



MIGRATION BY NUMBERS

NEWCOMERS IN THE FRENCH LABOUR MARKET

ABSTRACT

This policy brief examines, in practical terms and using official data, the entirety of current qualitative and quantitative data on migration in France. The figures and statistics on which it relies are from official institutions, such as the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), the National Institute for Demographic Studies, Department of Research Animation, Studies and Statistics (DARES) and the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII). In addition to these, numbered developments relying on other non-official sources (articles or longer works) are cited systematically. The brief begins with a numerical assessment of immigrants (both regular and irregular) in France that examines, in particular, their placement in administrative detention centres (CRAs). It then summarises the methods of judicial integration of immigrants in France: asylum, naturalisation, visas, etc. Next, the brief lays out the terms of social protection for migrants, both regular and irregular. Following this, it outlines the place of immigrants in the job market. Finally, it considers the question of whether immigration is an 'economic burden' or a resource for French society.



AUTHOR

SMAÏN LAACHER
Professor Emeritus at
Strasbourg University

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THE FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES (FEPS)

European Political Foundation – N° 4 BE 896.230.213
Avenue des Arts 46 1000 Brussels (Belgium)
www.feps-europe.eu
@FEPS_Europe

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT
STIFTUNG**



Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Italy

Piazza Adriana 5
00193 Rome (Italy)
<https://italia.fes.de/>
@fes_italia



Fondation Jean Jaurès

12 Cité Malesherbes
75009 Paris (France)
<https://www.jean-jaures.org/>
@j-jaures



Centro Politiche Europee

Via Giambattista Vico, 00196 Rome (Italy)
www.cep.eu
@cep_ITA



Università
per Stranieri
di Perugia

Università per Stranieri di Perugia

Piazza Braccio Fortebraccio, 4, 06122 Perugia (Italy)
<https://www.unistrapg.it/>
@UniStraPg



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1 Irregular immigration

In France, arrests of irregular immigrants increased by 12.4% between 2019 and 2021, to almost 121,000.¹ In 2022, the total number of 'returns' of foreigners in irregular situations grew by 14.9% since 2021. This was lower than the pre-pandemic levels, about three-quarters of the 2018 figure (almost 20,000 returns). In total, 19,425 irregular migrants left French soil in 2022 (through returns, voluntary assisted departures and spontaneous departures), a rise of 14.9% from 2021, which had 15,396 returns. The fight against irregular immigration has met with objective difficulties in terms of movement and sanitary restrictions, especially in 2021. Added to these barriers is the reduced activity of *laissez-passer consulaires*, as the countries of origin of irregular immigrants often refuse to grant these to French authorities.

It is impossible to accurately assess the number of people staying in France irregularly. However, it is possible to get an empirically based picture of the number of foreign nationals in irregular situations via the evaluation of the number of beneficiaries of State Medical Aid (AME). AME is a scheme that grants certain irregular migrants access to healthcare. This indicator is not completely reliable, however, as it depends on healthcare access conditions for populations that are often very precarious or in transit (for example, to the UK). As of 30 September 2021, 376,108 people benefitted from AME that year, a slight increase (+2%) compared with the same period in 2020.

1.1 Placements in administrative detention centres (CRA)

As of 31 December 2021, France had 2,086 CRAs (of which 1,859 were on mainland France and 227 were overseas).² The average duration of stay rose by four days to reach 24.2 days.

This number was much lower in overseas departments (DOM) – 4.1 days on average. The average annual CRA occupancy rate was significantly higher than in 2020 in mainland France (81.9%) and in French overseas territories (45.5%). In 2017, a programme to open additional spaces was launched, with the aim of providing 480 additional CRAs by the end of 2020 – of which 389 were delivered in 2019. In 2020, only 61 of the 91 remaining spaces became operational. The last 30 places were set up tardily, in March 2021 and became operational in January 2022. Following a significant decrease in detention centre placements in 2020 on the mainland (-49.4%), the numbers rose again in 2021 (+14.3%). At the same time, the number of people under house arrest as an alternative to detention rose from 12,913 in 2020 to 16,621 in 2021, an increase of 28.7%.

2 Regular immigration

Regular immigration to France is heavily regulated by a series of legal constraints. Naturalisation, deportation (expulsions), various types of residence permits, refugee status, visas, etc., are all different statuses enabling immigrants to remain in France regularly on a short-, medium- or long-term basis.

In June 2023, the Interior Ministry published definitive statistics on regular immigration in 2022.³

2.1 Beginning with migratory fluxes

According to the Interior Ministry's data, 316,174 first residence permits were issued in 2022. The first-time issuance of permits rose by 11.8% compared with 2021. Contrary to what is often claimed, family reasons are not the main reason for granting residence permits. The most common reason is student status,

Table 1. Residence Permits by reason for admission (excluding British nationals)

	2018	2019	2020	2021 (definitive)	2022 (provisional)	Increase in 2022
Economic	33,336	39,043	26,705	36,685	51,673	+40.9%
Familial	97,663	98,206	80,660	93,172	95,507	+2.5%
Student	83,974	90,671	73,394	88,617	101,250	+14.3%
Humanitarian	35,710	38,861	33,801	41,966	40,549	-3.4%
Miscellaneous	16,738	20,722	14,828	22,332	27,195	+21.8%
Total	267,421	287,503	229,388	282,772	316,174	+11.8%

Sources: Vie-publique.fr / and AGDREF/DSED

THE SPECIAL CASE OF UKRAINIANS

Ukrainians may benefit from a TRP (Temporary Residence Permit) as they have been granted temporary protection. In 2022, 65,833 Ukrainians received such a permit. The residence permits delivered to Ukrainians are the result of a European directive on temporary protection, created in 2001 and operationalised for the first time in March 2022. Ukrainians benefitting from the TRP are granted, among other things, the rights to work and to immediately obtain medical insurance, whereas other asylum seekers, as of 2019, had to wait three months before benefitting from social security. No other exiled people on French territory, be they Syrian or Afghan, have access to the temporary protection scheme.

which accounts for 101,250 permits. The main countries of origin of primary residence permits are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and the United States.

2.2 Asylum

In 2022, 155,773 applications (including for minors) were submitted in “one-stop shops for asylum applications” (*Guichets uniques de demandes d’asile*). This represents an increase of 28.3% from 2021 and a return to pre-pandemic levels. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Turkey and Georgia are the main countries of origin of first asylum applications. The OFPRA (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons) and the National Court for the Right of Asylum issued 56,276 decisions pronouncing protected status (refugee or subsidiary protection, excluding accompanying minors), a 3.5% increase from 2021.

2.3 Naturalisation

With regard to naturalisations, the number of people who acquired French citizenship by decree and by declaration (marriage, ancestors of French nationals) decreased by 12.5% in 2022. In total, 114,483 people acquired French citizenship in 2022.

Table 2. Top ten countries for first asylum applications in 2022

Nationality	2022	Change since 2021
Afghanistan	22,529	+39.8%
Bangladesh	10,549	+69.3%
Turkey	9,952	+99.6%
Georgia	8,867	+92.8%
Dem. Rep. of Congo	6,724	+143.0%
Guinea	6,175	+17.2%
Ivory Coast	5,864	-6.3%
Albania	5,650	+15.0%
Pakistan	3,746	+0.3%
Nigeria	2,777	-12.8%
Proportion of the ten nationalities	60.6%	+4.6 pts

Sources: Vie-publique.fr / DILA; Ministère de l'intérieur, SI-Asile.

2.4 Visa policy

France has three visa categories:

- Transit visas, which allow holders to travel from one Schengen member state to another, or pass through the international zone of an airport
- Short-stay visas for stays of under 90 days (tourist visas for example)
- Long-stay visas for stays of between 90 days and a year (student visas for example)

In 2022, France received over 2.3 million visa applications and rejected 500,000 of them. The top four countries of origin of visa holders in 2022 were India, Morocco, Algeria and Turkey.

3 Lack of coherent and continuous public policy

France is unique in respect of migration flows and the status of immigrants. This is due to

the lack of a public policy at the highest level of the state regarding immigrant populations. In other words, there has never been consistent governance of a national immigration policy. Broadly speaking, there have been two main periods in the management of immigrant presence in France. In the first period, from 1945 to the end of the 1980s, the state considered immigrants a 'temporary presence'. This meant that immigrants arriving in France were solely 'passing through' and that their ultimate objective was to return, sooner or later, to their country of origin. In the second period, from the 1990s to the present, the state only considers immigration on an ad hoc basis, in terms of electoral power struggles, laws, regulations and circulars. Immigration in France has never been the subject of long-term planning, that is, of the production of a constant and coherent public policy, collectively thought out.

Let us now consider the context of the 'migration waves' in France.

3.1 Three big 'migration waves'

The first wave was from approximately 1850 to 1914. Nationality and birthplace appeared in the census for the first time during this period. At the time, authorities counted 380,000 foreigners, of whom 63,000 were Italian. The law of 1851 guarantees French citizenship to "any child born in France to a foreigner also born in France".

The second period was the inter-war period (1918–1939). During this period, the central government 'offloaded' the management of migrant populations onto 'employers' organisations. The Société Générale d'Immigration, founded in 1924 by specialised employers' organisations and hosted by the Comité des Houillères organised the arrival of thousands of Poles by train. This configuration and division of labour between the State and employers lasted until 1974.

The third immigration wave (1945–1980) began at the end of the Second World War and is characterised, at least in its early stages, by family reunification. This was a period where the priority was France's reconstruction and modernisation. The first major regulatory instrument was the Order of 2 November 1945, which created the National Immigration Office and introduced one-, five- and ten-year residence permits. It also created the National Immigration Office, the forerunner of the Office des migrations internationales (Office for international migrations) and of the Agence nationale de l'accueil des étrangers et des migrants (National agency for the welcome of foreigners and migrants).

During this period, French authorities tried to encourage immigrants to return to their country of origin (for work and family reasons) on multiple occasions – in 1974, 1978 and 1980 – but with no success.

These migratory waves resulted in a series of laws and a redefinition of the administration's legal and administrative treatment of the presence of foreigners in France. It is therefore inappropriate to speak of 'public policy(ies)' on the subject of immigration. It was rather a perpetual balance of power among different social actors; a balance of power resulting either in greater firmness or greater progress in terms of rights. So we are not talking of state public policy in general in the matter of immigration, but mainly of policy on the entry, residence and removal of foreigners, whether or not they are in an irregular situation. It would be more accurate to talk of *legislative hyperactivity*: from 1945 to 2019, France passed an immigration law every two years on average. Whatever the political colours of the government (right- or left-wing), every Interior Minister has sought to leave their mark before leaving Place Beauveau. It goes without saying that alongside the law, there have been multiple ordinances, orders, circulars and decrees.

4 Access to social protection for irregular migrants

It is undeniable that the barriers to accessing social protection benefits have increased since the Covid-19 crisis, even for regular resident migrant workers. There are many reasons for this: employment duration in the host country, nationality and nature of employment (seasonal, permanent, self-employment, temporary work, etc.). The Covid-19 crisis considerably diminished (to say the least) access to support systems for both regular and irregular migrants, particularly for women who were victims of domestic violence and men who had to be quarantined when they were made redundant or forced to return to their country of origin. All economic and social activities were reduced or simply stopped.⁴

In France, as in a number of EU countries that have social security systems, equal treatment is only guaranteed to regularly resident migrants. As such, social security (in every sense of the term) is only granted if one is already legally employed and in possession of a regular employment contract under labour law. This necessarily excludes all those who work in the informal economy, even if they are legally employed.

Finally, a work permit may be refused to an immigrant by the prefecture “if the level of unemployment is too high for the occupation in the employment area in question”. As such, an immigrant worker applying for an employee and temporary worker residence permit can only obtain it for a profession where there is a shortage of labour. To this end, each region establishes a list of occupations in short supply.

5 Access to social protection for migrants in an ‘irregular situation’

Immigrants in an irregular situation are sometimes called ‘*sans-papiers*’ (undocumented) or ‘*clandestins*’ (clandestine).

Irregular migrants are not entitled to social protection, except for emergency healthcare. This is not the case with all EU countries. During the COVID-19 crisis, many female migrants, as well as male irregular migrants working in the care and health sectors, were exposed to a risk of infection much more often than others because they were on the front line. However, few studies have paid particular attention to women migrants. They are overrepresented in the informal economy and among undocumented workers and, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), they also bear unpaid burdens, for example in domestic work and care for the elderly. 90% of irregular foreign nationals entered France with a visa, that is,

regularly.⁵ It is only when the person remains in the country after their residence permit expires or after the administration refuses to renew it that their status becomes irregular.

Take the example of asylum. People in possession of a receipt, issued after their application has been registered by OFPRA, can be taken into a CADA (Centre d’Accueil de Demandeurs d’Asile), which is a hostel or hotel specialising in accommodation for asylum seekers during the examination period of their application. CADAs come under the heading of social action and are therefore funded by the state through regional prefectures, which charge fees. Finally, management is delegated to an association or business chosen after a tendering procedure. If the asylum seeker is not housed in a CADA and they wish to be, they may receive an *Allocation temporaire d’attente* throughout the asylum procedure. From the first application to the prefecture, asylum seekers are entitled to medical coverage which may be supplemented with Universal Health Cover. Irregular immigrants (non-asylum seekers) are entitled to AME. To qualify for this assistance, one must provide proof of identity (passport, National Identity Card, translated excerpt from a birth certificate), have been residing in France continuously for at least three months (expired residence permits, a copy of an electricity, gas, water or telephone bill dated more than months ago, a hotel bill dated more than three months ago, etc. can be offered as proof) and meet income criteria (income must be below a certain threshold).

6 Immigration and labour market structure in France

6.1 Jobs in short supply: a variety of causes

Let us briefly go over the nature of tensions in different occupations in different economic sectors.

- a lack of available labour
- 'hiring intensity' or the ratio between the number of job offers or recruitment projects and the average employment in the occupation
- unsustainability of employment
- working conditions
- the link between training speciality levels and the trade
- geographical mismatch

6.2 Jobs in short supply on the employment market according to DARES

The Department of Research Animation, Studies and Statistics (DARES) has established an indicative list of occupations in which there is the greatest mismatch between demand and supply. The 30 jobs in short supply have changed little since 2020, but DARES has added six new professions: nurses, skilled metalworkers, expert technicians, industrial supervisors, joiners and fitters and insulation workers.

6.3 Jobs in short supply in building and industry

In industry, almost all professions were in short supply in 2021. The greatest unfulfilled needs were related to:

- mechanical and metalworking technicians
- electrical and electronics draughtsmen and technicians
- machine setters
- vehicle mechanics and skilled mechanical maintenance workers
- skilled metalworkers, pipefitters, boilermakers, sheet metal workers and locksmiths
- unskilled workers

In the construction sector, supply is low for:

- construction draughtsmen
- building and civil engineering technicians and managers

- non-managerial site managers and supervisors
- surveyors
- roofers
- wood and metal carpenters
- plumbers and heating engineers
- carpenters and joiners

Geographically, the greatest tensions in these sectors are in the northwestern quarter of France.

Jobs in short supply in the third sector:

- Hotels and catering, particularly waiters, waitresses and hotel managers.
- The health sector, particularly nurses and care assistants. According to Pôle Emploi, by 2024, there will be a shortfall of 240,000 people to look after the elderly at home and in nursing homes.

A non-European foreign worker who has entered France irregularly may obtain, by grant of an exceptional admission to residence, an employee or temporary worker residence permit. This involves regularisation on a case-by-case basis. Foreign nationals must have been living and working in France for a certain length of time.

The following list of occupations in short supply in France could enable undocumented workers to obtain a residence permit:

- building maintenance workers
- paramedical professionals
- autobody repairmen
- carpenters
- butchers
- truck drivers
- mechanics and woodworkers

A more recent list of occupations in short supply was updated in 2021 and includes around 30 occupations, such as domestic help, cleaners, waiters, builders, plumbers/heating engineers, public works workers and self-service employees.

It should be noted that in France, a number of jobs are not open to immigrants (from outside the EU). For example, they can only work in the civil service as contractors, not as permanent employees. The same applies to certain regulated professions that require diplomas, certificates or other ad hoc qualifications.

7 What role do immigrants play in the job market?

A study published by DARES established that immigrants are most highly represented in the most demanding professions and those with the most pressure.⁶ In France, one in ten jobs is held by an immigrant, that is, a person born in a foreign country, whether or not they have acquired French citizenship. The rate of employment for immigrants between 15 and 64 years of age is 56%, lower than the rate for the rest of the population (65.8%). According to DARES, the majority of immigrants can be found in these 'demanding' professions, "linked to physical constraints, physical limitations, rhythm constraints, repetitive work, periods of work on non-working days or outside usual working hours and fragmentation of the workday".

They are also 'overrepresented' in occupations in short supply, that is, jobs with recruitment difficulties due to a lack of available labour: "the more difficult the working conditions and the higher the recruitment pressure, the higher the probability that the position will be filled by an immigrant". Among the "87 professional families", DARES mentions 35 occupations

where the proportion of immigrants is higher than the national average: "Half of the jobs in these occupations are in services to individuals and communities, or in building and public works". The numbers given by DARES are as follows: immigrants represent, in France, 39% of domestic workers, 28% of security guards, 27% of unskilled construction workers, 24% of political and clergy professionals, and 22% of cooks. Female immigrants are even more disadvantaged than their male counterparts. For example, 32% of female immigrants work in just five low-skilled professions: cleaner, domestic helper, care assistant, nursery assistant and sales assistant. The five most common occupations account for 24% of male immigrant workers.

Lastly, many surveys show that the disparities between immigrants and the rest of the population have reduced in recent generations: there are fewer young immigrant workers than ten years ago in low-skilled occupations in personal services. Their proportion grows, however, in more intellectual professions: among computer engineers, for example, it increased by 1.4 percentage points over the past ten years.⁷

Finally, let us consider the future draft law, which is likely to be amended during the discussions scheduled to start in September 2023 at the National Assembly and the Senate. One of the objectives of this draft law, according to Minister for Employment Olivier Dussopt is to make "progress, since in the first half of the year, when the unemployment rate was 7.5%, that of immigrant workers was 13%. Employment must become an integration and emancipation factor once again". Dussopt wants to create a "short supply occupation" residence permit, in order to recruit in sectors struggling to find workers: "Professional organisations are telling us that they need us to make it easier to recruit

foreigners. We are offering them solutions with this bill”.

8 Immigration: economic burden or resource?

In France, there is ceaseless controversy over whether immigration is a ‘boon’ or a ‘burden’. Its impact and its social, political, economic and cultural consequences divide the political world and the main players in civil society who are directly or indirectly involved in migration. Everyone recognises (as soon as one moves away from caricatured ideological positions) that estimation and assessment of, for example, unemployment, public finances and demographic transformations are particularly complicated, as situations vary according to territories, nationalities, personal characteristics of migrants, their age and sex, and their legal status (asylum seeker, lone worker or with family, ‘undocumented’, seasonal worker, refugee, regular migrant who has been in France for a long time, etc.).

However, economists and demographers agree on what they call ‘major trends’:

Employment: Migrants occupy jobs that are frequently unfilled, whether in construction, catering or personal services. Furthermore, migratory flows increase demand by stimulating consumption, which potentially creates jobs in other sectors. The situation is more uncertain when it comes to refugees: a massive influx of refugees can have a short-term impact on unemployment rates in certain regions and for certain segments of the population.⁸

Growth: Emmanuelle Auriol, of the Toulouse School of Economics, rightly points out that “Often, migrants who arrive have nothing, they need everything. (. . .) Giving them money boils down to a kind of Keynesian stimulus plan”. In

a study published in mid-June, researchers at the Centre national de recherche scientifique (CNRS) also concluded, concerning the specific case of asylum seekers and based on data from 15 European countries, that an influx of migrants would lead to an increase in GDP per capita, estimated at 0.32% over two years.⁹

Public finance: It is often said brusquely that immigration hurts public finances and increases public deficits in indebted countries such as France and Italy. The main argument put forward is that immigrants (regardless of their status) benefit from the entire range of social benefits, while only paying very low contributions. According to Anthony Edo,¹⁰ the fiscal impact of immigration is “overall neutral”. This is because, while the state must provide migrants with social protection, they are often young and working.

9 Recommendations

- 1) *The law:* It is important to take the rights of foreign nationals in France very seriously. The state and its various institutions that have a direct or indirect link with newcomers must give themselves the means to enforce the law uncompromisingly. The law, all the law, nothing but the law.
- 2) *Full and recognised participation in society and the nation:* Grant the right to vote to foreign citizens, at least as a first step, in municipal elections.
- 3) *A carefully considered regularisation policy according to circumstances and cases:* This should account for illness, persecution, employment, etc.
- 4) *Take into account an increasingly massive phenomenon:* Foreign nationals who are qualified in their country of origin find themselves downgraded in France. It does

not matter whether these people are in a regular situation or not. With this in mind, it is imperative to put in place a genuine training policy for these apparently 'unqualified' newcomers.

- 5) *Portability and continuity of rights*: Whether foreign nationals work in France or return to work in their country of origin for a certain period of time, they should not experience a loss of rights if they return to their former host country.
- 6) *Rationalise assisted return policies*: Those who wish to return to their country of origin should receive help to do so. However, this must be done not by coercion, but within a framework of free, legal movement policy for migrants.
- 7) *A genuine policy for regularising the status of 'undocumented' workers*: Create a committee of independent experts to make proposals

concerning economic immigration policy. This expert committee would report annually to Parliament on whether the objectives put forward have been achieved, and on new conditions to improve the needs of the host country, the country of origin and immigrants in France.

- 8) *Draw up an inventory of the countries around the Mediterranean perimeter (and more widely African countries)*: Note which are labour exporting countries, and look into the possibilities for modifying the 'concerted management' agreements in at least three areas: the organisation of regular migration; the fight against irregular immigration; and 'mutually supportive development'.
- 9) *Collectively (states, associations, NGOs, experts, etc.) re-examine 'free' trade agreements*: The aim should be to make them less unfavourable to the countries of the Global South.

Endnotes

- 1 The following numbers are drawn from www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/fr/Info-ressources/Etudes-et-statistiques/Chiffres-cles-sejour-visas-eloignements-asile-acces-a-la-nationalite/Les-chiffres-cles-de-l-immigration-2021.
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- 9 D’Albis, H., Boubtane, E. and Coulibaly, D. (2018), “Macroeconomic evidence suggests that asylum seekers are not a ‘burden’ for Western European countries”, Science Advances, (4).
- 10 Edo is a researcher at the Centre d’études prospectives et d’informations internationales, a department of the French Prime Minister and a member of the network coordinated by France Stratégie.

About the author



SMAÏN LAACHER

Smaïn Laacher is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Strasbourg, member of the Academic advisory board of *Diversité* and Director of the Observatoire du Fait Migratoire et de l'asile of the Fondation Jean Jaurès. Previously he was Chairman of the Scientific Council of the DILCRAH (Interministerial Delegation to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and anti-LGBT Hatred) and judge assessor representing UNHCR at the French National Court of Asylum in Paris. He is also the author of several publications on migration including the forthcoming *L'immigration à l'épreuve de la Nation* (2024).

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European Political Foundation – N° 4 BE 896.230.213 | Avenue des Arts 46 1000 Brussels (Belgium)

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Launched in 2020, Centro Politiche Europee (CEP/Roma) is the Italian branch of the Centres for European Policy Network, a group of think tanks based in Germany (Freiburg and Berlin), France (Paris) and Italy (Rome). The CEP network aims to develop in-depth analyses of European economic policies and regulations, bringing together different national perspectives to boost the understanding of common challenges among European decision-makers, private organisations, civil society and relevant stakeholders.

About Università per Stranieri di Perugia

The University for Foreigners of Perugia (Unistrapg) was founded in the early 1920s with the aim of promoting Italian culture and heritage abroad. A highly internationalised institution relying on a broad network of student and faculty exchange partners, Unistrapg attracts students from all over the world. Research and teaching at Unistrapg today focus on a number of different disciplines, such as communication, international relations, development cooperation, translation and interpretation, and food and hospitality.