

# TOGETHER

Photographic documentary by  
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Photo 01 - Céline, a volunteer with the Cimade for the past 16 years, tries to help Dhiakaby. His resident's permit has expired. It is my first day on this documentary....the summer sun illuminates the desk, throwing threatening shadows.



Photo 02 - Marie-Ange, volunteer at the Cimade since 2007, remembers that this man, with his papers in order, came along with his old Comorian cousin. She was 80 years old and her name was Princesse. Living at her niece's house and with no resources, she was able to get a resident's permit valid for only one year, leaving her in a fragile situation as the permit is not automatically renewed.



Photo 03 - Mohamed is Nigerian and spoke only English when he came here. This young man was living under threat in his home country, which is why he came to France. He was a Taekwondo champion at home and won many matches, and he continued his training after arriving in France. On that basis, Céline tried to get him a “special competence and talent” resident’s permit, valid three years (this card does not exist in the same form since March 2016) but the authorities did not take his talents into account. They finally applied for a “private life – family” category of permit which he was able to get through his French wife. Neither he nor she wanted to marry “for the papers” but they ended up having to do so....





Photo 04 – To start, they have to collect all the elements proving that they have lived in France for years. Marie-Ange explains to this man that his file is missing too many documents for his application to succeed.



Photo 05 - Clémence helps out at the association every Tuesday. She is a trainee, in her final year at university. The association regularly takes in placement students. For example, the Law Clinic contacted the Cimade so that its students could get some concrete experience with foreigners in the process of application for residents' permits.



Photo 06 - Mohamed got his papers with the help of the Cimade some years ago and today he is here with his uncle, in the hope that he can find a solution with the help of the Cimade volunteers. Laws change depending on who is in government; under Chirac and Sarkozy, things changed eight times.



Photo 07 - Precious is 8, her parents are Filipinos and don't speak a word of French. The law permits children to go to school even if their parents do not have their papers. Today, it is she who translates Céline's advice to her parents as to how to apply for their permit.





Photo 08 – These files contain applications followed by the volunteers as well as those that have been archived after four or five years. Everyone’s story is different and complex; rarely do they fit the strict framework defined by laws.





Photo 09 – Everyone notes their names as they arrive in the waiting room and they are seen in that order. These lists are also used to generate statistics on the people received by the association, which appear in the annual report of every county branch of the Cimade.



Photo **10** - Fanta has been living in France for eight years. Up until 2008, she had 7 children, but 6 of them are now dead... Since 2008, she has only her daughter who came to France when she was 18; as she had her papers in order, she was able to lodge her mother. Fanta has no resources; she works as a hawker and has no official documents. She is still “irregular” and is now 67 years old...



Photo 11 – Some days the wait can last for several hours. Their patience is remarkable. They seem to withdraw into themselves; it is rare to hear them talking amongst themselves. Marie-Jo, a Christian volunteer, speaks of the suffering of their inner selves. *“They’re lost”*, she says. How can their identities not be damaged, having lived hidden, unseen, because of their imposed illegality?



Photo 12 – Waiting, inside-outside.

There is a view over a courtyard with trees from the balcony.





Photo 13 - Sabine, a volunteer, goes across the waiting room to get the next person in line. Between two appointments, she will answer many questions...



Photo 14 – The waiting room: Céline checks the waiting list under everyone’s gaze.



Photo 15 - Precious is 8, her parents are Filipinos and don't speak a word of French. She draws while listening to Céline explain how her parents should go about applying for a resident's permit. She encourages them to take French lessons.



Photo 16 - The map is important for them to get their bearings. "Africa is right in the middle", Céline tells me.  
This woman asked me not to take her photo....





Photo 17 – This little girl has already learned that it is better not to be too visible.

Quite often, to protect the children, the volunteers recommend to the « irregulars » to avoid places where there are crowds, to avoid train stations and even to be sure not to jaywalk (considered to be a crime, conviction for which could lead to expulsion).



Photo 18 - Marie-Ange remembers that the document in the photo was probably an OQTF « *Obligation de quitter le territoire* », or Injunction to leave France. Sometimes they have managed to vaguely translate these letters from the authorities; sometimes they don't speak any French. They come to the association to understand what such letters are about.

The Algerians express more clearly the message that the acronym OQTF means: *"I have my leaving papers"!*



Photo 19 – A little girl with her father outside the offices of the association.





Photo 20 – I know nothing of this couple waiting their turn so patiently, but I find them magnificent.





Photo 21 – Separated by a wall.

Jean, a volunteer, takes care of a migrant while another waits on the other side of the wall; it is often an anxious wait for information.



Photo 22 – Not without my son?

In this second office where the volunteers meet the migrants, I wonder who is the little boy tattooed on this woman's back. I think I asked her the question. Was it her son back home? Or was it some story I imagined?

Sabine is going through the list of the other branches of the association (this woman may have qualified for political asylum). Later, looking at this photograph, Sabine wrote to me that the tattoo is like a jewel on her back.



Photo 23 - Marie-Ange shows this young woman the various circulars which describe the different solutions which exist in order to obtain the appropriate papers to stay in France.  
Here, she describes the rights of a spouse married to a French woman or to a foreign “irregular”.