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# Civic service by and for refugees: integration through volunteering?

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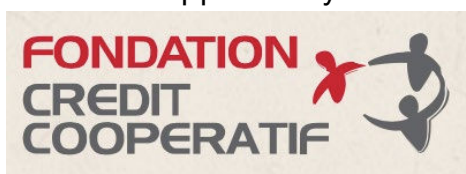
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## Résumé

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Depuis sa création en 2010, le programme de service civique a connu de nombreuses adaptations à des publics spécifiques. En juin 2018, la Délégation interministérielle pour l'accueil et l'intégration des réfugié·es (Diair) propose un programme dédié aux jeunes bénéficiaires de la protection internationale. Cette politique publique vise alors à faciliter l'intégration des jeunes migrant·es par des formes de mise au travail (quasi) gratuit, au service de l'intérêt général, menant à la coopération entre des associations traditionnellement en charge de l'accompagnement des migrant·es et celles, spécialistes du service civique, dites d'éducation populaire. De fait, elle favorise leur insertion professionnelle, quasi impossible sans cette prise en charge individualisée. Mais par l'assignation à des tâches et des missions qui les préparent à une insertion professionnelle dans des métiers désignés comme « manuel », le service civique reproduit la division raciale du marché de l'emploi.

**Mots-clés :** plateforme interassociative, préprofessionnalisation, politiques d'intégration, paternalisme, antiracisme pédagogique.

## Abstract

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Since 2010, the French "civic service" programme has been adapted to specific populations. In June 2018, the French Interministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees (DIAIR) proposed a specific volunteering programme dedicated to young beneficiaries of international protection. This public policy, therefore, aims to facilitate the integration of young migrants through forms of (quasi) free work, serving the public interest, leading to cooperation between non-profit organisations traditionally in charge of supporting migrants and others, specialists in "civic service", known as "popular education". In fact, it promotes their vocational integration, almost unreachable without this individualised care. But by assigning them to tasks and missions that prepare them for vocational integration into jobs designated as "manual", this specific "civic service" reproduces the racial division of the labour market.

**Keywords:** non-profit organisations, professionalisation, migration policies, paternalism, anti-racism.

# Civic service by and for refugees: integration through volunteering?

## Introduction

In June 2018, the French Interministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees (DIAIR) announced the introduction of a civic service programme based on action in aid of refugees in partnership with the French Civic Service Agency (ASC). To this end, DIAIR recommended the creation of 1,500 civic service missions for young French people working with migrants, as well as 500 missions for young refugees or those under subsidiary protection.

The French civic service scheme is intended to enable young people aged 16 to 25 to engage with a non-profit organisation (associations, local authorities, educational establishments and, more recently, public services) as part of a general interest mission, for a period of 6 to 12 months, 24 hours a week minimum (up to 48 hours for an adult), in return for an allowance of €580 per month, 80% funded by the French government, and minimum social protection including social security, valid but non-contributory "pension quarters" (contributions equivalent to three months' paid work), and exemption from unemployment insurance contributions. Volunteers can be assigned directly to the organisation, or "placed at the disposal" of a non-profit organisation via an intermediary system. Underpinned by a language of citizenship and a special vocabulary, volunteering is distinct from employment: non-subordinated, and compensated rather than remunerated, it is covered by the French National Service Code rather than the French Labour Code. It assumes a selfless act on the part of young people who quench their "thirst for commitment", in the words of [French civil servant and former head of Emmaüs France] Martin Hirsch<sup>1</sup>, who initiated the passage of the law through parliament. With its roots in cooperation programmes and the notion of conscientious objection<sup>2</sup>, this scheme is part of a drive to encourage young French people to demonstrate their commitment as members of the wider community<sup>3</sup> while developing their "employability".

While civic service is a common law provision that must be open equally to all young French people, with its primary objective to promote social diversity, it has undergone several changes since 2010, with the creation of specific provisions for target groups<sup>4</sup>. Since its

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<sup>1</sup> Maud Simonet, *Le travail bénévole. Engagement citoyen ou travail gratuit ?* Paris : La Dispute, Travail et salariat, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Florence Ihaddadene, "De l'instruction militaire à l'éducation populaire, que reste-t-il de l'objection de conscience dans le service civique ?" in *Mouvements*, 81, 2015, pp. 107-115.

<sup>3</sup> Florence Ihaddadene, *La marchandisation de l'engagement des jeunes, les « dérives » du service civique à la Ligue de l'enseignement*, doctoral thesis in sociology, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Adjustments are proposed for groups recognised as being in difficulty, referred to in French public policies as *Jeunes ayant moins d'opportunités* [disadvantaged young people]. For example, one civic service scheme for young people who have 'dropped out' of the school system allows them to return to school while carrying out a mission in the non-profit sector. Young people with disabilities are also eligible for the scheme up to the age of 30. Finally, partnerships with prison inclusion and probation

creation, the programme has been open to young foreign nationals lawfully resident in France for more than one year, with the notable exception of young Algerians, who are subject to a special legal regime created by an agreement of 27 December 1968. By widening eligibility for civic service, the French Equality and Citizenship Act of 27 January 2017 had already made it easier to receive refugees and foreign students. Although young foreign nationals previously had access to the scheme, they are now directly referred to the scheme by the structures in charge of supporting them once they acquire international protection status (asylum or subsidiary protection).

These non-profit and social entrepreneurship organisations use civic service as a potential means to integrate young newcomers. Similarly, popular education organisations, specialists in civic service activities, are now actively involved in policies to support migrants. The study of the civic service scheme targeted at refugees reveals the restructuring of public funding for social causes and the new ways in which different public policy initiatives (in this case, initiatives aimed at young people and migrants) work together. It also allows us to observe changes in the non-profit sector and, more generally, the transformation of the relationship between the public authorities and the social and solidarity economy organisations responsible for assisting refugees.

According to some sociological studies, some migrant reception policies have been delegated to the non-profit sector<sup>5</sup>. This research examines the involvement of migrants in volunteering and voluntary work programmes in Italy<sup>6</sup>, Switzerland<sup>7</sup> and Lebanon<sup>8</sup>. However, few studies compare policies to encourage involvement in these programmes and migrant integration policies in France. Nevertheless, these volunteering and voluntary work schemes raise several questions, including regarding the field of formal employment and citizenship/nationality. The legal status of migrants (asylum seekers, subsidiary protection, undocumented migrants, and refugees) excludes them legally or formally from the labour market, while their age (18 to 25) prevents them from accessing certain social benefits, mainly RSA [the French minimum income allowance]. For these young people, the incitement to take part in a civic service scheme intersects with an injunction to demonstrate their citizenship and their ongoing integration into the host society<sup>9</sup>. Unlike the male migrants studied by Simone Di Cecco and Agnès Aubry, the young people doing civic service have already obtained international protection status. In fact, civic service is not linked (or at least not in

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services have resulted in the development of 'parole' missions. Since the presidency of François Hollande, the civic service scheme is part of the development of *Grands programmes* [large-scale government-backed projects]: each ministry, in line with its objectives, proposes one or more civic service missions that correspond to its social and political priorities. The *Grand programme* for social affairs, health and women's rights, for example, offers missions to "combat exclusion, facilitate access to rights and community engagement for people with disabilities and people in precarious situations" and "promote equality between men and women".

<sup>5</sup> Mathilde Pette, "Venir en aide aux migrants dans le Calais", in *Savoir/Agir*, 36(2), 2016, pp. 47-52.

<sup>6</sup> Simone Di Cecco. *Les transformations du travail migrant en temps de crise : Inclusion différentielle, humanitarisme et utilitarisme en Italie*, Doctoral thesis in sociology, Université de Paris, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Agnès Aubry, *Gouverner les « indésirables » par le bénévolat Sociologie politique de la mise au travail gratuit*, Doctoral thesis in political science, Université de Lausanne, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Leila Drif, "Être réfugié et "volontaire" : Les travailleurs invisibles des dispositifs d'aide internationale", in *Critique internationale*, 81(4), 2018, pp. 21-42.

<sup>9</sup> Sébastien Chauvin and Blanca Garcés-Mascreñas. "Becoming Less Illegal: Deservingness Frames and Undocumented Migrant Incorporation," in *Sociology Compass*, 8(4), 2014, pp. 422-432.

the same way) to an implicit promise of regularisation highlighted in Simone Di Cecco's thesis<sup>10</sup>. Instead, volunteering is very much part of their "integration" programme, definitions of which vary, as shown below.

In France, the "Contrat d'intégration républicaine" [Republican Integration Contract], created in 2016, encourages immigrants to sign up for a "pathway" of "civic" and "language" training. The report to the French Prime Minister, led by LREM [La République en Marche] MP Aurélien Taché in 2018<sup>11</sup>, suggested including volunteering experiences in this pathway. But this is not a new idea. Although implemented in other countries over several years, it assumes a form of quid pro quo for integration and contributes, through an implicit promise of naturalisation and vocational inclusion, to make the passage through (virtually) free work a "rule of the game", more or less institutionalised, or at the very least internalised<sup>12</sup>. In the words of Agnès Aubry, the field study makes it possible "to take a fresh look at some of the constraints that govern volunteering, against a background of the neo-liberalisation of discourse and practice relating to work and citizenship"<sup>13</sup>. Whereas the researcher noted that "the neo-liberal norms that apply to voluntary work are tied in with the meritocratisation of access to legal status", which, through the internalisation of norms by migrants, makes it possible to rethink the boundary between "forced voluntary work and volunteer voluntary work", our study proposes, at the intersection between the sociology of voluntary work and the injunction to integrate, to extend these observations within the context of a meritocratisation of access to integration.

We will start with a detailed presentation of the methods used for the field study before moving on to discuss public policy on volunteering for migrants and its underlying assumptions. We will then analyse the work performed by refugee volunteers to reflect on the reconfiguration of what we describe as a division of volunteer labour. Lastly, we will explore the effects of this public policy and consider it in the context of more general developments in public policy on integrating migrants into French society.

## Methodology

This research, which began in September 2019 as part of a Red Cross Foundation postdoctoral fellowship, is based on two qualitative methods. Firstly, observation within structures that provide support to migrants and their reception as volunteers, and organisations where missions are performed. Secondly, interviews with French volunteers and refugees, but also with mission officers from the organisations that make them available and receive them. These data are examined in light of the grey literature on these schemes published by institutions or produced by non-profit organisations. The health crisis in 2020

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<sup>10</sup> Simone Di Cecco, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Aurélien Taché, Justin Babilotte, Catherine Hess, Sabine Fourcade, "72 propositions pour une politique ambitieuse d'intégration des étrangers arrivant en France", Rapport au Premier ministre, 2018, available at: <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/37165-72-propositions-pour-une-politique-ambitieuse-dintegration-des-etrange>

<sup>12</sup> Maud Simonet, *Travail gratuit : la nouvelle exploitation ?* Paris, Textuel, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Agnès Aubry, "Le bénévolat d'hommes migrants en Suisse : travail gratuit et mise à l'épreuve civique", in: *Critique internationale*, 2019, N° 84 n° 3. p. 164.

had a significant impact on data collection since ethnographic observations could no longer be carried out from the first lockdown onwards. Interviews were then carried out on-site or remotely, but it was no longer possible to visit the organisations, some of which had suspended their activities.

At a political and institutional level, interviews were conducted at two institutions responsible for the scheme: the Agence du service civique [or ASC, the French civic service agency] and the Délégation interministérielle à l'accueil et à l'intégration des réfugiés [the French Interministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees]. We met with representatives of decentralised government departments at regional level, for one of the regions observed, and at *département* level for two of the field sites, including one twice following a change of personnel. The other interviews are summarised below to present them succinctly and legibly depending on the non-profit organisation - on an anonymous basis - and the level at which the scheme was implemented.

Non-profit organisation	National	Local	Volunteers (refugees and non-refugees)
A	Head of public affairs for refugees	Director + Head of the Volont'R programme (and mentor) + Head of one refugee programme (and mentor)	2 group interviews: with 3 refugee volunteers + with 2 "non-refugee" volunteers + an interview with 1 refugee volunteer
B	Programmes manager + Civic service manager	Director at regional level + head of civic service at <i>département</i> level + head of the Volont'R programme at <i>département</i> level	
C	Programme manager	Regional development officer (and mentor) + regional delegate + in another region: the <i>département</i> director and the local project manager	4 volunteers (two refugees + two non-refugees)
D	Volunteering coordinator		
E	(level does not exist)	Two successive programme managers + 4 mentors from intermediary non-profits	3 refugee volunteers

## Public policy at the intersection between popular education and migration management.

The only overarching policy targeted at young people, civic service is regularly presented as the standard-bearer for policies on the social and vocational integration of young French people<sup>14</sup>. It lies at the crossroads between a range of policies, including youth policy, employment by non-profit organisations, the integration of young graduates and the professional development of low-skilled workers. Since 2020, it has been pivotal to the French government's "1 jeune, 1 solution" [one young person, one solution] plan, itself part of a plan to stimulate the economy following the lockdown, where it has ultimately been adopted as a

<sup>14</sup> Florence Ihaddadene, *La marchandisation de l'engagement des jeunes, les « dérives » du service civique à la Ligue de l'enseignement*, [Doctoral thesis in sociology], Paris Ouest Nanterre, 2018a.

vocational integration programme<sup>15</sup>. It is also regularly discussed in relation to its similarity to universal national service, currently under development. Internationally also volunteering can help support integration policies on international occupations for young graduates, development aid and even the managerialisation of local non-profit organisations<sup>16</sup>. The study of the Volont'R programme makes it possible to apply the analysis of the civic service to other policies (in this case, migration assistance policies) to understand its effects. We start by presenting the programme and putting it into its historical context to explain why it was created. We then look at the organisations involved in it and the emerging cooperation between non-profit organisations traditionally working in the field of popular education and those specialised in providing support to migrants.

### *The scheme: background and implementation*

In January 2018, the prefect Alain Régnier was appointed Délégué interministériel chargé de l'accueil et de l'intégration des réfugiés [Interministerial Delegate for the Reception and Integration of Refugees] (DIAIR) at the French Interior Ministry. Previously the Interior Ministry's point of contact for civic service development, he is well acquainted with the scheme and plays an active role as a member of its organising bodies. He was invited, as early as February 2018, during a steering committee meeting at the ASC, to discuss the advisability of launching a *Grand programme* linked to its new prerogatives. According to the chair of the ASC, this proposal reflects its "desire to ensure that its services, programmes and partners are best adapted to the situation in France, and also sometimes in Europe today<sup>17</sup>". ASC combined its experience with the engineering expertise and resources of DIAIR to organise the new "Volont'R" programme which, although mooted as early as June 2018<sup>18</sup>, was only officially launched on 26 October 2018. It organises the deployment of 2,000 civic service missions, 500 for young refugees and 1,500 for young French people engaged in a mission "in aid of refugees". The Volont'R programme provides reception structures with a budget of €1,000 per volunteer recruited under the programme.

A call for tenders was then issued to non-profit organisations able to receive these volunteers. Four non-profit organisations were appointed under a public procurement arrangement to co-organise the scheme: Unis-Cité, the Ligue de l'enseignement (major players in the organisation of civic service activities since its creation<sup>19</sup>) and two non-profit organisations with more experience in back-to-work placements and international voluntary work, Solidarités Jeunesse and Concordia, which joined forces as part of the initiative. The three structures set themselves the target of receiving 500 refugee volunteers in their first year, a target most failed to meet. They explain this comparative failure as the result of the delay in awarding the contract (the response was submitted in February) and the narrow pool

<sup>15</sup> Florence Ihaddadene, "Le service civique au service de l'"employabilité" des jeunes ?", *Revue Salariat*, n°1, published in October 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Florence Ihaddadene, "Politiques d'engagement ou d'employabilité ? Concurrences au sein des programmes de volontariat à Madagascar", *Critique internationale*, N° 81(4), 63-82, 2018b.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Béatrice Angrand, chair of the ASC, 2 March 2020

<sup>18</sup> URL: <https://accueil-integration-refugies.fr/2018/06/25/volont-r-le-grand-programme-national-de-service-civique-pour-les-refugies/> (23 mars 2020)

<sup>19</sup> Valérie Becquet, *L'expérience du service civil volontaire à Unis-Cité : Quels enseignements pour le service civique ?* Injep, 2011, and Florence Ihaddadene, 2018a, *op.cit.*



of young refugees they were able to recruit from. In 2021, of the 7,000 young people who took part in the programme, only 300 were refugees<sup>20</sup>. From 2020 onwards, the programme has been organised at regional level, with DIAIR leaving it up to the regions to select the assistance projects they wish to support. The "regionalisation" of the programme has enabled some structures to "spin-off" the scheme from a *département* level to other *départements*.

### *Cooperation between organisations with historically divergent missions*

In the field, the programme has fostered the creation of partnerships, networks and sometimes even platforms, promoting new forms of cooperation between organisations traditionally responsible for providing support to migrants and those more familiar with civic service, associated with popular education. Either by receiving volunteers (directly or as intermediaries) or providing popular education organisations with information on young people who might be suitable for the programme, non-profit organisations working in the field of migration are now better acquainted with civic service. They have made the scheme part of their toolset to promote the social and vocational integration of young refugees and, more recently, new arrivals<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, the management and implementation of the programme have been awarded, under a public procurement arrangement, to organisations historically responsible for voluntary work, which, according to the chair of the ASC, have a reputation for providing "good civic service". As a result, organisations previously responsible for policies targeted at migrants come into contact with youth policy institutions, and vice versa, and large popular education federations more used to holiday camps than queues at the prefecture are now involved in a public procurement arrangement organised by the Interior Ministry. When recruiting refugee volunteers, so-called popular education organisations turn to social workers and inclusion officers from the *Commission d'accès aux documents administratifs* ["Committee on Access to Administrative Documents"] (CADA) or *Centres d'hébergement et de réinsertion sociale* ["Accommodation and social rehabilitation centres"] (CHRS). They then form partnerships with non-profit organisations working in the field of migration (France Terre d'Asile, in particular).

This cooperation is particularly apparent in the interviews carried out regarding employee pathways. Most come from the professional networks of non-profit organisations that provide support to migrants and currently organise the Volont' R programme within popular education non-profit organisations. They share their pre-existing professional contacts with the non-profit organisation, helping to build bridges and networks. For these intermediary players pivotal to the implementation of the civic service scheme, public policy measures can be used to plug gaps in resources: either because insufficient money is allocated to migrant reception, or because other economic resources can be generated from cost-effective management of

<sup>20</sup> URL: <https://accueil-integration-refugies.fr/2021/03/17/programme-de-service-civique-volont-souvre-aux-jeunes-et-rangers-primo-arrivants/>. Since 2021, problems attracting a sufficient number of volunteers has led to a broadening of the eligibility criteria, to which we will now turn.

<sup>21</sup> Several non-profit organisations were already receiving refugee volunteers without benefiting from funds leveraged through a public procurement arrangement. This is true, for example, of a major non-profit organisation (Organisation E), which specialises in providing support to young migrants and which, since 2018, has offered young people under international protection the opportunity to take part in civic service activities alongside other schemes (accommodation for people unable to access social housing, vocational training, "solidarity" employers, etc.).

available funds, civic service can be used to fill funding gaps in other areas. For example, funds allocated to youth policy programmes are used to support assistance programmes for young migrants, for which it is increasingly difficult to obtain dedicated subsidies.

Generally, the programme budget covers the cost of a mission officer, who may also wear other hats<sup>22</sup> and contribute other resources (not just equipment) to the structure. The employee in charge of the Volont'R programme at one organisation also coordinated a network of employers prepared to take on refugees. In another organisation, an employee funded by the scheme was also in charge of a separate volunteering programme that did not receive refugee volunteers. The diverting of these funds is justified by a very strong belief in action in aid of young migrants, either as an expression of confidence in government schemes and the benefits of civic service or through the hope placed in actors from the lucrative private sector, who are capable of funding assistance for migrants. This belief, which we might describe as a "necessary fiction"<sup>23</sup>, also leads to excessive workloads and, ultimately, a high turnover. During the period covered by this study, the person responsible for the programme in several of the observed structures changed, sometimes twice. According to one employee at Organisation B, this means that partnerships, which remain fragile, must be constantly rebuilt. In this "world between worlds"<sup>24</sup> that helps integrate young beneficiaries of international protection, the social resources and information exchanged are mainly reliant on the individuals in question and generally do not extend beyond their involvement.

## What do volunteers do? Missions that reproduce the division of labour in non-profit organisations.

The Volont'R scheme is made available to young beneficiaries of international protection once they have acquired their status by the non-profit organisations that assist them (most often within CADAs [Administrative document access committees]) or by local missions. It functions as a transitional measure for people leaving the protection scheme, in the absence of employment or training opportunities (especially since young people under 25 are not eligible for RSA). As such, it is integral to social and occupational integration policies, which primarily take the form of (virtually) unpaid labour. An effective form of socialisation to the labour market they are about to enter, it is also a form of "quid pro quo" employment undertaken before they embark on the next stage - their integration into French society and adherence to its values, along with access to a job or training. For a better understanding of the programme's impact, we observed the work of volunteers concerning their reception structure. In practice, the division of labour is not unconnected with a certain reproduction of assignments prevailing in the labour market. And lastly, due to the material "emergency" facing these young people, the rhetoric of commitment is replaced by the rhetoric of vocational inclusion.

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<sup>22</sup> Florence Ihaddadene, 2018a, *op.cit*

<sup>23</sup> Dubet, F. (2008). *Faits d'école*. Paris : Éditions de l'EHESS

<sup>24</sup> Frédéric Balliere, *L'Entre-mondes de l'aide aux déboutés. Une reconfiguration de l'assistance aux marges de l'État*, Doctoral thesis in sociology, Université Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens, 2021.

*Avoiding refugee-specific missions in theory*

The ASC argues that the missions undertaken by young refugees should not be "specific to their refugee status", but instead "actual standard civic service missions". Justine Mesnard, responsible for civic service development in the public sector and for ministerial *grands programmes*, explains in an interview: "With DIAIR, when we were working on the agreement, we felt it was very important to really offer refugees missions that were not at all specific to refugee reception<sup>25</sup>." Several of the examples she gives are, in effect, missions regularly offered to young French people, such as distributing books to the elderly or sick, which often serve as "model" missions. The aim, she says, is to enable "refugees to step outside the environment they have been in since arriving in France". The chair of the ASC adds, "It's important, it's like people with disabilities, young disabled people on 'disabled' missions, and that's a bit of a risk, there are a lot of them, and I always say no, you absolutely have to offer them something else". She goes on to say that the programme is "also a very strong vector for integration because it puts [young refugees] on the same level as, I was going to say, the average young French person<sup>26</sup>."

Young refugees were offered a wide variety of civic service missions by the non-profit organisations observed as part of this study. Of the four structures studied, two operate as intermediaries, making available volunteers to other non-profit organisations while providing administrative support and, in the case of one of them, receiving funding from DIAIR. According to the chair of the ASC, the non-profit organisations selected to organise the scheme under a public procurement arrangement were chosen because they had prior knowledge of the civic service programme. In contrast, not all of them had previously been involved in policies to assist new arrivals. Instead, they address the issue as one affecting 'young people'. They adopt a rhetoric of interculturality, encounters, shared experiences, and social mixing as integration factors.

The implementation of a civic service for young refugees is integral to the organisation of the receiving non-profit. This means the scheme often reflects its structure. For Organisation C, the Volont'R programme is targeted at 11 young people out of 200 civic service volunteers. For Organisation E, it involved 13 young people at the start of the study, but there were no other volunteers. In contrast, out of Organisation B's 4,000-plus volunteers, there are only 30 or so refugee volunteers. Of the four non-profit organisations observed as part of this study (excluding Organisation D, which was not the subject of field observations), two had previously been engaged in migration policies (one as their main activity, the other as their secondary activity). Three claim to be directly involved in popular education; one focuses on Social Catholicism, another on the history of secularism. Two claim to be active in the social or social work fields, and another in international work and the advancement of peace. As regards the values and ideologies they advocate, two mention individual commitment or responsibility as the basis for their action, but all refer to social diversity or social mixing in their educational projects. None of the organisations observed as part of this study, whether engaged in a public procurement arrangement or not, can be considered as part of a protest

<sup>25</sup>Interview with Justine Mesnard, ASC, 2 March 2020.

<sup>26</sup>Interview with Béatrice Angrand, chair of the ASC, 2 March 2020

movement as defined by Mathilde Pette, i.e., one that publicly advocates the "struggle for rights"<sup>27</sup> by calling for the regularisation of undocumented migrants, or the abolition of border controls. Non-profit organisations covered by the public procurement arrangement primarily base their involvement on their participation in the civic service programme. In their public statements, they subscribe to the goals pursued by the ASC and present civic service as a means to combat discrimination, which can qualify them to apply for regional anti-racism budgets.

The missions include raising awareness of eco-actions and facilitation in leisure centres, but also - and this is a specific feature of the programme - missions described as "technical" or "manual", which may be considered more as preparatory to a professional career. Some of the missions observed are based on a genuine social mix, and some even have living together as their stated objective. For example, in one non-profit organisation, four young people (two French citizens and two refugees) work to promote gender equality in sport. Each person has their own role that takes into account their use of language, wishes and, potentially, training needs. Both young French people had a post-graduate qualification in a subject related to their mission and were using their civic service to improve their skills in this area. The two refugee volunteers working alongside them had no specific skills related to the mission, but they were able to choose a subject that interested them and how they wanted to contribute to the project. They explained that their mentor suggested they adapt their mission during the volunteering period. One of the non-refugee volunteers processed data on social networks, while the two refugee volunteers carried out short interviews and made videos to promote sport. The end purpose would appear to be less important than the interaction between the volunteers, language learning and what the structure calls "interculturality".

### *Manual labour in 'intermediary' non-profit organisations to promote vocational integration*

Civic service missions should be consistent with overarching themes such as solidarity, education for all, culture and leisure, health, and sports. Volunteers, who are not supposed to replace a salaried employee, should not carry out missions essential to the running of the non-profit organisation. Most of the time, their job description implies that they simply "take part in" and only support a regular activity<sup>28</sup>. However, non-profit organisations that receive young beneficiaries of international protection use titles such as "management", "cooking" and "gardening". This was particularly the case, in this study, for missions carried out in intermediation through small-scale reception structures. The missions are highly 'individualised' and often 'technical', even if they need to be adapted over time. For example, a volunteer with Organisation E works in a social centre. Bruno<sup>29</sup>, the salaried staff member in charge of the intermediation, explained it to me in these terms:

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<sup>27</sup> Mathilde Pette. *S'engager pour les étrangers : les associations et les militants de la cause des étrangers dans le Nord de la France*, Doctoral thesis in sociology, Lille 1. 2012, p. 353

<sup>28</sup> Florence Ihaddadene, 2018a, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Apart from public figures, all first names have been changed using Baptiste Coulmont's tool available at <http://coulmont.com/bac/>

"So, the idea was actually to basically focus his mission on fairly manual work, so now he's closely involved in catering with the kitchen team. He helps prepare meals and does a lot of service-related tasks."

This "manual" mission will eventually lead to training in a 'CAP cuisine or CQP' [catering vocational qualification certification or vocational integration experience].

Most missions in "intermediated" non-profit organisations are implemented in structures with a small number of salaried staff members. In what Matthieu Hély referred to as "entreprises associatives unipersonnelles"<sup>30</sup> [single-person non-profit enterprises], which we describe here as *family* enterprises, many volunteers carry out household or even domestic tasks. For example, Morad, who cooks and cleans in a public-facing facility, is engaged in material care practices, while his mentors are responsible for the emotional side, to adopt the division devised by Pascale Molinier<sup>31</sup>. The mentor of Issam, who was completing a mission in an "organic" garden, explained the tasks to me as I arrived at the non-profit organisation:

"There was quite a lot of clearing to do in the garden, quite a lot of watering before the automatic sprinkler system was installed, and then he installed the automatic sprinkler system for the whole of this area. So, there's quite a lot of work to do in advance on the wood before we can start building because, for example, we use recycled materials, so that requires quite a lot of work. Here, we've recovered some parquet flooring and we've got to remove all the glue. When we work with pallets, we have to dismantle the pallets, which is a bit tedious, but he's done quite a lot of that, tidying up the garden, harvesting tomatoes, harvesting beans and so on, so we've built a little compost, and we're in the process of building a chicken coop<sup>32</sup>."

The assignment of volunteers to "domestic" tasks in quasi-family non-profit organisations raises questions about the social and racial division of labour. This includes delegating the "dirty work"<sup>33</sup> to young foreign nationals. This is especially true since volunteers generally carry out these tasks with another immigrant salaried staff member: the Algerian cleaner or the Comorian caretaker.

The offer of "manual" missions reflects the "urgency" of the situations facing these young people, in the words of a salaried staff member from Organisation C. Voluntary work is therefore accepted as having a pragmatic dimension barely concealed behind a rhetoric of citizenship all but abandoned in relation to the non-profit sector<sup>34</sup>. It is not promoted, as it is for young French people, as a mechanism for engagement in society, but as an enabler of improved living conditions that will allow volunteers to escape precarity. By assigning them to care or maintenance work or to an intermediation role, the mentors hope to provide them with useful skills that are potentially transferable to the jobs market. They find themselves, however, in a double bind: the skills they are recognised as having are generally naturalised, linked to their nationality (particularly their language), their experience of migration, or their

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<sup>30</sup> Matthieu Hély, "Essai de typologie des associations employeurs et de leur rapport au bénévolat", in *La Tribune Fonda*, n° 170, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Pascale Molinier, *Le travail du care*, Paris, La Dispute, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Valentin, Marseille, 30 October 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Everett C. Hughes, *Le regard sociologique : essais choisis*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 1996.

<sup>34</sup> Maud Simonet, 2010, *Op. cit.*

social proximity to the people assisted by the organisation. Vocational skills developed during the mission but also sometimes acquired upstream, are erased, even denied, even though volunteers need professionalisation. This is also what Leila Drif demonstrated in relation to other migrants who work as volunteers in camps in Lebanon<sup>35</sup>. Here, volunteers are considered to be on a quasi-‘apprenticeship’ scheme. The réfugiés.info website describes civic service as follows: “It’s a bit like a traineeship, but you don’t need to have a degree or a profession to do it<sup>36</sup>.” Valentin, Issam’s mentor, explains:

"We’re still in a phase where I have to show him the task, and since at the moment we’re not working together on a complex task, it’s either I show him a fairly simple task and he can do it by himself, or we have to work together, for example, on a slightly more delicate task where I really need to supervise him, to be there."

Ahmed, who works in a leisure centre, was able to take his BAFA [diploma in monitoring]. However, he does not see himself working as a monitor. He was studying human rights in Sudan and now hopes to resume his studies shortly in France. However, to earn a living, he relies instead on his long experience in the catering sector. In his case, the structure’s desire to integrate him is almost a negation of his vocational plans: since he needs to be integrated as quickly as possible, he is invited to rethink his plans to correspond with his "objective chances<sup>37</sup>" of integration. Integration into French society therefore sometimes occurs regardless of the subjective desires of these young refugees.

### *Socialisation in the ‘workplace’: young migrants, prove yourselves*

In this case, the ‘urgency’ and lack of allocated public funding lead actors to conclude that this cannot be a ‘conventional’ civic service mission. The aim is to train young refugees, help them find a job and, above all, ensure the transition between several schemes. Once young people have been granted refugee status, they no longer benefit from certain forms of support given to asylum seekers. They often must also leave their hostel accommodation. Civic service provides them with a buffer period before they start work. The main aim is to make this process easier, as it is considered almost impossible for young people to find a job immediately after obtaining refugee status. Civic service is used as a kind of pre-professionalisation period, during which the volunteer’s previous skills may be overlooked. The aim is to adapt them as quickly as possible to a job market that could accommodate them.

Non-profit organisations recognise that the main aim is to socialise people to workplace practices, which does not mean they cannot help them integrate ‘socially’ or ‘culturally’. As a salaried staff member of Organisation C explains, "It doesn’t matter if they come here to work, it’s up to us to give them the desire to get personally involved". Given the difficulties faced by the young people in question, the priority is to give them a professionalising experience. In

<sup>35</sup> Leila Drif, 2018, *Op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> URL: <https://www.refugies.info/dispositif/5ce7f372be522800168293e5>

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “L’école conservatrice. Les inégalités devant l’école et devant la culture”, in *Revue française de sociologie*, 7(3), 1966, pp. 325-347.

Organisation E, the mission manager explained to me that "as a result, you have to strike a balance, and so clearly, yes, they're young people, they haven't enjoyed their status for very long. We want their CV to show they have some experience, so we try as far as possible to link it up with their future career plans." In this organisation, civic service leads, in most cases, to vocational integration or a place on a training course for these young refugees.

More than anywhere else, civic service is used here as a test to reassure potential employers. Above all, it enables volunteers to be trained in the 'practices' applied in the labour market. One mission leader complained that a certain non-profit organisation, described as on the far left of the political spectrum and "self-managing", does not do enough to prepare them for the labour market.

"Well, I think that even in terms of interpersonal skills, I'd at least like these civic service missions - and this is what I try to explain - to provide a caring environment, to be open, but not too flexible in terms of interpersonal skills, particularly in relation to working hours and absences. Well yeah, okay, there's no obligation as such to perform civic service, and there's no employment contract, where you need to be signed off work by a doctor. And at the same time, these young people need to get to grips with how things work in France. So, we always try to find the right balance and say, well, if you provide a framework, and they're absent, ask them to say why, let me know. If they're late and all that, we don't let it drop, because it won't do them any favours. And the two from [the organisation] I think are especially... (laughs). I don't know how to put it."

In this sense, civic service for young refugees can be compared to the voluntary work carried out by male migrants in Italy, described by Simone Di Cecco, who writes:

"Volunteering is therefore seen as a functional social work tool for producing or strengthening the employability and integration of migrants: even more than a 'springboard' towards a specific paid activity, it is first and foremost seen as a time for learning about the norms that govern the Italian labour market, and more broadly as a way of teaching active and 'ethical' citizenship (Muehlebach 2012)." <sup>38</sup>

But this vocational integration does not apply to all areas of the labour market. Bruno, after describing the missions of some of the volunteers in intermediation as "manual", goes on to say:

"We bear in mind the idea that volunteering is not at all about replacing a salaried worker. But sometimes, when you don't speak the language and you don't know how an organisation or even a territory works, it's good to start with an exchange of know-how because that helps to build relationships and links, and then gradually, as time goes by, you move on to missions that are perhaps more in keeping with civic service, where the person will no longer do purely manual work, but will also be able to do work that is a little more intellectual or mediation work or work to strengthen social ties<sup>39</sup>."

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<sup>38</sup> Simone Di Cecco, 2021, *op. cit.*, p. 36

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Bruno, Marseille, 15 February 2019.

The ideal civic service - insofar as it responds to the requirements of the public authorities and complies with the law - should be "intellectual or mediation". The fear of substitution for salaried employment therefore only relates to the "manual" aspect of the mission. We might argue that the salaried worker who should not be replaced corresponds to a specific figure in the labour market: the immigrant worker assigned to "technical" tasks and "manual" occupations. The specific skills to provide to volunteers reflect the ethnic division of labour into which the salaried employees hope to place them.

They also reproduce a gendered division of this specific market. Laëtitia, an employee of Organisation E, explains:

"You see, there's a young man who's going to... who we're going to take to a Montessori school on Friday. Personally, I think it's cool to send a man to a Montessori school. He's a young man who seems to me to be at the top of his game, and I'm glad I met him. I think he's going to send him, but if not, yes, I still have the nursing home system where there are only women, African women. And all the jobs that are more like... all the jobs where there's more construction, work, garages and so on, it's very masculine."

Employees are aware that they are replicating the inequalities and restrictions of the labour market, but the emergency in which young people find themselves and their need to access funding takes precedence over the ideals of social change. This is also the case of another volunteer I was told about who would have liked to have taken his baccalaureate but ended up taking a job in the solidarity garage where he was completing a mission.

## Educational anti-racism of an individualised integration policy

Civic service for young beneficiaries of international protection forms part of the individualisation of migratory policies, which are increasingly delegated to the field of the social and solidarity economy and, more recently, to popular education organisations. The assistance provided to young people benefiting from international protection by social economy organisations facilitates their personalised social integration that benefits young people in general. They allow young refugees to demonstrate their desire to integrate into French society. This definition of citizenship, which can be likened to the expression "give back to the community"<sup>40</sup>, the definition used by Maud Simonet in the United States, also implies a form of citizenship based on "activation", in which young people benefiting from international protection must above all prove that they do not wish to remain inactive. Reactivated by the post-2015 "reception crisis"<sup>41</sup>, integration policies aimed at immigrants

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<sup>40</sup> Maud Simonet, "Derrière le voile de la citoyenneté : Les usages politiques du volontariat en France et aux États-Unis", In : *Les Mondes du travail*, 2008, 5, 53-65.

<sup>41</sup> Annalisa Lendaro, Claire Rodier et Youri Lou Vertongen (dir.). *La crise de l'accueil : Frontières, droits, résistances*. Paris : Éditions La Découverte, 2019.



rely in part on an emotionalisation of public action, which sometimes leads to "re-actualized practices of paternalism"<sup>42</sup>.

### *An integration policy?*

Proposals for a civic service programme targeted at young refugees emerged as early as February 2018 in a report made to the French Prime Minister by an MP from [the governing centrist party] LREM Aurélien Taché entitled "72 proposals for an ambitious integration policy for foreign nations arriving in France". It states that "developing effective access for these young people contributes to their integration into society while benefiting society with their skills as translators or cultural mediators, or their know-how [developed] before they arrive in France."<sup>43</sup> Although we have already seen that there is nothing straightforward about the recognition and "benefit" of their skills, this text already contains the vision of civic service as a "win-win" situation benefiting both parties. Frédérique Pharaboz, an adviser to DIAIR on education, higher education, youth and culture, believes the scheme helps to combat stereotypes and preconceived ideas about young refugees<sup>44</sup>. Civic service could facilitate access to citizenship for young refugees and their social integration by allowing them to take part in an activity within a non-profit organisation and to improve their language skills. But it could also help to shift public perception of young refugees from the category of "helped" to "helper". Salaried staff members of Organisation C claim to use the scheme as a tool to fight discrimination.

In this case, volunteering is consistent with public policies that use voluntary action "both as an instrument and as an indicator of social integration, political participation and the economic inclusion of immigrant populations"<sup>45</sup>. This practically free form of work is described as a means of "preventing tension", which, for Simone Di Cecco, contributes to an instrumental vision of voluntary activity by institutions. In public discourse, volunteering by migrants is targeted more at French citizens than at the refugees themselves. The same is not always true of the views expressed by the salaried staff members of non-profit organisations, who see civic service as promoting the integration (particularly the vocational integration) of refugees, although the content of this "integration process" varies from one organisation to the next. But this personalised policy, which concerns a small number of individuals, also contributes to a process of individualisation in the way volunteers are managed, which can lead to forms of paternalism.

### *Re-actualized practices of paternalism*

The vocational integration policies targeted at young people and implemented by the French state since the 1980s appear to be individualised, to the extent that they take a

<sup>42</sup> Élise Palomares, and Aude Rabaud, "Minoritaires et citoyens ? Faites vos preuves !", *L'Homme / la Société*, 2006, n° 160-161(2), 135-160.

<sup>43</sup> Aurélien Taché, Justin Babilotte, Catherine Hess, Sabine Fourcade, 2018, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Frédérique Pharaboz, manager of the Volont'R programme at DIAIR, 6 September 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Rim Arara et Altay A Manço, "Le Bénévolat Comme Dispositif d'insertion à l'emploi Des Migrants : À Quel Prix ?", in *Insertion Des Travailleurs Migrants: Efficacité Des Dispositifs*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2018.

personalised approach to the causes of exclusion or precarity<sup>46</sup>. Like the latest plan advanced by the French government following the health crisis, entitled *1 jeune, 1 solution* ["One young person, one solution"], everyone is invited to identify their own "solution" from a range of tools and schemes. Once again, for volunteers benefiting from international protection, civic service is an individualised solution for "integrating" into French society. It is also part of the emotionalisation of policies to support migrants, reactivated principally by the post-2015 "reception crisis"<sup>47</sup> - to use the title of the collective work edited by Annalisa Leandaro, Claire Rodier and Youri Lou Vertongen. This leads to "re-actualized practices of paternalism"<sup>48</sup>. I asked one mentor about their decision to get involved in the programme:

Florence: why did you decide to get involved with a civic service scheme for refugees? Had you wanted to work with refugees for a long time? Or did the opportunity simply arise?  
Mentor: In fact, we'd never thought too much about it, we'd never thought much about getting involved in a conventional civic service scheme, but working with refugees is something that we knew would appeal to us, we think it's a good thing that there are different cultures, that everyone brings something to the table and, yes, this is the opportunity that came up. It's a bit selfish, but I feel useful, and I enjoy helping people. And I think that helping someone who has had to flee, who wasn't happy somewhere and who needs help, that's great, I... like that. We liked it, my family liked it, we gave him a birthday because he didn't have a birthday, everyone gave him a present, so it was nice. We went to the restaurant with our other employee on a fixed-term contract this summer called Fatiah so that was fun too, we thought it would be great to have someone who spoke Arabic, but in fact they don't speak the same Arabic and...  
Florence: Where is she from?  
Mentor: She's Kabyle, she's from Algeria, and she's a nice person too, so we had a really good time."

This desire to be useful can lead to forms of "familiarisation" in the mentoring relationship, which does not necessarily create a better understanding of the effects of migration or migratory flows. This "privatisation" of hospitality also sometimes goes hand in hand - in this case in a faith-based non-profit organisation - with a religiously motivated discourse of charity. One couple was hosting Nurah, an Eritrean volunteer who recently arrived after what he describes as a violent migration experience and several years of living rough in France. They explained their reasons for hosting him as part of a civic service scheme:

"He: I think everyone grows; everyone reaps the benefits. We, like [Nurah], like... And if we had taken a purely practical approach we wouldn't have managed to create as many beautiful things as we have done here."  
She: That's true. We'll have to see how things go in the future... how the flowers...  
He: That's right, how the seeds grow.  
She: Yes, I like that image. It's like, in a way, what we call, time-limited, we give something away. We allow the seed, Lamine, to come into a space for a moment and then start to grow. And there you have it. And then, I think it can help too. You'll see for yourself [Nurah].

<sup>46</sup> Robert Castel, *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale : Une chronique du salariat*. Fayard, 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Annalisa Leandaro, Claire Rodier et Youri Lou Vertongen *La crise de l'accueil : Frontières, droits, résistances*. Éditions La Découverte, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Élise Palomares et Aude Rabaud, 2006, *op. cit.*

If you see that things are good here, you might say to yourself 'Things can be okay for me too. Now I feel confident, I can move on, you see, I can head towards my future, towards a job for me. I'm capable of doing that. I'm someone who is valued,' you see."

Nurah goes on to say that he seriously injured his knee shortly after arriving in Italy. The two mentors add:

"He: In fact, it's because of his problem, his injury, that he came here.

She: Thank you, knee. (laughs)

Nurah: Now!

She: Now you can say, 'Thank you, knee'.

He: Whatever happens to you in life, you can't just see it as a bad thing."

These forms of private hospitality sometimes overlook the highly political nature of the migrant reception crisis, even though these mentors are dealing with young people who have been able to obtain international protection status. This charitable conception of reception reflects the objectives of the scheme as envisaged by the public authorities: their understanding of the involvement of young people as a means of helping to improve acceptance by the host country's population does not purport to combat in depth the discrimination experienced by migrants or racism per se. Commenting on a voluntary work programme for male migrants in Italy, Simone Di Cecco says:

"The aim of changing how Italians see non-nationals, thereby ensuring a sort of recognition for them by the host society, makes the volunteer programmes a particular form of educational anti-racism. Educational anti-racism relegates racism to the realm of ideology, explaining it in terms of beliefs, fear of otherness and ignorance, which are supposed to be combatable through encounters, inter-knowledge and the creation of positive representations<sup>49</sup>."

This policy of combating negative public opinion through voluntary work by young beneficiaries of international protection fails to challenge the systemic basis of opposition to migrants and of racism. It tends in particular to reproduce the racial division of labour by assigning these young people to "manual" jobs and occupations and providing them with paternalistic forms of individual mentoring, as if to make up for the shortcomings of the welfare state in this respect.

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<sup>49</sup> Anna Curcio and Miguel Mellino, *La razza al lavoro* (Rome, Italy: Manifestolibri, 2012); Donna Jeffery, "What Good Is Anti-Racist Social Work If You Can't Master It"? Exploring a Paradox in Anti-racist Social Work Education", *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8.4 (2005), 409–25. Cited by the author.

<sup>50</sup> Simone Di Cecco, "Racisme, hiérarchies et résistances chez les travailleurs migrants bénévoles en Italie", *Confluences Méditerranée*, N° 111(4), 2019, p. 78.

## Conclusion

The main aim of the Volont'R scheme, as set out in the DIAIR brochure, is to help change the way young people involved in civic service, and French people in general, view migration. In other words, since migrants suffer from a tarnished image, civic service could promote their acceptance in France. Refugees are therefore invited to demonstrate their citizenship and goodwill, through "active" forms of citizenship, to improve the image that the French population has of them. The figure of the deserving migrant joins the already well-established ones of the deserving poor<sup>51</sup> and the young instigator of his or her "activation" on the labour market. However, as with the local and participatory democracy schemes studied by Élisabeth Palomares and Aude Rabaud, this concept of integration, through activities seen as "making a difference to the community", helps to "evacuate conflicts, power struggles and collective demands"<sup>52</sup>.

These schemes also help to spread the idea of *quid pro quo* citizenship: as with the case of the Italian migrant volunteers described by Simone Di Cecco, integration into society involves putting on a public show of one's ability to work "for free" - or in this case, below the minimum wage. Civic service for refugees is a promise, not of regularisation as in Italy, but of integration into French society. To be eligible, you must "seize your opportunity", which means demonstrating your "goodwill" to make a selfless investment in the general interest. In a way, it is also a question of "giving back", in the sense of reimbursing or acknowledging the hospitality provided in France (although this is based on international conventions that are binding on signatory countries). In an interview, the chair of the French Civic Service Agency (ASC) quoted a volunteer who was delighted after completing his civic service: "I'm happy to be helpful because it's my way of saying thank you to France for welcoming me".

Civic service for young beneficiaries of international protection forms part of the individualisation of migratory policies, which are increasingly delegated to the field of the social and solidarity economy and, more recently, to popular education organisations. The assistance provided to young people benefiting from international protection by social economy organisations facilitates their personalised social integration that benefits young people in general. Successful vocational integration in these cases is common and often exemplary, to the extent that it would not have occurred without the civic service experience. Organisation C, which is not part of a public procurement arrangement, favours, in particular, the signing of post-volunteering contracts, through a regular partnership with reception organisations and investment in "technical" missions. Although this is less true of non-profit organisations involved in public procurement arrangements, they find it easier to encourage people to embark on training through pre-existing networks. Volunteering appears to make it easier to learn the French language, by bolstering French as a Foreign Language courses within the non-profit organisation. However, it can also reproduce exclusion and assignment to low-skilled jobs that sometimes fail to consider the individual desires of volunteers. Finally, because it is regularly applied in "family" non-profit organisations, it can encourage paternalistic forms of support for volunteers.

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<sup>51</sup> Élisabeth Chelle, *Gouverner les pauvres: Politiques sociales et administration du mérite*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Élisabeth Palomares et Aude Rabaud, 2006, *op. cit.*

While the need to stay active and to combat boredom and loneliness through volunteering should be taken seriously, there is every reason to believe that, given the precarious situation of these young refugees, in terms of integration, social integration or integration as a citizen come second to the overriding priority of vocational integration. However, although an individualised policy, in the same way as other policies designed to tackle exclusion, poverty or precarity (in particular programmes in "zero unemployment" areas and the experiments around RSA [the French minimum income allowance] in exchange for work), it does not prevent the reproduction of racial and gendered assignments on the labour market. Although the obvious involvement of these young people should change public opinion, refugee volunteers are being assigned tasks that reproduce the unequal division of labour. While the media and political parties regularly voice their opposition to receiving migrants, these young people are encouraged to show their "goodwill" and involvement in the general interest. To benefit from support to enter the labour market, they have to give the best of themselves, get training and fit in where they are told to, without being able to stabilise their finances. Although the aim is to change public opinion by portraying migrants as "deserving" figures, in the end, young refugees are encouraged, often without any alternative, to prove their willingness to integrate by doing work that is virtually free and does not allow them to repay the cost of their migration.

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