renewal of practices of each protagonist.

In total, between March and November 2021, we carried out:

- Five observations within the associative structures
- An observation in one of the apartments of young refugees accompanied by the Red Cross
 - 24 individual interviews with volunteers, employees and young refugees accompanied by the Red Cross
 - A collective workshop with the Red Cross team
 - A collective workshop with the RESF34 team
 - Two focus groups around podcast workshops with young UAMs
 - Three restitution workshops with the members of each association.

The interviews with employees, volunteers and young isolated migrants⁴³ were structured according to the stages of the health crisis (first lockdown, second lockdown, etc., up to the time of the interview), to enable people to express their reality and experiences, and to get reflexive feedback on whether or not they impacted on their working methods and conditions.

Almost all of the individual interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. The audio material enabled us to make an audio film with the support of the team of the MSH-SUD audio-visual cluster. Visual methods⁴⁴ played a dual role in our research, both to collect data and to present the results in order to inform a debate with the protagonists in question. Through the prism of Covid-19, the audio film addresses an aspect of associative reality, the accompanying-accompanied relationship, from the point of view of volunteers and employees. It offers a moment of immersion in the world of associative actors who recount their experience of engagement.

⁴³ We only met young men in the field.

⁴⁴ We use the term visual methods as defined by Alain Bouldoires, Michaël Meyer and Fabien Reix 2017, "Introduction, Méthodes visuels: définition et enjeux." These methods are not restricted to the still or animated image – its use is not exclusive – but also include audio. "Although imperfect (speaking of 'audio-visual methods' would seem more accurate), the term "visual methods" has been retained in view of its institutionalisation in the Anglo-Saxon academic world" (ibid.).

This audio medium then allows us to question the responsibility of associative structures in the mental and emotional support of employees and volunteers. We inscribe the realisation of this audio film in a logic of creation-mediation as proposed by Laura Corsi and Chloé Buire.⁴⁵ The final product is aimed at respondents, and all those who share their experiences or are interested in them. The sharing of the results with the respondents is essential because their feedback enables us to adjust and enrich the analyses in order to continue this research project.⁴⁶

Results

Adjustments and adaptations in associations' actions and organisation

Based on the analysis of the associations' trajectories and networks, we observed both adjustments and adaptations in their actions and their organisation following the health crisis (Table 1).

Firstly, the associations adjusted their daily practices from the first lockdown. Volunteers and employees followed national guidelines, and within their local teams, they developed their own initiatives. They quickly set up health protocols, and started using digital tools (or strengthened their use) for remote communication between volunteers and employees, and with the aid-recipients. For youth groups, the structures favoured the use of the WhatsApp and Facebook groups, allowing them to maintain contact and/or attend French courses remotely, by sending exercises and resources online. The associations also organised videoconference meetings between accompanying actors, aimed at organising the continuation of their activities, but also to maintain a social link, especially with the volunteers who were isolated in quarantine. Following the first lockdown, and the reopening of the associative premises for all, the use of digital tools gradually decreased, but this experience gave rise to new reflections. In particular, RESF34 volunteers questioned how to best integrate digital tools into their daily practices to exchange information or resources, to train new recruits amongst volunteers, or to digitise the files of the accompanied youths. The team met with several obstacles and doubts: the need for time to train all members in the use of these tools; convincing reluctant parties; remaining in line with the associative project and not dehumanising the relationship with the aid-recipients by making excessive use of digital tools.

Secondly, the daily missions of the associations were adapted to deal with new situations of precariousness induced by the health crisis. For example, to respond to the food emergencies of young migrants, RESF34 set up food distribution systems by mobilising a large inter-associative network. Beyond the first lockdown, the associations were able to mobilise and establish collaborations with new partners, even in the case of the team of Red Cross employees who, despite their lack of long-term presence in Montpellier, managed to join forces with training and employment support organisations.

⁴⁵ Laura Corsi and Chloé Buire, 2019, "Géographies audiovisuelles."

⁴⁶ *ibidem*.

The associations were also able to appropriate this crisis to strengthen their projects and carry them out. The Red Cross team was able to obtain additional funds to extend the resettlement scheme for young refugees by pointing to the difficulties inherent in the health crisis in terms of accompanying the aid-recipients (suspension of French courses, difficulties in accessing employment, etc.). According to the team, Covid-19 was used as a pretext to extend a scheme which had been developed over too short a period of time, and which was ill-adapted to the time scales of the integration of young refugees. Although they still did not have enough time, these extra months were necessary for several missions.

These various adjustments and adaptations highlight the strength of the volunteers' commitment to continue their actions, and that of the employees who were not content to carry out their mission in "substandard way," as they were required to do by their management in the context of the pandemic. In the case of La Cimade volunteers, it should be noted that their project of French courses for UAMs, originally planned to start in March 2020, was postponed to October 2020 due to the health crisis (the initial project of courses for young UAMs was run by several associations). The new volunteers⁴⁷ began their actions during the pandemic, and the adjustments and adaptations related to the health crisis struck them as less restrictive. They were more affected by the impact of the crisis when they could not get to the youth shelter due to Covid-19 cases. The accompanying actors from the three structures explained to us their frustration about losing contact with the aid-recipients. As soon as possible, the in-person French courses were resumed, the associations' offices reopened, and despite the restrictions, the accompanying actors travelled to see the young people. Human contact and a presence on the ground are the very essence of social work for the employees of the Red Cross, and of the volunteer commitment of the RESF34 and La Cimade members.

The accompanying actors therefore fought from the first lockdown, and throughout the health crisis, to carry out – to the best of their ability – their actions of assistance and accompaniment and to maintain contact with young people. However, this management was accompanied by stress, an additional workload and new frustrations.

Breakdowns and the reimposition of power relationships

In addition to the temporary adjustments and adaptations of associative practices, the health crisis has had disruptive effects on the organisation of associations and their links with their networks of actors.

Firstly, various collaborations with local partners (especially in the cultural field) did not "survive" the health crisis, especially in the case of the Red Cross. Some collaborations never resumed after the forced closure of the first lockdown, and the breakdown proved definitive; this, in addition to the direct impact of the crisis, can be explained by the recent presence of the association on the territory of Montpellier.

⁴⁷ We refer to the volunteers of La Cimade where the volunteer team was exclusively composed of women.

Secondly, the relationships with the Hérault Prefecture have become more complex. Before the pandemic, the dialogue was fragile, but it existed. Several associations, including RESF34, had obtained quarterly meetings to defend the cause of young migrants, and also denounced the methods of the prefectural reception that required appointments to be booked electronically, even though "any administration is required to provide an alternative to the dematerialised procedure."⁴⁸ The Red Cross team, meanwhile, told us about the tensions they encountered at the beginning of the scheme with the Prefecture, which was reluctant to welcome a new group of refugees in Montpellier. The dialogue had improved over the course of the programme. But as of March 2020, the asylum application process was suspended and the prefectural offices were closed. Their access became restricted, and in order to "facilitate" the procedures, the dematerialisation of the appointments became generalised. Obtaining an appointment has become more difficult, blocking the administrative trajectories of some migrant people, sometimes leading to serious situations: administrative irregularity, loss of accommodation, food insecurity. Associations are now faced with more difficulties in defending cases in the context of an overburdened Prefecture. According to many accompanying actors, Covid-19 was effectively used to legitimise measures that exacerbate the dehumanisation of the prefectural reception, and to further diminish individual freedoms. This dehumanisation has not imposed itself since the pandemic, but is rather based on a pre-existing organisation which handicaps marginalised populations on the pretext of optimising administrative services. Thus, in many respects, the Covid-19 event appears to have had a "windfall effect" for the Prefecture, a way to reimpose relationships of power and domination.

By imposing their own rules of the game, public authorities have restricted associations. Those who are recognised in the territory for their strongly assertive political position have sometimes found themselves ejected from current programmes and no longer able to carry out their actions. The group of volunteers at La Cimade working with young UAMs was renewed during the summer of 2021 by the association mandated by the department in charge of youth in the place of accommodation. French courses are now provided by an association that La Cimade volunteers consider to be less "politicised".

These initial results show that Covid-19 has exposed precarious balances and exacerbated pre-existing problems and situations. The deterioration of the relationship with the prefectorial administration further reduces the associations' margins of manoeuvre within a reception system in which they already occupied a peripheral and subordinate position, even though they are alone in managing a number of services for migrant people. Subject to the new requirements of the Prefecture in the context of a health crisis, they are forced to take on time-consuming tasks and direct their actions to deal with the emergency, jeopardising the balance between the three constituent dimensions of the associations: organisation, project and method of action.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Défenseur des droits, 2020, "Décision du Défenseur des droits n°2020-142."

⁴⁹ Julien Bernet et al., 2016, "La gestion des associations."

The need to escape restrictive time scales and be heard

Beyond highlighting the different types of change related to the health crisis, our fieldwork allowed us to discuss their functioning, project, actions and organisations with the associative actors, and to get their feedback as individuals and as members of a collective. We focused on their experience of the pandemic, but also their involvement in the associative structure in a general way, which allowed us to go beyond the strict focus on the Covid-19 event, to situate it in the broader time scales of the reception and asylum system, and of associative action.

The RESF34 volunteers explained to us their difficulty in conducting "substantive actions," including advocacy, in the face of daily emergencies; for example, when young people are subject to a decision of the Prefecture obliging them to leave the French territory (OQTF), when accommodation needs to be found or, as in the first lockdown, when emergency food assistance needs to be arranged.

The La Cimade volunteers were affected by the management problems of the accommodation structure in which they were working. They were caught up in a network of actors in the grip of several conflicts of interest, which affected their activity. The young UAMs (whose supervision, as explained above, is managed by an association mandated by the Prefecture, whose scope is national and whose team is almost exclusively composed of employees) live there with people hosted by the 115, supported by another associative structure composed of employees. In the context of Covid-19, the relationship between the two "associations"⁵⁰ that manage different and heterogeneous groups within the same hotel has become strained, which has complicated the interventions of La Cimade volunteers (for example, rooms not being available for classes). In addition, several volunteers raised the issue of struggling not to be overwhelmed in the face of the young people's life stories. Often inexperienced, they had to learn to manage their emotions and maintain an appropriate distance from their learners.⁵¹

The employees of the Red Cross pointed out the contradiction, even the incompatibility, between the time scale of their mission and the time provided by the pilot scheme for the resettlement of young refugees. In 14 months, the team was initially required to provide an integration mission covering support in a care path, learning French, professional training and a stable accommodation solution at the end of the programme. Although a 10-month extension has helped to ease the race against time, the success of the project has largely depended on the "exceptional" work of employees – to use the terms used by the project leader – who have far exceeded their job description. In this case, this "exceptional" over-investment was added to the ordinary operational methods, which were already subject to an obligation to provide results, given the funding allocated to employees.⁵²

⁵⁰ Matthieu Hély, 2009, *Les métamorphoses du monde associatif*.

⁵¹ This aspect is addressed in the audio film from the IMPCoV research project.

⁵² Matthieu Hély, 2009, *Les métamorphoses du monde associatif*.

It is difficult for associations like the Red Cross to offer long-term follow-up for accompanied young people, while their access to rights and employment are conditioned by time-consuming administrative procedures.⁵³ Thus, the combination of both structural and cyclical limits appeared as a source of frustration and disappointment for employees, especially for those who were forced to end their contract before the end of the scheme. Subject to a project-by-project operational method, the contracts are signed in the short term and do not allow for the support mission to be pursued until the autonomy of the aid-recipients is guaranteed. Added to this is a lack of recognition, since they expressed their bitterness with regard to a hierarchy (on a national scale) that gave them no feedback at the end of the programme, nor did they highlight the important work done to maintain the scheme.

No longer being able to ensure advocacy actions, or being restricted in one's ability to accompany migrant people in a complete process of integration, can be a source of frustration and lead to a feeling of helplessness on behalf of the accompanying actors, especially the less experienced ones. Our various exchanges highlighted several of their expectations: the need to be listened to; to benefit from psychological support and an analysis of practices; to detach themselves from the daily emergencies and the short term perspective in order to take a step back; to be recognised in their paid or volunteer activities.

RESF34 volunteers no longer have time to debrief at the end of the shift, and no such initiative ever existed within the Red Cross resettlement programme. Although La Cimade has implemented a psychological support system, the Psymade, which is open to foreigners and accompanying persons, those we met did not necessarily make use of it. This lack of use of the existing system can be explained by the internal divisions between the different groups of volunteers. The group working with the UAMs was separate from the rest of the La Cimade team, carrying out their mission outside of the associative premises, and having joined the association recently (mostly in the context of the health crisis and at the beginning of the project with young UAMs).

The individual interviews, and especially the collective and restitution workshops, were the occasion to address all these dimensions, and to review the associative practices and the actions that were carried out. Firstly, the accompanying actors, especially from La Cimade, exchanged about the management of their emotions, and their way of responding (verbally or otherwise) to the young people's stories, which were often painful and shocking. Secondly, the employees and volunteers were able to engage in a retrospective and reflexive perspective with their ways of working and their past decisions, some of which were made in haste, thereby impacting their projects and actions. This also allowed them to question how they interact with their partners and, in the case of RESF34, to think about how to better prepare for the arrival of new volunteers, to promote their integration and to motivate their involvement, perhaps by modernising some of the in-house tools to provide the information and knowledge necessary for their engagement.

⁵³ Shoshana Fine, H  l  ne Soup  ios-David, and Alexia Duvernoy, 2018, "Rapport National - NIEM. L'int  gration des b  n  ficiaires d'une protection internationale en France"; Davide Tisato, 2017, "Le temps interstitiel des demandeurs d'asile. Strat  gies de contre-pouvoir et r  appropriation partielle d'une temporalit   impos  e."

Finally, these moments of collective exchange were an opportunity for all structures to become aware of the efforts and self-sacrifice of each party to carry out the actions of the association, but also and above all to verbalise it.

Conclusion

Through the mobilisation of participatory tools and the creation of spaces for exchange, the IMPCoV research project has allowed associative actors to state their needs and to give reflexive feedback about their experiences in the context of the pandemic, and as volunteers or employees. Throughout the fieldwork, we were encouraged by the idea of the relevance of creating time and dedicated spaces, through research, to feed the self-reflection of associative actors, value their initiatives and encourage them to deconstruct their practices.

By constructing a framework for the analysis of change, we were able to observe that volunteers and employees made various adjustments to deal with the first emergencies related to the health crisis, and that they have adapted their practices. Although these adjustments and adaptations may have been provisional, they have enabled reflections about associations' internal organisation and ways of doing things. In this sense, we can assume that the changes made to continue to carry out the missions may lead to renewed operations after the health crisis. The accompanying actors also sought to establish new relationships, or mobilised a network of actors which was already in place. However, the health crisis has led to disruptions in their networks, some of which they consider to be definitive.

The analysis of changes of all kinds demonstrates how the response of accompanying actors to Covid-19 – whether volunteers or employees – is due to the strength of their convictions and the meaning they give to their commitment. Their willingness to continue and carry out their mission, even as Covid-19 complicated an already severely degraded ordinary functioning, has made it possible to overcome the difficulties and risks induced by the health crisis, and to maintain the associations' projects. However, the analysis also showed the limits of the innovation, adaptation and resistance capacities of the accompanying actors. Their experience bears witness, on the one hand, to a temporal hiatus in the implementation of their mission, the incompatibility between the short time scale of the project – subject to the requirements of the emergency and the obligation of short-term results – and the longer time scale required for the real support and integration of migrant people. On the other hand, it reveals the disconnection between employees in the field and their hierarchy, a dimension which has also been exacerbated by the health crisis. The employees alone "on the front lines" expressed a feeling of loneliness or even abandonment. As such, horizontal associative structures, such as RESF34, are distinguished by a greater organisational flexibility and their ability to form a coherent whole, relying on the skills of each member. Finally, the experience of the accompanying actors bears witness to the psychosocial cost as a corollary of their commitment.

Our research therefore corroborates other research, using qualitative methods, into social workers and volunteers during the health crisis. The results of the Covidexp Homeless research

project highlighted the importance of considering the mental health of volunteers,⁵⁴ as could be done in the case of occupational health, in order to help them navigate the risks inherent in their practices⁵⁵ and to recognise their need for peer helpers.

This study, which can also be connected to other research, also raises the question of the reception and asylum system in France, and the outsourcing of many public services to associations. As we have shown, volunteers and employees struggle to carry out their daily actions, hampered by organisational and administrative obstacles, and to maintain the harmony between their practices, their associative project and their ideals. Associative actors must adapt to the standards imposed by their funders and/or the administrations with which they interact. The feedback from volunteers and employees about the pandemic, and their more comprehensive demands, deserve the attention of the public authorities and civil society as a whole, especially when power relationships are reimposed on them by public actors.

Finally, this study contributes to a broader debate in the humanities and social sciences on the place and role of researchers in the field, and as observers of "extraordinary" periods such as the Covid-19 pandemic. These moments of crisis tend to be instrumentalised and decontextualised in public and media debates, with a sometimes defeatist discourse about the increased vulnerability of fragile populations, in contradiction with the evolution of public policies (in this case migration). In this context, participatory and qualitative research, carried out as close as possible to real-life situations, is all the more relevant. In this sense, we advocate a micro-social approach in contact with the field, which allows both to fuel and to build research and action, enabling each party to take the necessary distance from their own practices. In this way, learning, knowledge and replicable methods can be drawn from this research, to enable associations, in this case, to improve the supervision, psycho-social risk-taking and practices of volunteers and employees for better project implementation.

⁵⁴ Volunteers are subjected to "often hectic and life-changing work patterns, emotionally and socially demanding tasks, ethical conflicts, feelings of powerlessness, exposure to infectious risks, violence, etc." Olivia Nevissas et al., 2020, "Les personnes en situation de sans-abrisme face à la Covid-19." p. 2.

⁵⁵ *ibidem.* p. 2.

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