

THE HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS

**EVALUATION  
OF A PRIVATE  
SPONSORSHIP  
PROGRAMME,  
THREE YEARS ON**



Fédération  
Entraide Protestante



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Migration and Integration Fund

# INTRODUCTION

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## Presentation of the evaluation

This is concentrated on the impact made by the Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante (FEP) Community sponsorship programme in the context of humanitarian corridors (henceforth, in this summary, "the Project") from March 2017 to February 2020, by means of which 236 persons were welcomed in France by citizens' committees, supported by the FEP network.

This piece of research is based on methods which are both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative part has been done through a statistical analysis of the FEP's "tracking table" and answers to a survey carried out among 35 adults hosted in four regions (New Aquitaine, Ile-de-France, Rhône-Alpes and Grand-Est). The qualitative part was done through eight semi-directed interviews with different actors in the Project.

This summary of the project final evaluation report report is organised around three main themes:

- The Project as seen by the newcomers, from the selection process in Lebanon up to the accommodation by citizens' committees in France ;
- The Project from the point of view of the FEP, its regional centres (pôles régionaux) and the citizens' committees ;
- The summary of the main points of the evaluation and the recommendations which stem from this.

## Presentation of the Project and profiles of the persons received

In 2015, the migrant crisis revealed the European Union's deficiencies regarding the welcome of migrants. Moreover, it highlighted the importance of the commitment by volunteers, both individually and collectively, regarding the welcoming of refugees in view of the reluctance of states to offer migrants a safe and decent welcome, in line with European values. It was in this context, in several countries, that "humanitarian corridors" developed, with their own national characteristics.

Inspired by the example of humanitarian corridors in Italy, an agreement was signed in France in March 2017 between the Ministry of the Interior and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and five organisations<sup>1</sup>. This memorandum committed France to issuing 500 long-stay visas for asylum-seekers (Visa D) for person who were refugees in Lebanon, having fled Syria or Iraq, which allowed them to request asylum once in France within a short time period (90 days). Several conditions of vulnerability were necessary in order for this visa to be granted,

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<sup>1</sup> These associations and networks are religion-based structures and they include three Catholic associations (Secours Catholique - Caritas France, Comunità di Sant'Egidio, Conférence des Évêques de France) and two Protestant ones (Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante, Fédération Protestante de France).

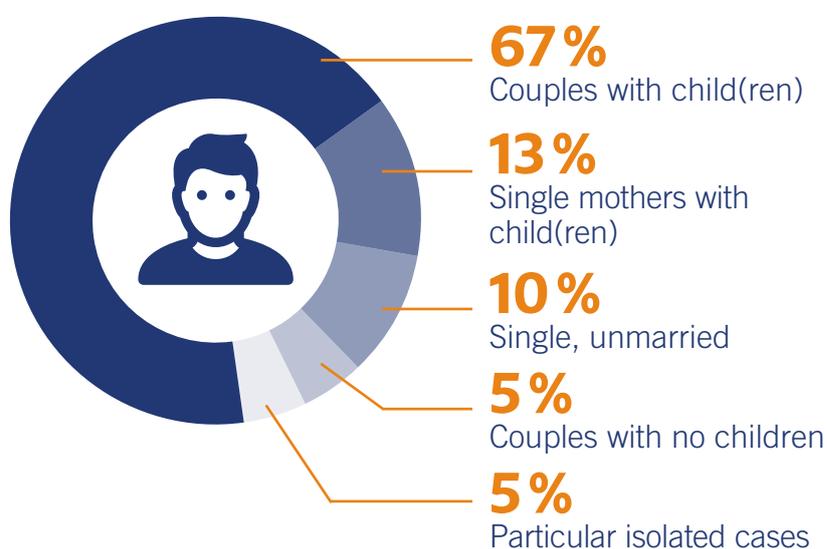
while a particular link with France and family members already in the country are also possible criteria. In exchange, the five signatory organisations committed to selecting the candidates and finding them accommodation. In the framework of the FEP welcome project, the people were housed by volunteer citizen committees for the length of time it took for their request for asylum to be processed by the state (and sometimes even beyond their obtaining their residence permit).

As asylum-seekers, the people who were welcomed benefit from financial aid (Allocation pour Demandeur d'Asile (Asylum Seeker's Aid) - ADA) as well as having access to state services, in particular those departments responsible for accompanying asylum-seekers. In actual fact, the citizens' committees play a very important role in accompanying refugees administratively, in learning French or in their integration process. They are supported in these tasks by social workers who mediate between the incomers and the citizens' committees. These social workers are paid by the FEP and are attached to member associations working in the help for refugees sector. The regional distribution is shown below:

Regions	Number of persons welcomed	Association to which social workers are attached
<b>NOUVELLE AQUITAINE</b>	<b>97</b>	Diaconat Protestant de Bordeaux (Bordeaux)
<b>RHÔNES-ALPES</b>	<b>47</b>	Diaconat Protestant Drôme-Ardèche
<b>ARC MÉDITERRANÉEN</b>	<b>33</b>	Jane Panier (Marseille)
<b>GRAND-EST</b>	<b>30</b>	L'Étage (Strasbourg)
<b>ÎLE-DE-FRANCE</b>	<b>25</b>	Centre d'Action Social Protestant (Paris)
<b>HORS-PÔLES</b>	<b>4</b>	FEP Central Office

Of the  
**236**  
persons  
welcomed,  
  
most,  
**187**  
came from  
Syria  
  
and  
**24**  
were Iraqi.

The family composition of these persons was:



# THE PROJECT AS SEEN BY THE PERSONS HOSTED

## The selection process in Lebanon

Perception of the selection process varies significantly according to who is questioned. In fact, **50% of them consider this stage to be "difficult" or "very difficult"** whereas fewer than a third reckon it to be "easy" or "very easy".

Regarding access to information, a **third of the respondents thought they had been "sufficiently informed"** about their departure project while fewer than a third said they had received "a lot" of useful advice. The last third deplored a lack of information. **However, most of the respondents agreed that the Project team in Lebanon helped them a great deal. The work of the local team is therefore widely appreciated despite the lack of information received.**

## Upon arrival in France

### Integration from a legal point of view

All the persons accompanied registered a claim to asylum once they arrived in France. At the time this survey was finished (January 2020) of the 236 persons welcomed, 166 had already obtained a residence visa, which is 94 as a statutory refugee (residence card with 10-year validity, renewable) and 66 who benefited from subsidiary protection (4-year residence card, renewable). **A large majority of the respondents said that they had had sufficient accompaniment from the citizens' committees and / or social workers in their application processes.**

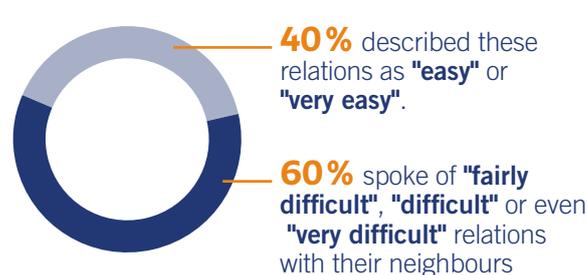
In the widest sense, legal integration also reveals the opinions of the new arrivals regarding state administrative structures or private organisations supposed to favour their integration and their access to their rights. Answers to the questionnaire **reveal majority satisfaction regarding access to health care, the freedom of religious practice, safety and security and above all access to education, which came second in the institutions that are most appreciated, just after associations** (which include citizens' committees).

### Socio-cultural integration

#### 1. First contacts with French society.



#### 2. Social environment & relations within the neighbourhood



Moreover, a small majority (57%) declared that they had French friends whom they could contact if they had a problem (not including social workers or citizens' committees). On the other hand, nearly all the respondents stated that they had family members or friends from their home country in other parts of France or in the European Union.

Learning French is a key element in promoting socio-cultural integration, as is stated in the "welcome booklet" that FEP gives to those who are welcomed. All of the respondents acknowledged that learning French was one of their priorities. The FEP tracking table helps evaluate the impact of French lessons provided by the OFII and volunteers from the citizens' committees. The overall results show more or less significant progress in mastering the language for a quarter of the people since their arrival.

### Economic integration

Finding employment and independent accommodation can be considered as the two priorities for all the people accompanied. These responses came out of a context where only 4 out of 35 respondents had a job or were in professional training and where most of them were still housed by citizens' committees in some form or another.

The search for housing seems to be the most problematic issue for the people incoming. Generally speaking, **40% of the respondents stated they were "not satisfied" or "not at all satisfied" by their current accommodation which is mostly accommodation supplied by citizens' committees.** Nevertheless, these same people very often dispose of an individual private space. Also, it seems that the level of satisfaction expressed regarding accommodation is more to do with the feeling of being dependent on citizens' committees than with the fact of having to share a space with family members.

Finding a job or housing are both also part of the recurring "hopes" expressed by mentored persons along with the health and school results of their children and rejoining members of their family or getting them to come to France.

## THE POSITIVE POINTS AND THE CHALLENGES TO BE MET

The answers to the questionnaire reveal that in 2020 there was overall satisfaction on the part of persons welcomed since **nearly 70% of them said they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the FEP welcome programme.** In particular, most of the respondents judged the double system to be efficient (citizens' committees + social workers) that FEP has set up to help them begin their new life in France.

However, some opinions were more critical, in particular regarding the slowness of the administrative procedure handling their request for asylum or the lack of opportunities for learning French, and this is a reminder that **the Project faces structural difficulties linked to welcoming asylum seekers in France.** More generally, it appears that needs in terms of learning French, of cultural integration, of access to the job market and to independent accommodation are widely expressed by welcome people.

# THE PROJECT SEEN BY FEP REGIONAL DIVISIONS AND CITIZENS' COMMITTEES

The object here is to see how far the double system of humanitarian corridors promoted by the Project in fact facilitates cultural mediation and increases the prospect of integration on the legal and socio-cultural levels.

## Setting up the welcome

In keeping with the witness statements that were recorded, "citizen accommodation" does not necessarily mean that **the persons who arrive are necessarily hosted by the members of the citizens' committees but more often they are received in individual dwellings.**

All of the members of the citizens' committees emphasised the special link with the social workers and the team at the FEP's central hub as soon as the welcome programme was set up. At this stage the role of social workers at the regional level consists in:

- Identifying potential accommodation providers, making contact with already existing citizens' committees or helping to set up new citizens' committees ;
- Presenting the Project and assigning tasks to the members of the citizens' committees ;
- Visiting potential accommodation sites to ensure that they meet the Project's standards ;
- Preparing the accommodation providers and the citizens' committees networks for the arrival of the refugees; notably, this implies signing a tripartite agreement between the FEP, the citizens' committees and socio-cultural centres for learning French.

Once these tasks are completed, the main mission of the social workers is to act as mediators, at different levels, between the accommodation provider and those they house and to accompany the latter in their administrative processes.

## Initial welcome for accompanied persons

The first stage is to welcome the people at the airport, near Paris. This can be done by the team from the central hub, social workers or citizens' committees. Apart from this event, which is a major moment, the citizens' committees, especially those based in medium sized towns or rural areas are sometimes faced with local apprehensions due to the arrival of foreigners.



## Accompaniment through legal and administrative procedures

According to testimony from citizens' committees, the part played by social workers is vital in the administrative follow-up of the persons being supported, especially as far as preparing for the OFPRA<sup>1</sup> interview is concerned. Generally, **being accompanied by at least one accommodation provider and a social worker seems to be an appreciated support for the newcomers**, as much for administrative reasons as for their morale, since the OFPRA or the CNDA<sup>2</sup> interviews are often very trying events psychologically.

## Material support

As is mentioned in the FEP welcome booklet, the first months of the Project are those which demand the greatest material investment for the members of the citizens' committees. During the first two months especially, the incomers depend totally on the citizens' committees, including for meals, because they do not yet have access to the ADA. Once this aid is acquired, they can then get food for themselves but the citizens' committees continue to pay for other costs.

Some associations, like the Secours Catholique or the Restos du Cœur can provide material aid through donations in kind (clothing, food, school material, etc.).

However, some needs, such as transport, rely entirely on solidarity between members of the citizens' committees. Rural zones in particular face difficulties concerning mobility, especially since a new law introduced in 2019 no longer allows a Syrian or Iraqi driving licence to be exchanged for a French one. The problem of access to transport highlights the importance of building a wide citizens' collective or one where several members can share out various duties. Some interviews sometimes reveal however a sort of "competition" between different members in a citizens' collective when it comes to helping incomers,

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<sup>1</sup> Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons) – this is the organisation responsible for applying the laws relating to the recognition of refugee status and of admission for subsidiary protection.

<sup>2</sup> Cour Nationale du Droit d'Asile (National Court for Right to Asylum): this is a special judicial body which rules on the appeals made against OFPRA decisions. The CNDA can annul a decision made by OFPRA and make its own ruling to grant refugee status or subsidiary protection to the claimant.



**which may create tension within a group but also a feeling of infantilization among those being helped.**

**In other cases, conflicts are more linked either to the relation between those who welcome and those who are accommodated, or else to the attitude of those who are taken in. In such cases social workers can mediate.**

In order to avoid these kinds of tensions and in so far as the Project's mission is to encourage independence among incomers as quickly as possible, the members of citizens' committees and social workers generally try to speed up the integration process for supported persons, with greater or lesser degrees of success.

## **Towards integration**

A wide array of efforts has been rolled out by citizens' committees and social workers to accelerate the administrative integration of incomers. While procedures at the level of the GUDA<sup>3</sup>, the OFPRA or the CNDA take a while, local institutions seem to be more flexible.

All of the members of citizens' committees who were questioned recognise the key role played by schools which allow children to learn French more quickly than their parents and to develop a network of friends which can extend to the parents and which can also provide the opportunity for the adults to come and tell the story of their exile in a friendly context.

Finally, citizens' committees and social workers also play a part in the economic integration of the people being supported. In fact, once a residence permit has been granted, while they can start working, find housing and get access to social benefit from the CAF (RSA or APL for example) in practice they still face material difficulties which require the cooperation of citizens' committees and social workers, and all the while maintaining respect for the wishes of the supported families. In any case, when the persons leave the Project, the citizens' committees and social workers generally keep strong ties to the families.

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<sup>3</sup> Guichet Unique pour Demandeurs d'Asile (Single-Stop Office for Asylum Seekers): these are places where the préfecture and the OFII jointly receive asylum seekers; it is the GUDA which issues the form for seeking asylum which is then sent to the OFPRA.

## POSITIVE POINTS AND PROBLEMS

There are three major positive points put forward by the social workers and the local citizens' committees concerning:

- The efficiency of the double system between the social workers and the citizens' committees, and in this framework good working relations have been established between the different levels, as soon as the welcome had been set up ;
- The creation of new local dynamics which contribute in particular to the promotion of a new kind of social cohesion especially in rural areas where early apprehensions soon vanish with the consolidation of neighbourhood networks of citizens' committees ;
- A strong desire shared by the majority of the newcomers to be socially and economically integrated in France in such a way that they can be independent when they leave the Project.

The members of the citizens' committees also noted several difficulties which they still face after three years. Among these the existence of a "cultural gap" has been observed between the so-called "traditional" practices of the accompanied families and those of the host country.

## PATHS FOR IMPROVMENT

The citizens' committees and the social workers suggest two paths for improvement:

- Recruiting more social workers and interpreters in order to overcome the language barrier and so better accompany the people as soon as they arrive in France ;
- Develop more training programmes for the members of the citizens' committees which could be run by social workers or other professionals (psychologists, specialising in particular in autonomy issues, since not everybody has the same idea of what "independence" means for the newcomers.

**All these elements suggest the existence of a certain tension between the time needed for adaptation on the one hand, and the desire to speed up the integration process on the other.**

# CONCLUSION

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## Summary of the main points of the survey

After analysing the FEP tracking table, the questionnaires and the interviews, several key points can be identified:

1. Humanitarian corridors such as those set up by the FEP are **the concrete proof that a strong model of alternative accommodation is possible since, despite the problems mentioned, nearly 70% of the people mentored are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the Project.** As for the citizens' committees and the social workers, they found three positive aspects:

- The efficacy of the double system in the FEP's humanitarian corridors ;
- The emergence of **new local dynamics of cohesion** particularly in rural areas ;
- The fact that **most of the persons accompanied strongly desire integration into French society.**

2. **The selection process in Lebanon seems to be a difficult stage** of the Project for the mentored people, notably due to the lack of information received ahead of the arrival in France.

3. **While 80% of respondents said they were "well welcomed", relations with the neighbourhood seemed more problematic**, beyond the immediate circle of the FEP network made up of citizens' committees and social workers.

4. **For the incomers being welcomed by those actors in the Project (citizens' committees, social workers, the central FEP hub) the administrative and moral accompaniment during the different stages of the asylum-seeking process had a fundamental impact on their integration process.**

5. The challenges linked to the integration of refugees last well beyond the acquisition of international protection, particularly as far as **access to a job and independent housing are concerned. In fact, the vast majority of persons having already gained international protections are still seeking work, and depend largely on social welfare and most of them are still housed by the citizens' committees.** Mastering the language seems to be one of the chief obstacles in their quest for autonomy. In any case, the citizens' committees and the social workers underline the "cultural gap" between traditional practices and those of the host country, which could be reduced if interpreters were recruited and training programmes set up by citizens' committees, etc.

6. There is a difference in the level of integration between rural and urban zones. **According to the data collected, it would seem that incomers welcomed to rural areas are more easily integrated there than those who find themselves in urban areas.** This is particularly due to the fact that citizens' committees in the countryside seem to be encouraging a new kind of cohesion between newcomers and locals

## SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE PROJECT

1. **Sharing much more information during the selection process in Lebanon** so that the refugees can form realistic expectations regarding their accommodation in France and therefore avoid disappointment.

2. Once in France, and in view of the difficulties mentioned (slowness and complexity of asylum processes, access to employment and to independent housing, cultural gap, language barrier, etc.) it would be a good idea to:

- **Standardise certain practices at regional centres (PR) and citizens' committee level without compromising their independence.** This was also highlighted by the FEP central hub which, in 2020, made plans for a Project steering committee with a view to gathering recommendations which the five PRs had in common. It would be a good idea to pursue the efforts already made in this direction ;
- Respond to the requests made by social workers concerning the recruitment of interpreters, or the organisation of training sessions for the citizens' committees in order to lessen the "cultural gap". **As suggested by one of the persons who have been mentored, some of those already welcomed and well-integrated could help the citizens' committees and the social workers in their efforts to integrate the new arrivals.**

3. More generally, it has been recommended to develop the network of humanitarian corridors at a European level (Italy, France, Belgium, etc.), national and local (between the PRs and the citizens' committees, in the framework of the FEP project). In view of the current situation linked to the Covid-19 epidemic, it is likely that the coming months and years will bring fresh challenges which vulnerable people will have to face, which includes those that the project accompanies. With this in mind, greater cooperation and a sharing of practices between states might be a solution in order to better tackle the future problems that will arise due to the development of the global situation, while preserving the independence of the organisation of different humanitarian corridors.



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