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MIGRATION POSITIVE

POSITIVE MIGRATION

Positive aspects of the migration experience

Illustrated results 2020 - 2021





This book is dedicated to young people in migration situations
and to those who accompany them in solidarity

Thank you to all the young people, host families, associations
and professionals who agreed to share their experiences in this study
and who highlight the value of our differences

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Illustrated results 2020 - 2021



Observatoire
de la **Migration**
de **Mineurs**

MIGRINTER - CNRS - Université de Poitiers

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Migration and the presence of migrants in our societies: a controversial topic

Migration narratives in many European countries, including France, tend to focus on the difficulties and potential threats (budget cuts, insecurity, labour market disruption, encroachment on health services) associated with the arrival of migrants.

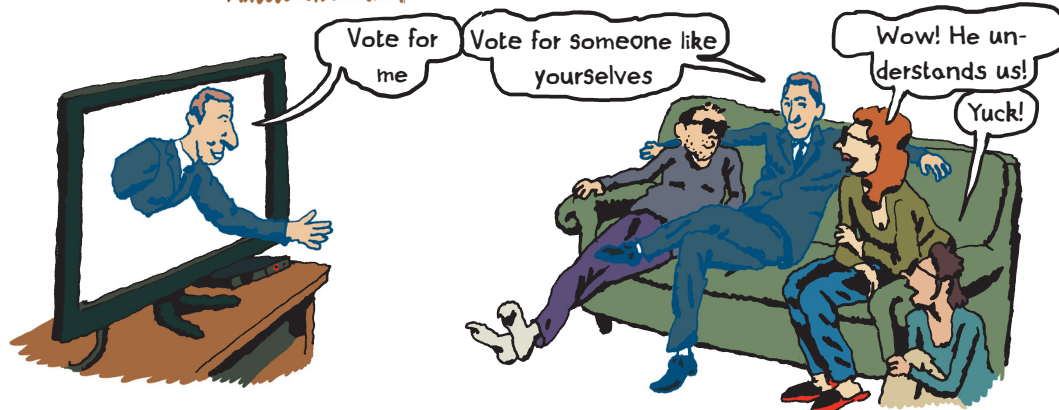
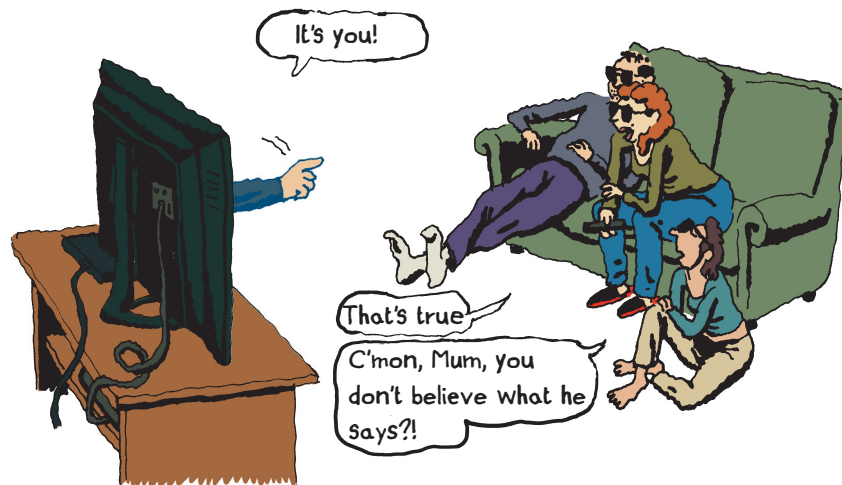
These discussions are essentially based on contradictory elements. The migrant, the «other», is often presented and perceived as a threat or a burden. By this logic, it would seem that they have nothing to contribute by coming to Europe. The associated costs, difficulties and conflicts would appear to outweigh the mutual benefits.



This negative perspective on migration has featured prominently in the political debate in various European countries, where anti-migrant parties have gained considerable ground in recent years.

Some of these political groups – whose parliamentary representation is growing – are not afraid to use the «threats» and budgetary costs of migrants in their electoral strategies.

2022 ELECTION: POLITICAL BROADCASTS ARE IN 3 DIMENSIONS



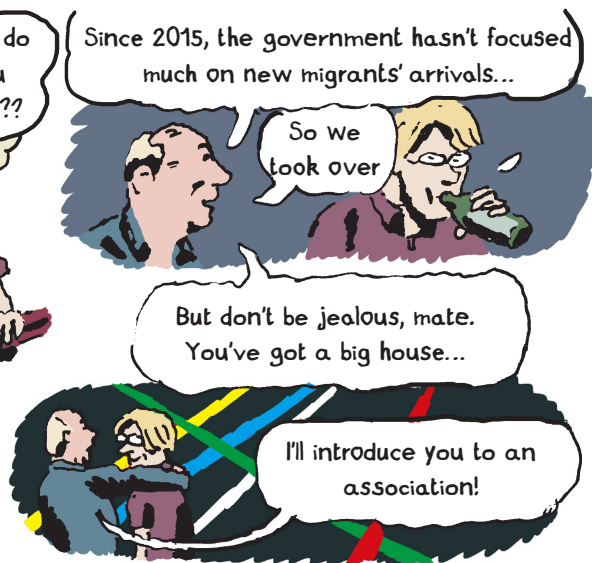
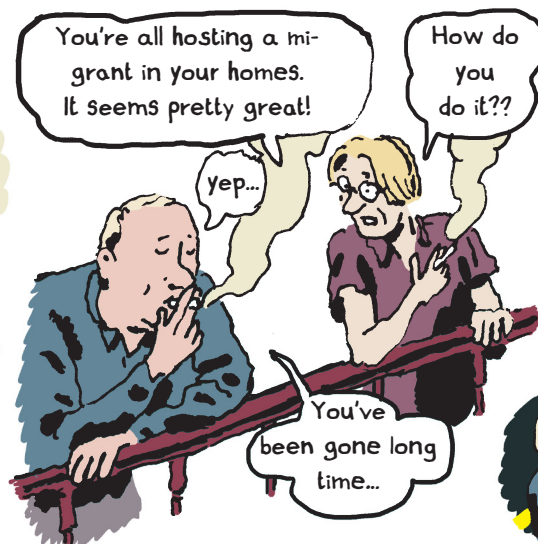
For example, in the spring of 2021, election posters of two political forces in Spain and France – sharing their head-on opposition to the entry of migrants – used arguments against unaccompanied minors («MENA») in their campaigns, including the cost of caring for them and associating their presence with an increase in delinquency. The Spanish poster claims that these young people receive an allowance of €4,700 per month, while the elderly (i.e., «your granny») receive only €426 per month in pensions.

In reality, the amount cited is an estimate of the average monthly expenditure for any minor (Spanish or foreign) placed in child protection (including the cost of depreciation of accommodation, pro rata salaries of protection staff, food, clothing and all other related expenses)¹. Meanwhile, the official minimum pension amount declared by the Spanish Social Security is significantly higher than that stated in this election propaganda: 689.70€ per month for a single person for 2021².



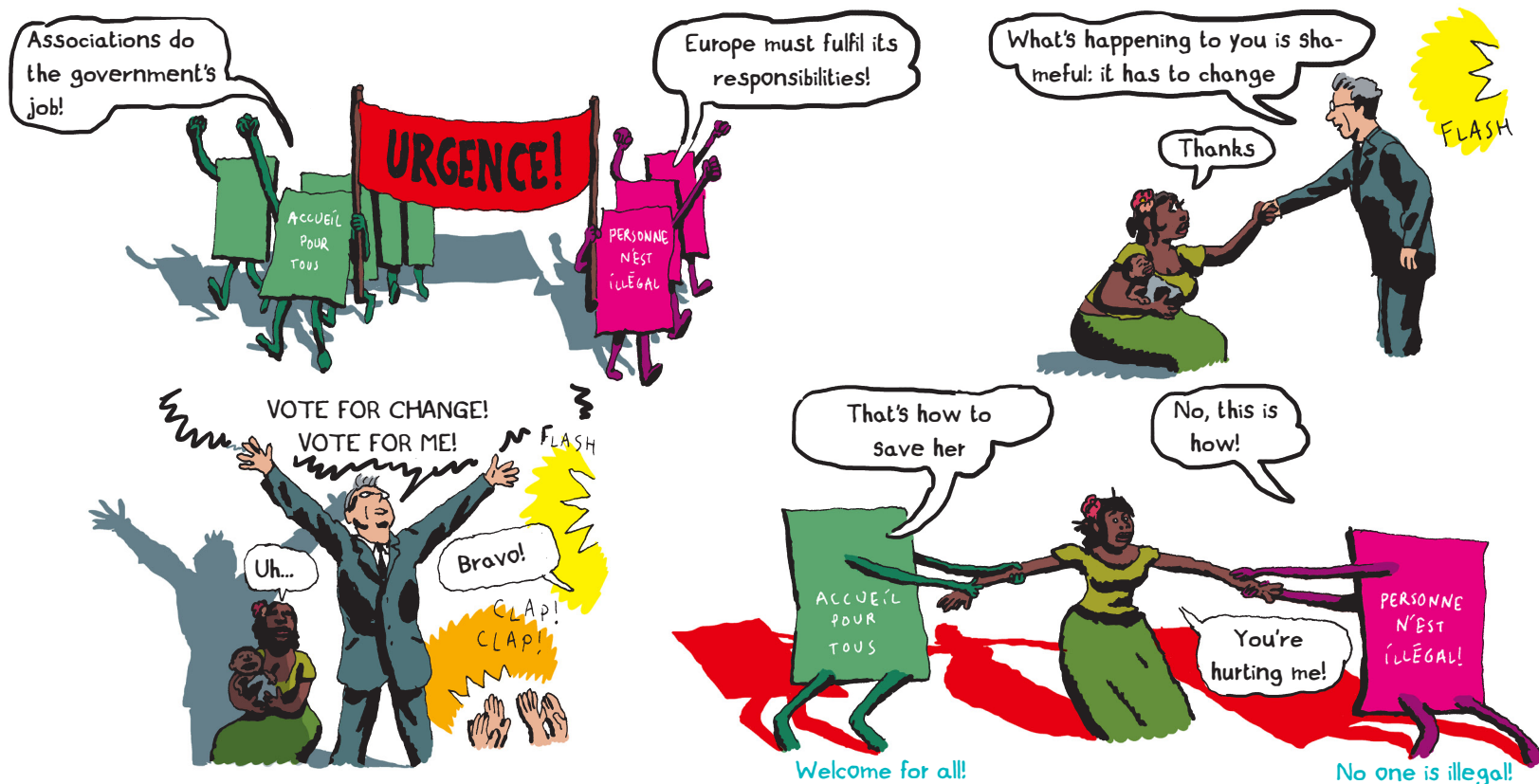
Alongside attitudes hostile to the presence of migrants, citizen mobilisation has increased considerably in recent years, particularly since the so-called 'migration crisis' of 2015 (described by some authors as more of a 'crisis of reception policies'³).

This surge of citizen and associative solidarity, which may occasionally involve institutional entities (especially at the local level), has many positive aspects that are highlighted throughout this book.



These movements have also become politicised, denouncing the disengagement of public authorities from migrant populations in precarious situations. On a larger scale, this surge of solidarity also calls into question European policies and laws concerning the management of the arrival of migrants.

This engagement may reveal a manipulation in favour of other political movements challenging the power of the state, which can exacerbate the vulnerabilities of the migrants concerned⁴. This can lead to conflicts and tensions between groups and associations that defend the same cause in principle, but which disagree on the strategies or actions to be adopted in response to the same problem⁵.



Presentation of the Positive Migration project

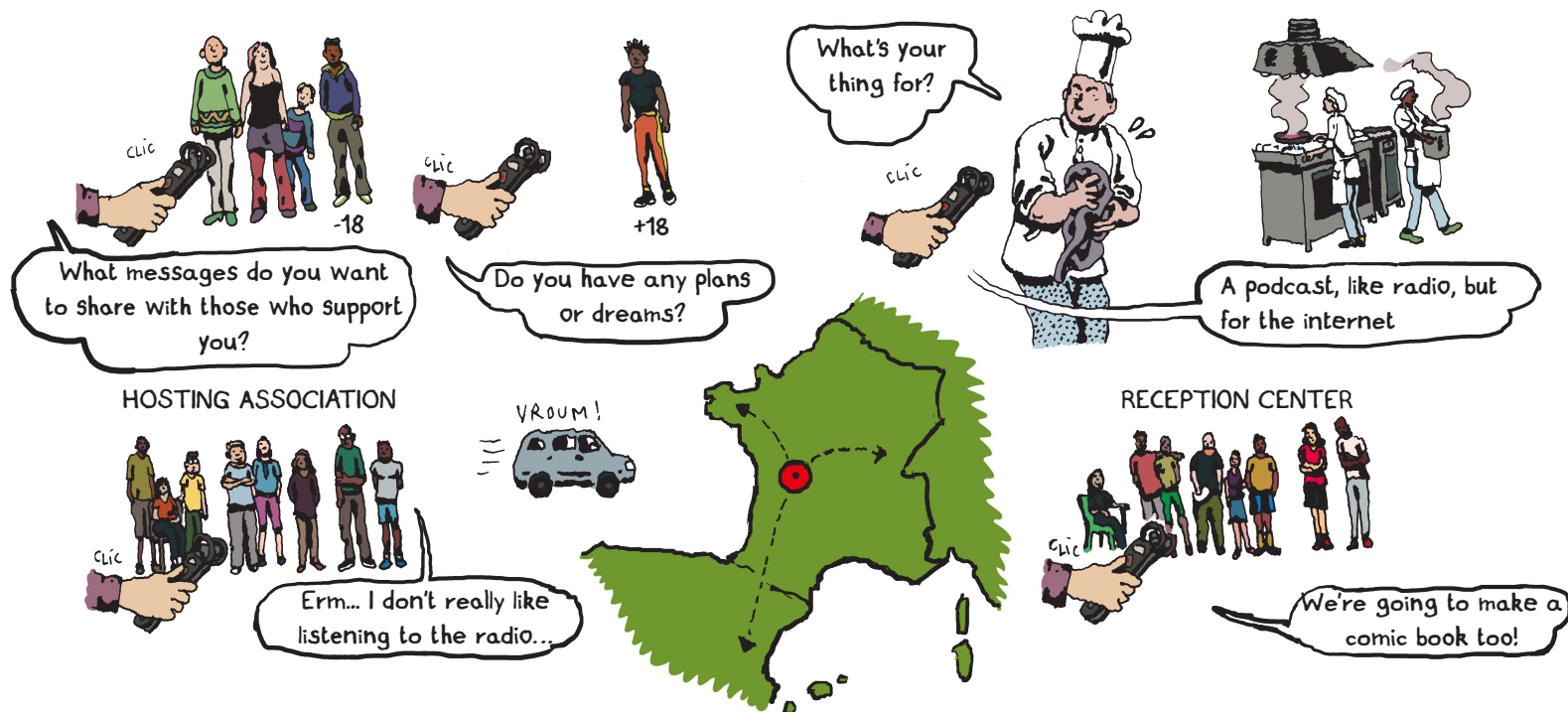
In the face of these constant controversies, the objective of the Migration Positive project, conducted by the Observatory on the Migration of Minors- research laboratory Migrantinter (CNRS-University of Poitiers) and co-financed by the CPER INSECT programme, was to show that positive stories about migration exist and can become visible.

More specifically, we generated a dynamic discourse with young migrants and members of the host society in order to produce narratives on the positive aspects of the migration experience. Without minimising its challenges and problems, we chose to contribute to changing the negative and conflicting paradigm of migration in order to make its more positive and constructive contributions perceivable.



We worked primarily in the city of Poitiers and its surroundings, meeting families and people involved in solidarity accommodation for young migrants⁶. We met young people who are mostly former unaccompanied minors rejected by the child protection system⁷. We also reached out to educational personnel and business owners in contact with this population. Beyond our fieldwork in Poitiers, we visited and exchanged with different solidarity collectives in Briançon, Gap, Grenoble and Saint-Brieuc in France, as well as in Andalusia (Cadiz province) in Spain to analyse similar actions in different contexts.

We have spread the results of the project in a number of ways: we produced a series of podcasts compiling the testimonies collected; we supported a group of young people to write and produce a song that expresses positive perceptions of their situation; we conducted a number of video interviews with young people willing to share their achievements in different areas; and we organised drawing, writing and photography workshops with young people and migrant minors in various circumstances. All of these realisations are available on the project website: <https://o-m-m.org/index.php/category/projet-migration-positive/>



These modes of expression were jointly selected by the young migrants and the people in solidarity we consulted. They were invited to express themselves freely on the basis of the following two questions:

How do young migrants and people in reception contexts (host families, schools, workplaces, etc.) experience or have experienced solidarity and mutual hospitality?

How do young migrants aspire to and achieve social, economic, personal and legal stability in their new living conditions?



The mutual experience of hospitality

The people in solidarity that we met have highly diverse profiles. Some are retired, others are students or professionally active. They live alone, in shared flats or in families of varying size, but all are prepared to make room for a new member. It's impossible to establish a typical profile because the phenomenon seems to mobilise – at least in the contexts we studied – people of different generations and socio-professional situations.

Nevertheless, we can identify certain common features in their motivations for becoming involved in the reception and support of a migrant.

Three main motives can be distinguished: (1) the sincere desire to help someone in need; (2) the wish to meet and share with others; and (3) political commitment and activism.

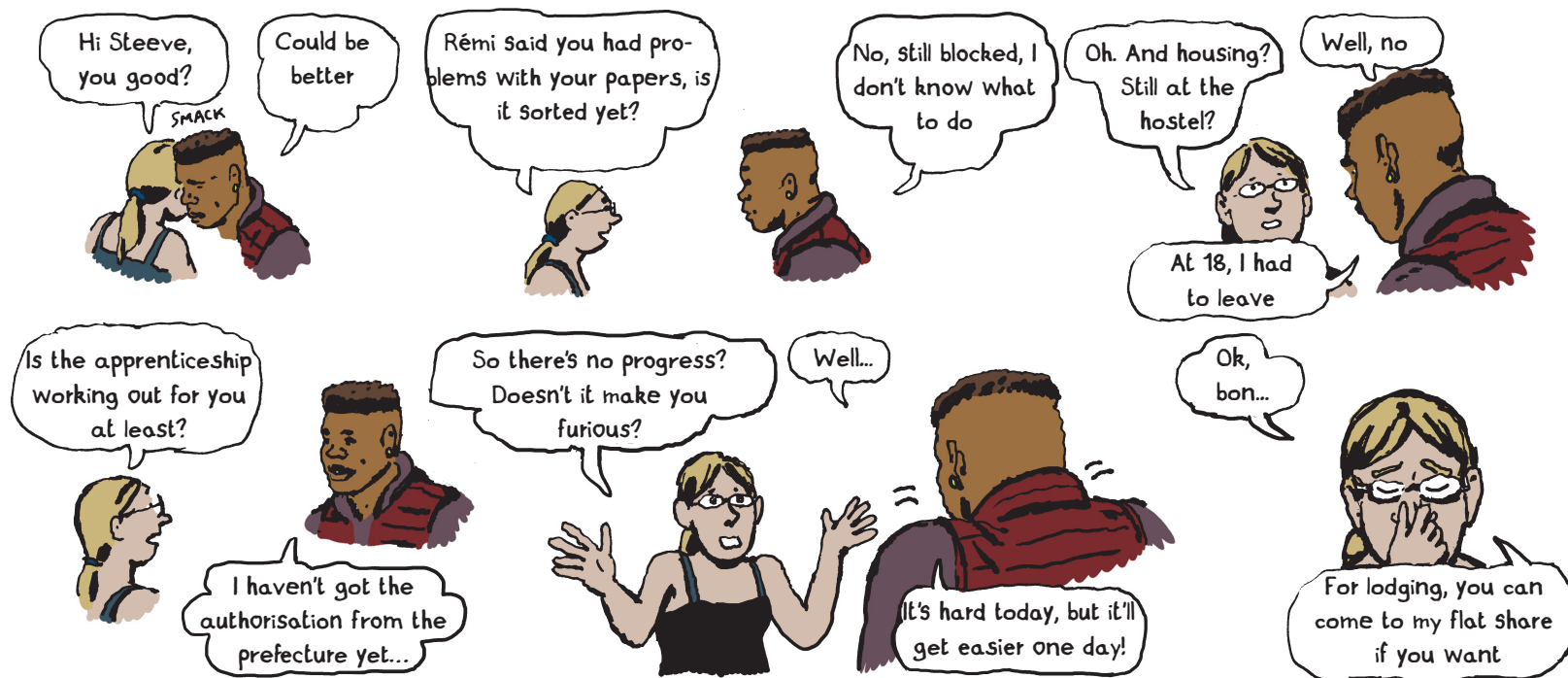


The awareness that there are people in precarious situations around us triggers a spontaneous emotional charge that justifies taking a solidarity initiative, as this testimony shows:

«I don't think I thought about it at any point in terms of... in terms of convictions or motivations. It was just, 'there's this person I've met, who I like, who's having a hard time with absolutely everything, and I have the resources to take them in, so I'll do it'» (Ambre)

The desire for connection, mutual enrichment and sharing, especially with those who've come from far away, are also recurrent aspects of the discourse:

«I truly believe that we need to share lots of things with people. We all need love, smiles and warmth in our lives. And I think it's important to defend that, and to defend young people who want to share and be free to smile and to live their lives» (Aline)

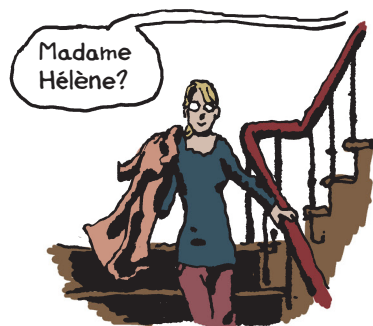


The experience of solidarity accommodation may also spring from a purely political conviction, a form of commitment in line with one's ideology or another way of seeing our societies. This initial incentive may gradually evolve into a purely human adventure.

In addition to motivations, we sought to explore the positive points of the presence of young migrants for their hosts. Many of those consulted expressed their satisfaction and pleasure in hosting a young person from another country, even if the issues related to their personal situation could pose various problems.

As Marcel Mauss points out in his essay on giving⁸, charity can be hurtful to the recipient, and unreciprocated charity can introduce a logic of inferiority or dependence in those involved.

Marjorie Gerbier-Aublanc and Evangeline Masson Diez also point out the possible imbalance in the relationship between the host and the hosted⁹. At the same time, our discussions reveal the establishment, often spontaneous, of a «give-and-take» dynamic between hosts and the young people they host, which is likely to generate a mutually enriching and shared relationship that is positively perceived.



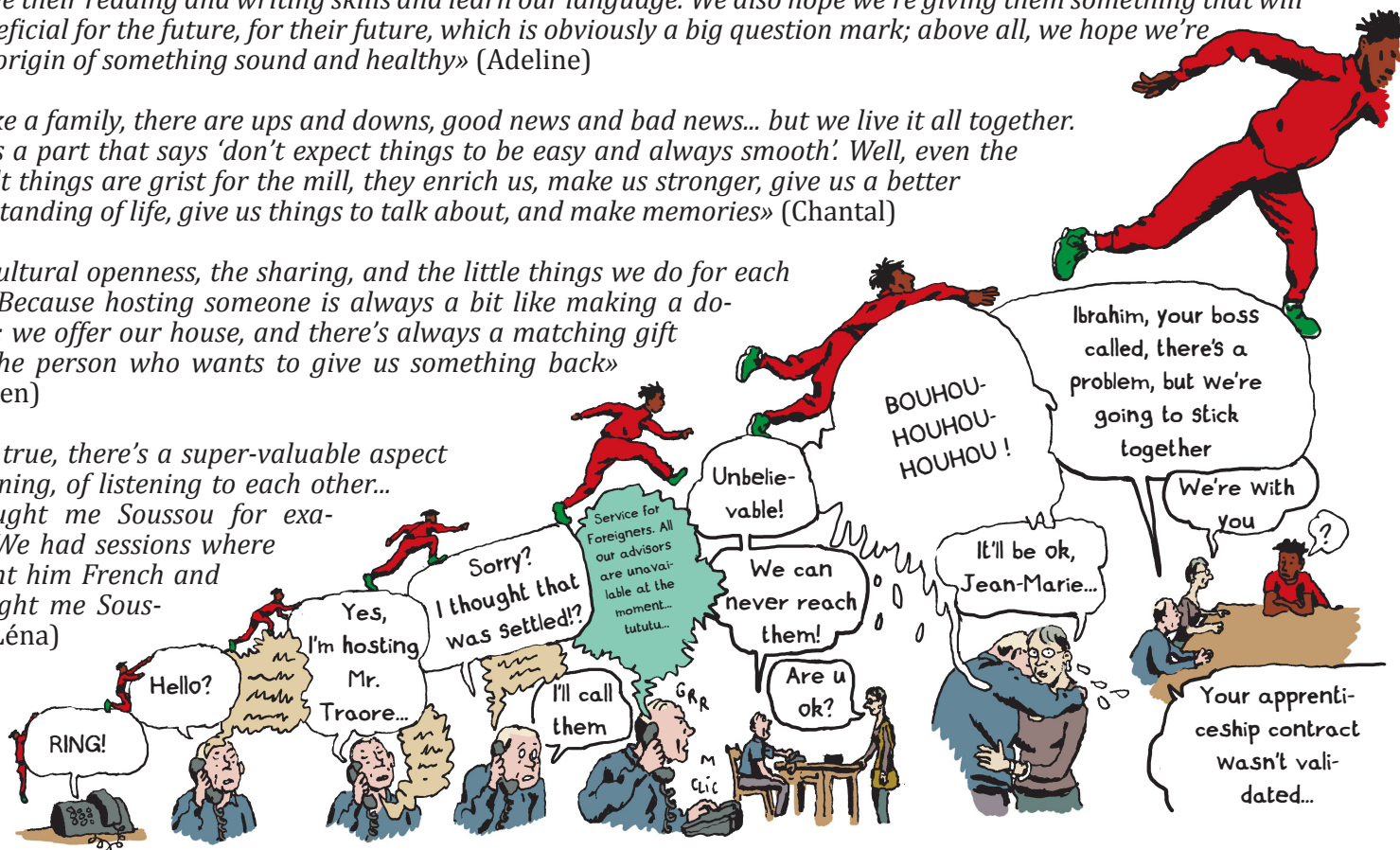
«Because of my activism, I was already aware of this, the difference in the way people living in poverty were treated, especially young people. You don't know what it's like, you live a comfortable life: you work, you're a student... Well, I chose to leave a bit of space at home. And it went really well» (Thomas)

«I think the positive aspects are more personal, for example the satisfaction of welcoming someone in need. Helping them improve their reading and writing skills and learn our language. We also hope we're giving them something that will be beneficial for the future, for their future, which is obviously a big question mark; above all, we hope we're at the origin of something sound and healthy» (Adeline)

«It's like a family, there are ups and downs, good news and bad news... but we live it all together. There's a part that says 'don't expect things to be easy and always smooth.' Well, even the difficult things are grist for the mill, they enrich us, make us stronger, give us a better understanding of life, give us things to talk about, and make memories» (Chantal)

«The cultural openness, the sharing, and the little things we do for each other. Because hosting someone is always a bit like making a donation: we offer our house, and there's always a matching gift from the person who wants to give us something back» (Laureen)

«... It's true, there's a super-valuable aspect of learning, of listening to each other... He taught me Soussou for example. We had sessions where I taught him French and he taught me Sous-sou» (Léna)



Conversely, some young people found it difficult to adapt to the rules, timetables and sharing of tasks inherent in family life. Some hosts also expected them to be more involved in their daily lives, which could lead to misunderstandings.

«We sort of manage our schedule with them. But in return, we ask them to be involved in our lives too [...] There were times when some stayed in their rooms, in their private corners, and didn't take an active part in things. It's true that it's hard to deal with, we're not a hotel, as we've always said» (Marie)

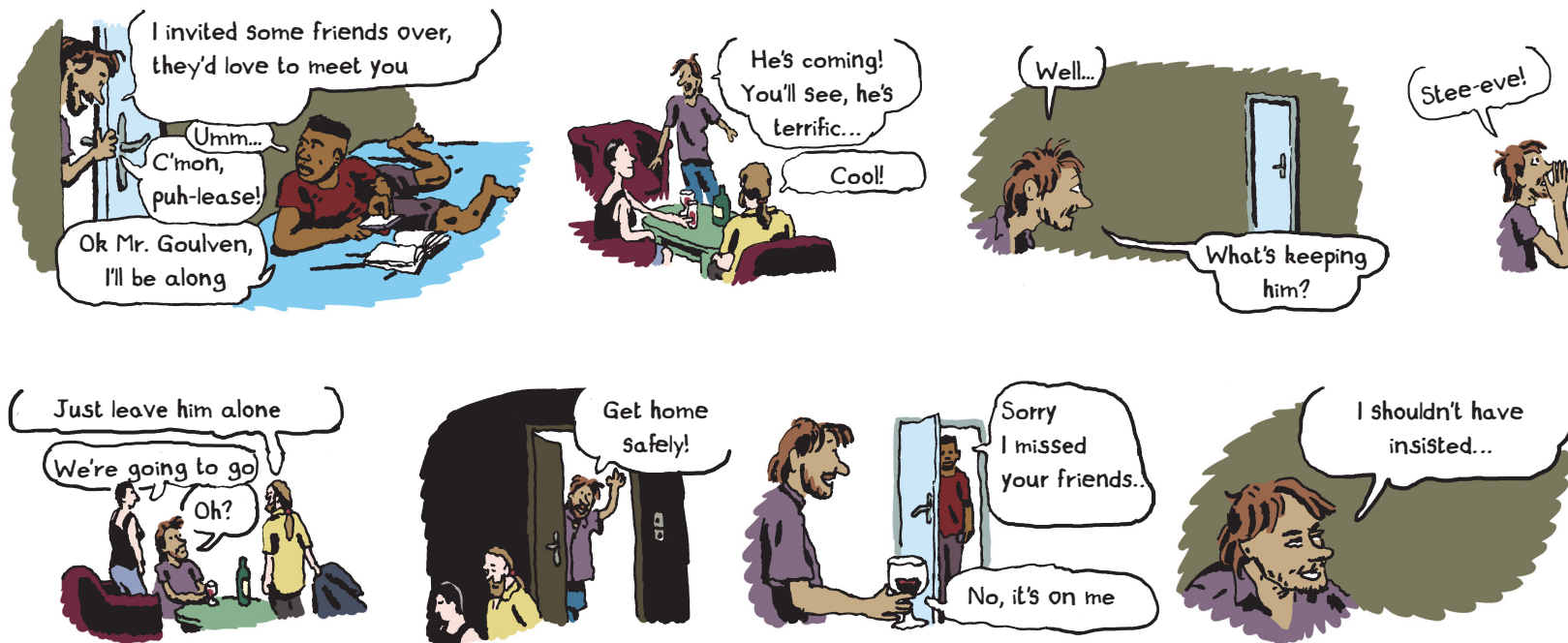
We also explored how the experience of solidarity accommodation has transformed the people involved over time. In this respect, most report that young migrants provide an opportunity to challenge their certainties, put their problems into perspective and question their relationship to the support offered.

«What I find really positive about this is that it shatters the fantasy that we are in a world where what we experience as French people is universal. I think it would be very constructive if we could abandon this belief, to see that the world is multiple and that there are many ways of doing and thinking. It shakes up our certainties... our convictions» (Cécile)



Some hosts may also question their relationship with the help they're offering, particularly the balance between wanting to know about the person they've invited into their home and not asking too many questions about difficult – sometimes perhaps even unspeakable – aspects of their past. It's a question of finding the right compromise between proximity and privacy.

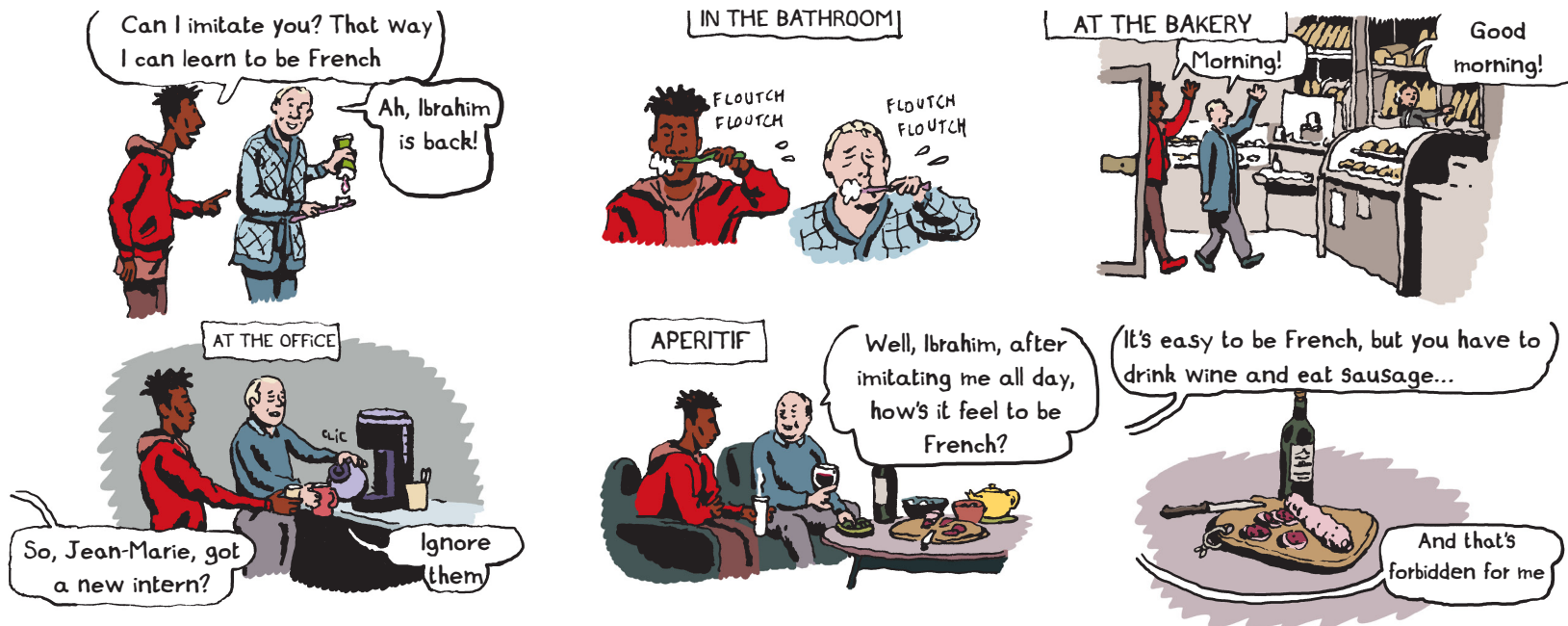
«You also understand what it means to help and where you stand in relation to that. That was a big lesson in the first year, when you also have the desire for mutual exchange. You have lots of expectations, even if you don't necessarily realise it, even if you don't verbalise it. You expect a lot in terms of cultural interaction, as though you're in a cultural exchange programme, except that's not what's happening, they're not on holiday»
(Yoann)



The young migrants with whom we spoke expressed great appreciation for the people who supported and guided them on their journey. We collected many messages of gratitude for all those families and people «who help us without knowing us». The young people honour the commitment of these supportive families and individuals by keeping in touch and giving them news. They also remain available to help them in turn when they need it. Interestingly, the hospitality experience is also a valuable opportunity for many of them to learn about the culture and codes of their new environment.

«I used to live with other young people, but we were all together, we didn't know what real family life was like or how to behave in France or anything. When I got here, I didn't realise that I was going to have a French family and everything. I remember how curious I was, I came to France to be in France; to be French you have to learn French culture. And to be really French, you have to live in France with French people and learn how everything works» (Stéphane)

Young people generally feel, sometimes to their surprise, that they've found a new family that provides them with affection and support, in their personal evolution towards autonomy.



«As far as I'm concerned, right now I feel closer to my host family than to my own family. Because they've given me the opportunity to try to know myself better without setting too many limits. They're always there for me when I need something or when I want to talk. Sometimes they even come to see if there's anything I want or would like to do. They're the ones who've pushed me to this point, so that now I can start taking initiatives or find training programmes on my own» (Soraya)

Without discounting the constraints these solidarity initiatives may entail, such as a deep commitment in terms of availability and energy, the management of frustrations, or a possible lack of coherence, the testimonies gathered show that hospitality is a globally fulfilling and symbiotic form of commitment for all parties involved.

I used to be afraid of doing the wrong thing, even little things in everyday life...



I thought I was always being judged



That what I said would draw attention to me, that if I kept quiet would be worse.



Now I realise that you don't have to talk much in the supermarket...



But at home we talk all the time. It's a bit scary yo be honest

But what do you want to do Celia?

I don't know!

A profession, training?



Maybe studies?

Training would be good

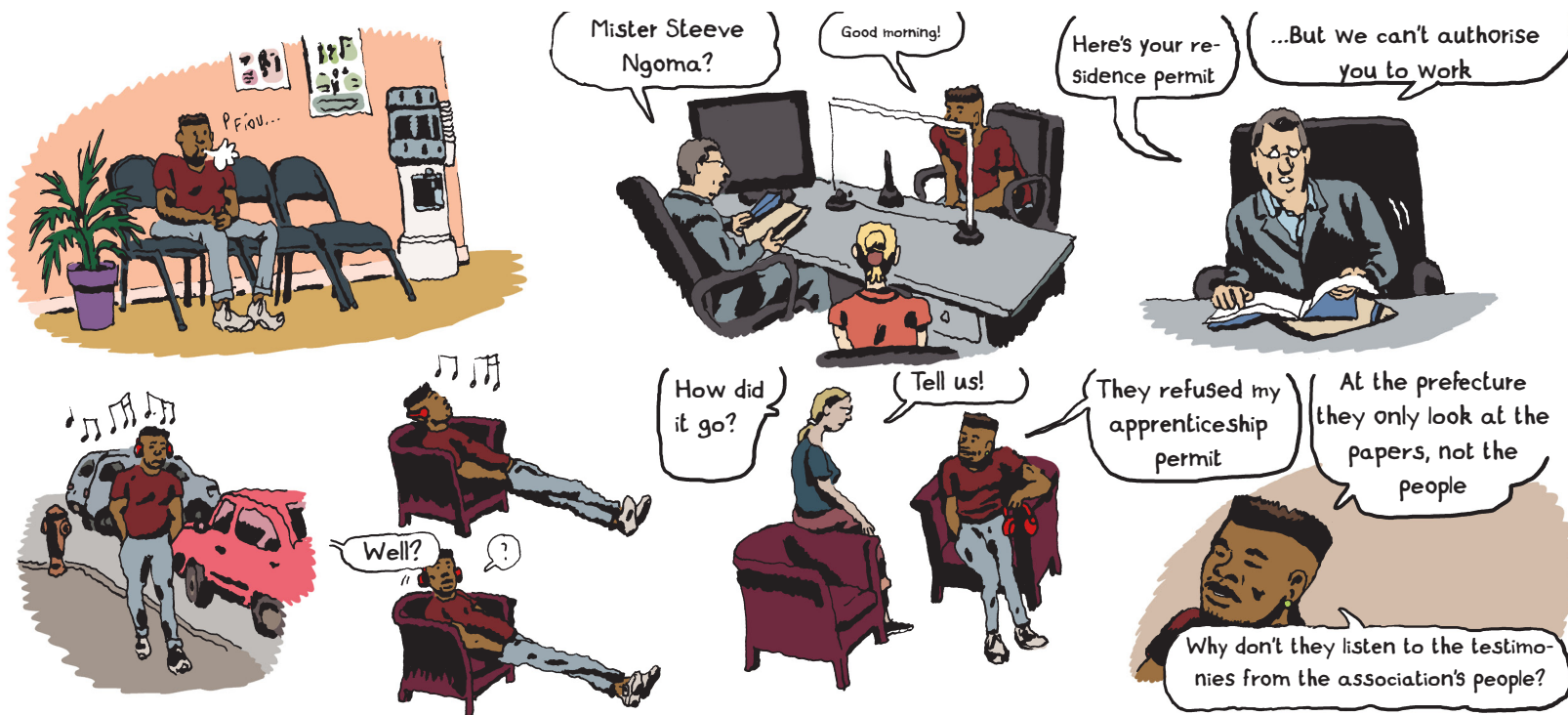


But in fact, it feels nice

The current institutional context, however, is marked by chronic deterioration in the quality of reception of migrants and refugees, largely conditioned by budgetary and management aspects. Overall, these political choices reflect a strategy of blocking and «putting migrants and asylum seekers on hold» (particularly in terms of administrative status for residence and work permits), thus hindering their access to an autonomous life¹⁰.

Given these conditions, if young people are to be able to rebuild their lives in our societies and find lasting integration, we feel it's important to promote these «private» forms of reception, to support them at the institutional level and to give them legitimacy.

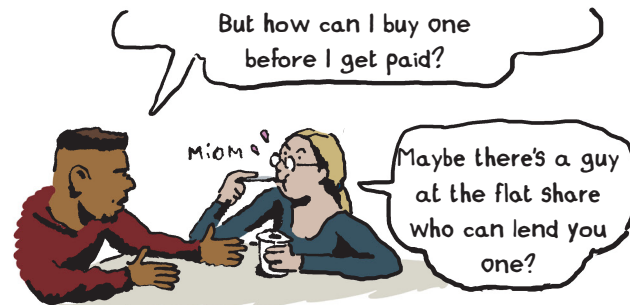
«I'll tell you about an experience I had when I was interviewed at the prefecture. They asked, 'What do you like most about France?' I said 'Solidarity'. They answered, 'Yes, well, given your situation'...» (Kemo)



The (re)construction of an ordinary life

In his writings, Professor Ravi KS Kohli frequently emphasises the importance for unaccompanied minors to rebuild an ordinary life. The return to ordinary life (or the first-time construction of an ordinary life that some have never had), is something young migrants learn to do, rather than something that happens to them.

Kohli argues that a successful transition to ordinary life is rarely accidental. The ability of young people to achieve it is profoundly influenced by the people (or institutions) that offer them protection or support. With this support, young migrants believe that it is possible to return to ordinary life¹¹.

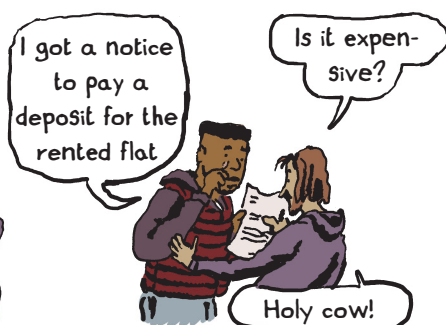


In their responses, the young people interviewed confirm their positive perception of very mundane aspects of daily life, such as having a home, having enough to eat, not being cold, being able to dress as they wish, etc.

«Yes, just the simple fact that when I leave my house, I can lock the door and put the key in my pocket. I say, 'Oh yeah, I've got a home now,' it's great. Knowing that someone's calling me to chat about whatever, my own electricity bill... And it makes me forget about the hard times I've been through and all, it's just memories. Now it's time to move on» (Boris)

«Yeah, there are positive things at the moment (...). I'm going to school, I'm getting plenty to eat, my head's a bit calmer than when I arrived. That's already really positive for me. Especially right now, when the weather's really cold, it's warm in the house, I have enough food, all that makes me really happy" (Samba)

«I'm glad because there were lots of things I wasn't allowed to do before. Now, here in France, I have the right to do what I want (...). Go out, wear trousers without putting on a hijab, for me, that means... freedom, that makes me happy!" (Mariam)



As far as their plans for the future are concerned, most have simple hopes and dreams: to learn a trade, to get a diploma, to find a job, to start a family...

«My dream is to become a bus driver, but as I can't just now, I'm going to work with the elderly. In the meantime, I'm happy with CAJMA¹²» (Mariam)

«After getting a vocational training certificate, my future plans are to become a nurse or a care assistant, and to do very well at it. I want to continue my studies, graduate with good marks, go back to my country, bring my knowledge to the people and look after the poorest. Because back home, the poor haven't the means to go to hospital» (Laetitia)



Some are also looking ahead to goals related to their passions, as in the case of a group of youths aged 16 to 21 in the city of Poitiers who formed the association «Young Revolution 86». In the summer of 2020, these young people noticed that Poitiers had no free venue for people on low incomes who wanted to pursue music. So they decided to open a studio whose goal was to «*accompany, encourage and support any individual or legal entity with a passion for creating and producing music*». In September 2020, we met with these young people, whose ideas and state of mind naturally attracted our attention. We've been since then in regular contact with the group, assisting them in their

search for premises and sources of funding, and in their efforts to establish the association, whose statutes state: «*the association seeks to give an opportunity to people who may lack resources, and to help develop their potential*». A strong commitment, made by migrants who want to become involved in a positive way in French society¹³.

«A lot is working out well in my life, actually. One thing that's close to my heart is the music project that's being developed. In the three months since the project started, it's really come along. When you see everything we had to do, I think it's really encouraging and it's one of the most positive things in my life right now» (Alphonse)



* Based on the original song 'Migration positive' from «Young Revolution 86». Available in Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nl_kvPDcA0

What are the messages young people want to share?

When we asked the young people we met about the messages they wanted to share with their peers back home, they were unanimous: they wanted to warn them about the misinformation conveyed by certain media.

They also mentioned the misleading influence of the information that some migrants spread, representing a life of «success» in Europe where money grows on trees.

Life in Europe (according to INSTAGRAM):



I party with Gérard
Depardieu



I have a flat with a
terrace



I drive an S.U.V



Every month, the French
government sends me money



I have a top-level job
in a successful company



My secretary is
Kim Kardashian



When I'm sick
I get free treatment



I'm super healthy anyway

These direct «don't make the trip» messages to those who remain in their country of departure seem to be fundamentally linked to the risks involved in the journey and the uncertainties of life in France. These messages could be interpreted as an implicit consequence of contemporary international migration management policies and norms, which oblige people to take considerable risks in order to travel.

In addition to the difficulties created during the migration process, these rules and policies further increase the precariousness of those who reach European territory, limiting their capacity for autonomy and confining them to particularly restrictive legal and administrative categories.

Life in Europe (in reality):



I don't speak the language properly



I live with pensioners



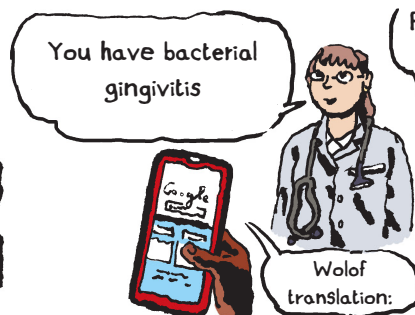
I ride a bike



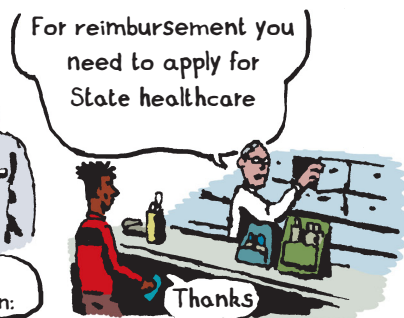
The French government sends me bills



I get up early to go to an apprenticeship



My secretary is Google Translate



When I'm sick, I treat myself as best I can



Anyway, I'm never sick

According to the researcher Francesco Vacchiano, migration allows young people to break down social barriers and gain access to a consumer society to which they aspire, but in doing so, they expose themselves to forms of control and exploitation imposed on them by borders and administrations¹⁴. In short, migration simultaneously liberates and enslaves youth, which could explain the potential contradiction between the positive and cautionary discourses we've observed.

«My message is simple: they should stay. Despite everything that's happening, despite everything they're going through, despite the hardships they're enduring... the best thing is to stay there. Because it's not that easy once you get to Europe. I've been here for nearly three years, and all I've benefited from is some training, a bit of knowledge, discoveries and so on. But afterwards, in terms of increased income, there's nothing. So they should stay... I can't advise someone to go out and risk everything in the desert. I risked my life in the desert, the Mediterranean too; others died there... It could have been me too, so... Going out, risking your life for an uncertain outcome, it's... it's a huge thing...» (Lénine)



CHAMBER OF TRADES

«To young people back home, I'm going to say 'work'. Really, 'work' is the all-purpose message for everyone. 'Work, and believe in it'. Because I won't ask a young person who's back home to leave, seriously. Because... I'm not necessarily going to elaborate on everything I've been through, but really, there's nothing worse than leaving. There are far worse things on the journey. And more importantly, there's no guarantee you're actually going to leave or get where you want to go safely. The secret is to work and believe» (Loïc)

«I wouldn't advise anyone who lives back home to make the same journey as I did. In a way it's participating in a moral crime, because if anything happens to that person, you'll blame yourself for the rest of your life. Other people may interpret this differently by saying that we've been successful in our lives and don't want them to succeed in turn. In a way, leaving your country is consenting to die» (Stephen)



As for their messages to young migrants in France and Europe, we see great encouragement for other young people in the same situation. They invite each other to be individually strong so as to believe in their projects and share their successes. On a collective level, the goal is to remain united despite the difficulties encountered and to face the fear - very present in their discourse - of falling into delinquency should their situation not improve.

Some young people also plan to help and support others who have just arrived.

«For the lads I'm with, the lads in the same boat as me, whether it's in Poitiers or wherever, we all tend to give up and get into illegal stuff. I know we're in a difficult situation, but we have to try. When you listen to all the politicians' speeches, they're always saying 'France needs young people who dare'. So you've got to dare» (Alphonse)



«What I want to tell young people in the same situation as me is that I'm happy today because I've been looked after, and that's fine. I've had financial aid from the state, from the ASE [French child welfare], and it's going well. If I've a message to share, it's to tell young people that France is a good country. It's a welcoming country open to everyone, but you have to persevere and not give up. It is a good country» (Stéphane)



Conclusion: Positive migration?

Given that international migration into the European space is a highly polarised area of conflict in past and current political and media discourse, the stated aim of the Migration Positive project was to highlight the positive aspects of the migratory experience for both young migrants and members of host societies. To this end, we studied the motivations and mutual contributions of civic hospitality, in particular with non-institutional networks of solidarity with migrants in different territories in France and Spain.

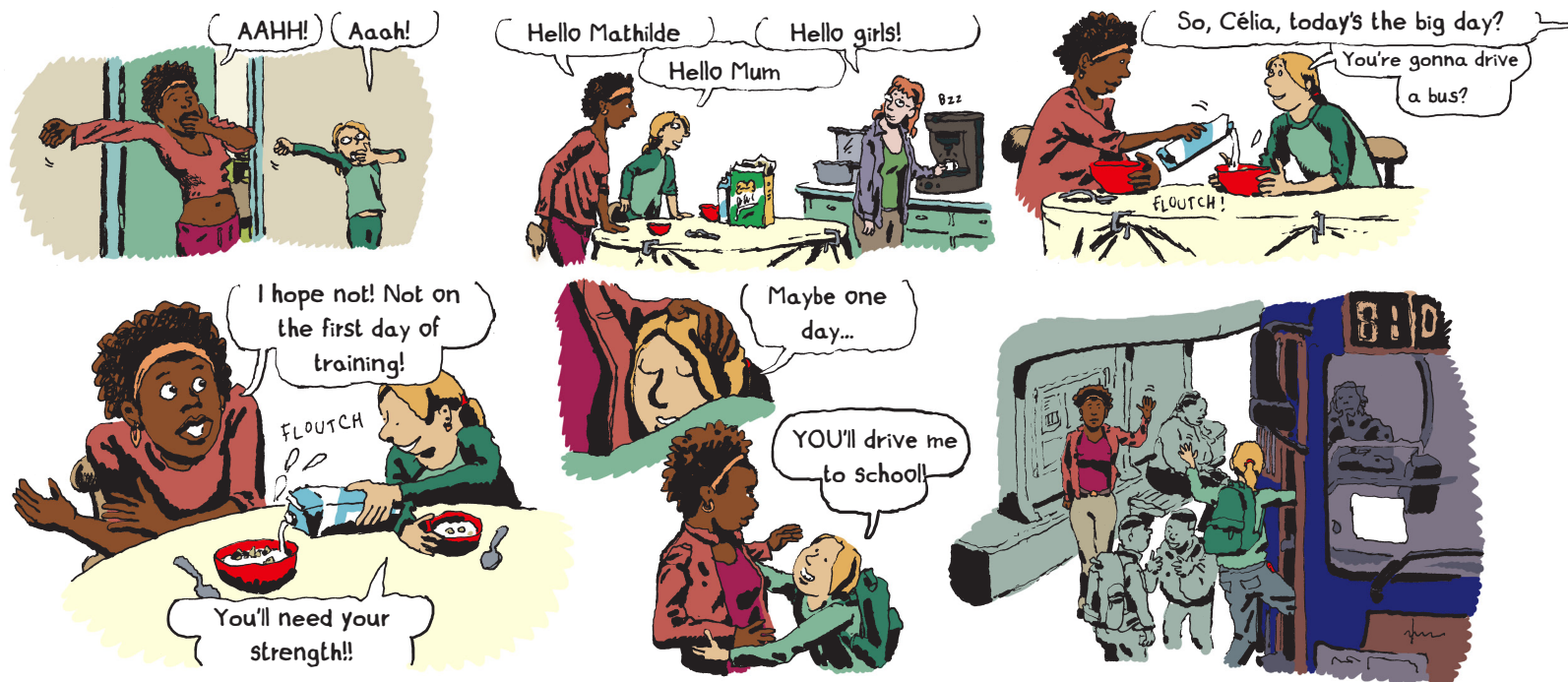
We also drew attention to the constructive aspects of the migration experience from the viewpoint of young migrants, particularly the contrast between aspects of their current and past lives and their projections for the future. Our results confirmed that positive narratives about migration do exist and deserve to become more visible.



We met people of solidarity who dedicate a great deal of their time and energy to protecting and supporting young migrants. Families from different social backgrounds and compositions who provide them with affection and moral and material support that these young people have lost as a result of exile or that they were never able to have in their past. We also met young migrants who, with patience and perseverance, are gradually (re)building their lives in a new setting: they're graduating and becoming constructively involved in the schools that receive them; they're contributing to the economic dynamism of our societies with their

work and energy; they're developing their own individual and/or collective projects and are also sometimes involved with their relatives and communities of origin.

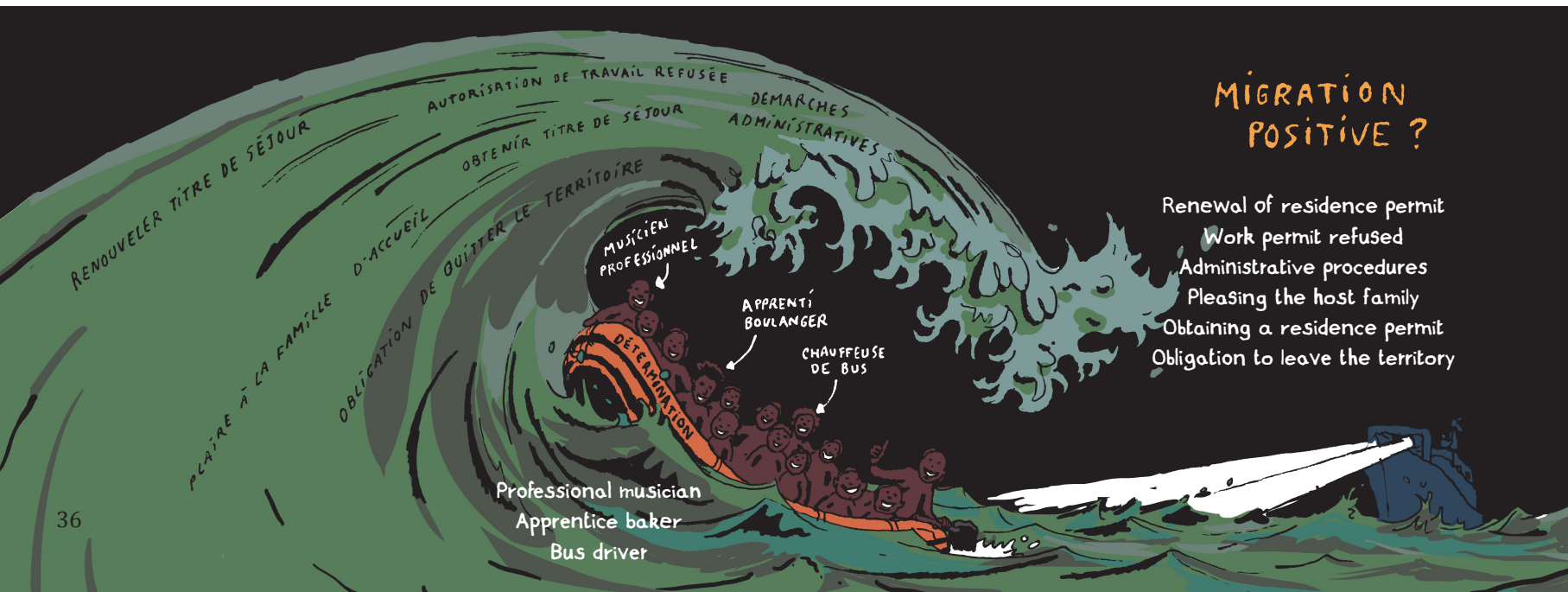
Yet some controversial elements threaten the positivity of the narratives we've collected.



One omnipresent element is the interpretation and application of the political and legal framework for managing migration. The efforts made by young migrants and host persons to achieve educational, cultural, social and professional integration are often frustrated by slow and arbitrary administrative procedures.

The progressive sophistication of migration control mechanisms discourages young migrants, who remain very grateful for the private support they receive, but would like to be independent actors in their new lives. This restrictive management contributes greatly to the polarisation and conflicting nature of the discourse for and against the presence of migrants.

Despite making remarkable achievements in their migration journeys, many of the young people also have mixed feelings when it comes to evaluating their experiences. Almost unanimously, they advise their friends and relatives back home against embarking on the same adventure as they did. «*To migrate is to accept the possibility of dying*»: the terrors, dangers and frustrations endured during their journey and the uncertainty and precariousness of their situation once they arrive in Europe unfortunately seem to outweigh the wealth of wonderful encounters and successes. Along with their heartfelt testimonies, the young people we met once again underlined the violence and injustice caused by the political-legislative management of contemporary migration.



Notes

¹ 'El coste de los menores extranjeros, otra vez en la diana' (The cost of foreign minors once again the subject of controversy), *El País* daily newspaper, 22 April 2021

² Source: www.seg-social.es

³ Camille Guennebeaud "Dans la frontière. Migrants et lutte des places dans la ville de Calais", Université de Lille 1, 2017.

⁴ For example, see situations described by Marie Cosnay in the text "Dans nos maisons", *Monde commun* review, vol. 3, no. 2, 2019, pp. 146-161.

⁵ On this point, see the analysis proposed by Evangeline Masson Diez in her doctoral thesis: "Eprouver l'hospitalité: l'accueil chez soi du jeune isolé exilé", Université de Strasbourg, 2020, pp. 92-99.

⁶ This network of solidarity hosts is coordinated in Poitiers by the association Min'de Rien. More information on following link: <https://mdr86.jimdofree.com>

⁷ We met most of the young people thanks to the REMIV Centre of the Maison des Trois Quartiers with whom we collaborated throughout the project.

⁸ Marcel Mauss "Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques", 1923-1924, digital version by Jean Marie Tremblay, collection "Les classiques des sciences sociales", Université de Québec at Chicoutimi, 106 p.

⁹ Marjorie Gerbier-Aublanc & Evangeline Masson-Diez "Être accueilli chez l'habitant: de l'hébergement-épreuve à la cohabitation-tremplin pour les migrants", *Rhizome*, vol. 71, no. 1, 2019, pp. 51-60.

¹⁰ We explored these aspects in our previous work within the REMIV project. See Daniel Senovilla Hernández, coord. "L'attente subie par les mineurs non accompagnés dans le département de la Vienne: raisons et réponses. Résultats 2017-2019 du projet REMIV", Poitiers, MIGRINTER, 2019, 130 p.

¹¹ See Ravi KS Kohli "Protecting asylum seeking children on the move" in *Mineurs en Migration: enjeux juridiques, politiques et sociaux*, *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, volume 30 (1), 2014, pp. 83-104. Ravi KS Kohli was a major inspiration for the creation of the Migration Positive project. Together with Finnish researcher Mervi Kaukko, he coordinates a similar programme called "Drawing together": <https://www.drawingtogetherproject.org/>

¹² CAJMA 22- Collective for the Aid of Young Migrants and their Accompanying Persons in Côtes d'Armor. For more information: <https://www.cajma22.fr/>

¹³ More information about the association "Young Revolution 86" here: Instagram = https://www.instagram.com/young_revolution86/?hl=fr

¹⁴ Francesco Vacchiano "À la recherche d'une citoyenneté globale. L'expérience des adolescents migrants en Europe", in *Mineurs en Migration: enjeux juridiques, politiques et sociaux*, *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, volume 30 (1), 2014, pp. 59-81.

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Life in Europe (according to INSTAGRAM):



I party with Gérard
Depardieu



I have a flat
with a terrace



I drive an S.U.V.



Every month the French State
sends me money

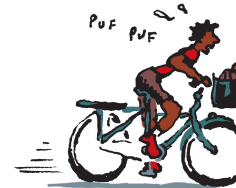
Life in Europe (in reality):



I don't speak the
language properly



I live with pensioners



I ride a bike



The French State
sends me bills



GRAND POITIERS
Communauté d'agglomération



RÉGION
Nouvelle-
Aquitaine

