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# **Territorial dynamics and local reception of the asylum seekers in rural spaces and small towns**

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### ***Abstract***

Since the “long summer of migration” in 2015, the reception of asylum seekers in France has increasingly depended on non-metropolitan areas, which have expanded their reception capacities. These areas, often considered ‘left-behind places’ with more fragile capacity for action, are playing an increasing role in the reception of asylum seekers. This paper explores how the territorial diversity in these areas leads to a variety of the local reception dynamics at the municipal level. Our analysis is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods, using an unprecedented database provided by the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Regional Directorate for the Economy, Employment, Labour, and Solidarity in 2023, along with semi-structured interviews with local actors. The research reveals that, the reception of asylum seekers outside metropolitan areas is far from homogeneous, varying according to the specific characteristics of each municipality.

### ***Keywords***

Asylum seekers, migration policy, local reception, rural spaces, small towns, shrinking areas

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## Introduction

Since the long summer of migration in 2015 (Hess, Kasparek, 2019), the reception of asylum seekers is, on the one hand, seen as central in European public debates (Lacroix, 2016). On the other, it goes beyond the sole involvement of states and is invested at the local level. The public policy addressing the reception of asylum seekers in France was established in the mid-1970s; it was strengthened after the increase of the arrivals in 2014-2015. This policy has consistently aimed to achieve two main objectives: increasing the number of accommodations and distributing the reception centers across the national territory. Consequently, this distribution involves territories, increasingly rural areas, and small towns since the 2010s (Berthomière et al., 2020). Thus, the reception of asylum seekers in France is spatialized and materialized by centers of accommodation. The rationality behind these locations draws a geography of reception through territorial delimitations, centralities, and peripheries. The aim of our paper translates into three objectives and research questions:

- To build a typology of spaces of reception, based on demographic, political, and socio-economic dynamics at the municipal level.
- To highlight the plurality of the local reception dynamics in the rural spaces and small towns
- To understand how the geography of the centers of accommodation and their differentiated location outside metropolitan areas produce plural local dynamics of reception.

While the literature on the governance of migration in Europe highlights a “local turn” (Caponio and Borkert, 2010, Zapata-Barrero et al, 2017), this has been studied in major cities (Flamant et al, 2020), where the city councils are more powerful and have more possibilities to influence policymaking (Scholten, 2016). Yet, since 2015, the reception of asylum seekers in France has largely relied on non-metropolitan areas, with an increase in their reception capacities (Berthomière et al. 2020). Non-metropolitan areas, deemed to be ‘left-behind places’ and to have a more fragile capacity for action (Dehne et al., 2022), are playing an increasing role in the reception of asylum seekers. In this context, there has been a growing interest in studying this arrival in spaces outside the metropolises. This translates into several special issues (Flamant et al, 2020; Morali et al, 2023) and research projects at the EU level (project “Welcoming spaces”<sup>1</sup>; project “Whole-Comm”<sup>2</sup>), and the national level (project Camigri<sup>3</sup> in France).

While the themes included in the rich body of literature on this topic during the last decade are diverse, they share the aim of bridging refugee studies – that take a little account of the dynamics outside metropolitan areas – with urban and rural studies, that don’t consider the migration challenges in analyzing the transformation of spaces outside the metropolises. Thus, the recent literature attempts to address several issues, such as the challenge of diversity in rural regions (Glorius, 2017), the “ethnic representations in refugees” access to housing in medium-sized towns (Gardesse and Lelévrier, 2021), the local networks for the reception (Arfaoui et al, 2023). This literature, as well as migration studies in rural spaces, are mainly based on a qualitative approach (Hochedez et al, 2024).

Quantitative and cartographic approaches are less common. In 2004, Emmanuelle Bonerandi mapped out the geography of the centers of accommodation of asylum seekers in France at the departmental level (Bonerandi, Bourgeois, Richard, 2004). More recently, within the research program CAMIGRI, the geography of the reception centers was analyzed at the local level, precisely at the level of a group of municipalities called *bassins de vie*, in 1999, 2017, and 2019. This analysis highlighted the logic of

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<sup>1</sup> See <<https://www.welcomingspaces.eu>>

<sup>2</sup> See <<https://whole-comm.eu>>

<sup>3</sup> See <<https://camigri.hypotheses.org>>

dispersion of the national reception system throughout the territory, "largely relying on sub-urban and rural territories," even though major urban areas remained the main locations for accommodation centers (Berthomière et al., 2020). While this quantitative research gives original insights about the spatial distribution of asylum seekers and the diversification of rural spaces due to the immigrant profiles that came there (Fromentin, 2021), it remains constrained by the lack of data on the locations of the asylum seekers' accommodations, only a secondary data from the national NGO *La Cimade*, has been used (Hochedez et al, 2024). This approach is partial and is not conducted at the municipal level, while it's an important scope to analyze the reception of asylum seekers, in major urban spaces (Caponio and Jones-Correa, 2018; Garcés-Mascareñas and Gebhardt, 2020) as well as in rural spaces and small towns (Haselbacher and Sagarra, 2021).

Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, our paper asks the following question: **How does the diversity of territorial dynamics lead to a plurality of local reception dynamics at the municipal level?** To address this question, this article focuses on the arrival dynamics in the Reception Centers of Asylum Seekers in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region (AURA). Our paper will first classify the territories and then 'zoom in' to investigate how the territorial dynamics impact local migration management and the solidarities around it.

We propose to analyze the spatial distribution of *Asile & Intégration (ASI)* places and its recent evolution at the municipal scale, while paying attention to the different characteristics of reception spaces. For this purpose, we use an original database provided in May 2023 by the Regional Directorate for Economy, Employment, Labor, and Solidarity of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (DREETS AURA): it gives details on the accommodation places ASI from 2017 to 2022 in AURA at the municipal level. The database is completed by demographic, socio-economic data provided from the Population Census (INSEE) at municipal level. First, based upon a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Hierarchical Clustering Analysis (HCA) with Euclidean distance, the analysis produces a typology of the municipalities of reception in the region, which differentiate between municipalities. This quantitative analysis was carried out as part of the Research program UrbExil (2023-2024). Second, following this quantitative approach, this paper will analyze the local reception dynamics within the territorial dynamics outside metropolitan areas. This second analysis is based on qualitative data obtained as part of a field survey conducted by AUTHOR for his doctoral thesis (2016-2021). The qualitative data incorporated in this paper were obtained by using semi-structured interviews conducted with social workers, elected municipal officials, and volunteers. In total, 41 semi-structured interviews, ranging from 30 minutes to over two hours, were conducted with these three groups of actors.

## 1. The diversity of reception's spaces

### 1.1. Three main types of reception municipalities

Spaces and local conditions for the reception of the asylum seekers have been significantly diversified in France (Flamant et al., 2020). This is due to the dispersal of the centers of accommodation from large cities to small and medium-sized towns and rural municipalities during the 2010s (Berthomière et al., 2020).

To analyze how territorial heterogeneity translates into plural reception, this paper explores the diversity of the arrival spaces. Therefore, statistical analyses focus only on the municipalities equipped by ASI places in the AURA region. The diversity of the arrival environments is analyzed through a typology, highlighting three main types of municipalities of reception.

Some research emphasizes the role of local societies in the conditions of reception (Arfaoui, 2020, 2021;

Berthomière, Imbert, Michalon, 2021; Glorius, 2023). The concept of receptivity (Glorius et al., 2021) inspired the selection of the variables we used to classify the 179 municipalities with at least one ASI place in 2022 in our area of study (Table 1).

Table 1 - List of indicators considered in PCA and HCA Indicators used in PCA and HCA

<b>List of indicators considered in PCA and HCA Indicators used in PCA and HCA (Source: INSEE RP 2008 and 2019)</b>	
Population and demographic dynamics	
P19_POP	Population in 2019
EVOLPOP08_19	Rate of Population change between 2008 and 2019
Population structure	
TX_75PLUS	Percentage of adults older than 75 years in the total population in 2019
PART_IMMIG	Percentage of immigrants in the total population in 2019
CHO_1564	Unemployment rate of 15-64 year old in 2019
Housing stock characteristics	
TX_HLM	Percentage of social housing in the total main residences in 2019
TX_LOGVAC	Percentage of vacant housing in the total housing stock in 2019

Principal component analysis (PCA) reveals a first axis, which represents one third of the information (33.57%). It opposes, for the 179 municipalities, the rate of population change between 2008 and 2019 to the percentage of adults older than 75 years and the housing vacancy rate (Figure 1). It is therefore an axis that differentiates municipalities characterized by demographic degrowth from municipalities characterized by demographic growth. The second axis, which represents nearly 30% of the information, is mainly determined by the unemployment rate, the percentage of immigrants, and the rate of social housing, three variables correlated with each other (Figure 1). However, the number of inhabitants in 2019 (P19\_POP) is a variable which is less strongly considered by both axes.

The factorial axes of this PCA serve as input variables for the Hierarchical Ascendant Classification (HAC), by using Euclidean distance. The following figure provides the tree diagram of successive classification. The cut performed produces three homogeneous clusters. (Figure 2).

Thus, the classification of the 179 municipalities reveals 3 clusters, which are mapped out (map 1).

Cluster 1 (in black on the map) encompasses 59 municipalities with less than 30,000 inhabitants, such as Crolles, Fontaines-St-Martin, Oullins, Mozac, or St-Pierre-d'Albigny. The majority is located on the outskirts of large metropolitan areas as well as in the Alpine valleys, and are dynamic, growing and economically stable suburban areas. They share the following characteristics:

- High rates for variables such as the proportion of the upper social classes and increasing population.
- Low rates for variables such as the unemployment rate, housing vacancy rate, social housing rate, proportion of the population aged over 75 years, proportion of immigrant, proportion of foreigners, number of places ASI in 2022, and population density.

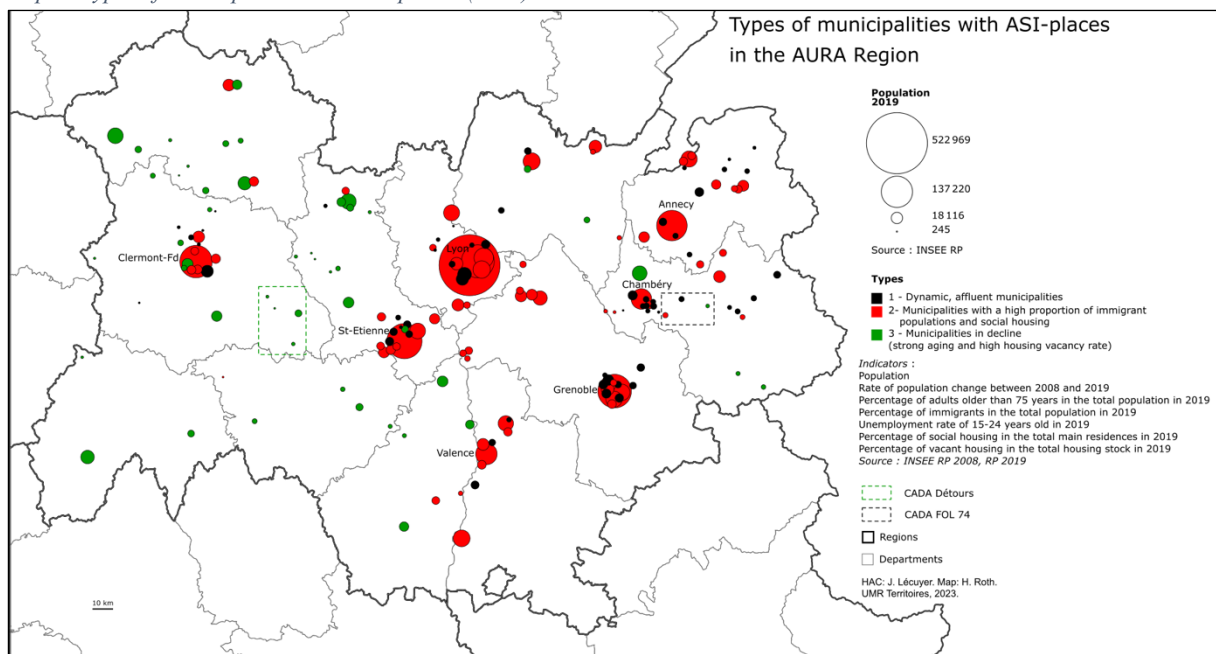
Cluster 2 (in red on the map) encompasses 71 municipalities such as central municipalities of large metropolitan areas but also municipalities of 'popular' suburbs (Vaulx-en-Velin, Bourg-lès-Valence) and small towns marked by industry (Montmélian, Givors, Moûtiers, etc.). The number of inhabitants is diverse, involving municipalities with more than 200,000 inhabitants, as well as municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants. The number of inhabitants is less important than other characteristics such as the increasing population in the PCA of our sample. This group is characterized by:

- High rates for variables such as the proportion of immigrant<sup>4</sup>, proportion of foreigners<sup>5</sup>, social housing rate, unemployment rate, number of places ASI in 2022, and population.
- Low rates for variables such as the proportion of the population aged over 75 years and the number of places ASI per 100 inhabitants.

Cluster 3 (in green on the map) consists of 49 municipalities with less than 35,000 inhabitants, such as Montluçon, Roanne, Saint-Eloy-les-Mines, Ambert, etc. Most of them are in the departments of the Massif Central (Auvergne, Loire, and Ardèche) and are shrinking. The municipalities of this group share the following characteristics:

- High rates for variables such as the proportion of the population aged over 75 years, housing vacancy rate, unemployment rate;
- Low rates for variables such as the population change, proportion of immigrants, proportion of foreigners, social housing rate.

Map 1: Types of municipalities with ASI-places (2022)



## 1.2. Two case studies in rural areas and small towns

This article sets out to document the diversity of host communities revealed by this typology, through in-depth case studies. It analyzes the actions of the reception of asylum seekers in two reception centers (*Centre d'Accueil de Demandeurs d'Asile: CADA*). The scattered CADA Détours facilities (Photo 1), that have opened in 2016, are located in the department of Puy-de-Dôme. The four municipalities of the CADA – Ambert (6,636 inhabitants), Arlanc (1,803 inhabitants), Cunlhat (1,319 inhabitants), and Saint-

<sup>4</sup> "An immigrant is a person born as a foreigner abroad and who is actually living in France. Thus, persons who are born French abroad and are living in France are not counted. Some immigrants may have acquired French nationality, while others remain foreigners. The foreign and immigrant populations do not completely overlap: an immigrant is not necessarily a foreigner, and conversely, some foreigners were born in France. The status of an immigrant is permanent: an individual remains part of the immigrant population even if they acquire French nationality. It is the country of birth, not the nationality at the moment of birth, that defines the geographical origin of an immigrant." (INSEE, 2016)

<sup>5</sup> "A foreigner is a person living in France who does not hold French nationality. This may be because they hold a different nationality exclusively or because they are stateless. Individuals with French nationality who also hold another nationality (or multiple nationalities) are considered French in France. A foreigner is not necessarily an immigrant; they may be born in France." (INSEE, 2016)



Amant-Roche-Savine (513 inhabitants) – are part of the cluster 3 – the cluster of shrinking municipalities.

At the time of our field surveys (2017-2020), the mayors of the four municipalities were unaffiliated to any political party (Arlanc, Cunlhat) or were affiliated with left-wing (*Parti Communiste* in the case of Saint-Amant-Roche-Savine) and right-wing parties (*Les Républicains* in the case of Ambert). According to the municipal officials we interviewed, this is due to the difference of the political challenges and discourses between the local and national levels. Taking this into consideration, the municipal officials of the four municipalities highlighted that their commitment for the reception of asylum seekers addresses issues such as the maintenance of public services (especially schools) and/or the social rental housing vacancy (Arfaoui, 2020). Although municipal officials have no decision-making power in creating or expanding a center of accommodation for asylum seekers,<sup>6</sup> the local political acceptability is highlighted by the central state as one of the important elements for the decision-making process of the distribution of the asylum seekers' facilities among several territories in France.

Photo 1 : The CADA Détours in the territory of Ambert. *AUTHOR*, 2017. 1- The offices of the association Détours in Cunlhat. 2- CADA's facilities in Arlanc. 3- CADA's facilities in Saint-Amant-Roche-Savine. 4- CADA's facilities in Ambert.



The scattered CADA FOL 74 (Photo 2) facilities, that have opened in 2016, are located in the department of Savoie, in three municipalities: Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny (cluster 1), Montmélian (cluster 2), and Val d'Arc<sup>7</sup> (cluster 3). The mayors of the three municipalities – part of the left-wing parties *Parti Socialiste* in the case of Montmélian) or left-wing political orientations (Sans étiquettes-divers gauche in the case of the two other municipalities) – are less committed in the CADA's creation process, compared to the previous case. This is due to the lack of need to maintain public services, such as schools. Nevertheless, the mayor of Val-d'Arc highlighted the need to accommodate persons who have more possibilities to access to the refugee status (interview with social workers at the CADA FOL 74). The mayor is described by the team of the CADA as more paying attention on the arrival process in his municipality and less open to build strong collaboration with the CADA's team in relation with the reception of asylum seekers.

Photo 2 : Accommodations and the direction of the CADA FOL 74. © *AUTHOR*, 2018. 1- Facilities in a tower and the direction

<sup>6</sup> The state can impose the creation of CADA facilities even if the municipal officials refuse it.

<sup>7</sup> The municipality of Val d'Arc was created in 2019, after the merger of the two municipalities: Aiguebelle and Randens. Our fieldwork was conducted before 2019 in the municipality of Aiguebelle.

of the CADA. 2- CADA's facilities in Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny. 3- CADA's facilities in Val d'Arc.



Created after the so-called ‘long summer of migration’ in 2015, the CADAs Détours and FOL 74 encompass the three clusters of the municipalities (Table 3). Therefore, our case studies present an opportunity to provide an analysis of the reception of asylum seekers in the different types of rural areas and the small towns of the AURA region. It addresses our assumption and research question on how the plurality of the arrival spaces lead to the plurality of local reception dynamics.

Table 2 – Characteristics of the municipalities of the two scattered CADA facilities. Sources: Insee Census of 2013 and 2019; DREETS AURA

	Name and cluster of the municipality		Population (2013)	Population (2019)	Annual population growth rate in % (2013-2019)	Number of places ASI (2022)	Number of places ASI for 100 inhabitants
CADA Détours	Ambert	3	6.834	6.655	- 0,4	20	0,3
	Arlanc		1.957	1.856	- 0,9	10	0,5
	Cunlhat		1.307	1.323	+ 0,2	13	1
	Saint-Amant-Roche-Savine		523	513	- 0,3	17	3,3
CADA FOL 74	Montmélian	2	4.083	4.102	+ 0,1	18	0,4
	Saint Pierre-d'Albigny	1	3.825	4.087	+ 1,1	16	0,4

	Val d'arc	3	1.987	2.018	+ 0,3	26	1,3
	Auvergne- Rhône-Alpes		7.757.595	8.042.936	+ 0,6	13 223	0,16
	France		63.697.865	65.096.768	+ 0,4	109 496	0,16

## 2. Diverse Reception Dynamics

The diversity of reception dynamics in the localities of the two selected CADA facilities is correlated with the differences between the three cluster of our study area. This section analyzes the differences between the reception dynamics regarding two topics: the management of the reception and the access of asylum seekers to mobility and health.

### 2.1. The management of Asylum Seekers' Arrival outside Metropolises: positionalities and commitments of the elected Municipal officials

The relation between the social workers of the CADA and the local actors, notably elected municipal officials, are diverse depending on the temporalities of the reception (Arfaoui, 2020). The elected municipal officials of the four municipalities of the scattered CADA Détours facilities and the municipality of Val-d'arc had relations of coordination with the social workers before the arrival of the asylum seekers in July 2016. In contrast, the elected municipal officials of Montmélian and Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny were less involved in the creation process of the CADA FOL 74. This temporal difference of the commitment depends on plural motivations and relations between the associations managing the two CADA and the elected municipal officials. In the case of the CADA Détours, the elected municipal officials are more involved in the creation process of the facilities due to a pragmatic approach (the importance to select a local association to manage the CADA and the dual role of the mayor of Saint-Amant-Roche-Savine who is also the director of the association Détours) and an utilitarian approach (addressing the social rental housing vacancy and maintaining public services). In the case of the CADA FOL 74, the elected municipal officials in Montmélian and Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny are motivated by the necessity to ensure social cohesion by promoting local solidarity<sup>8</sup> and not to respond to demographic challenges. Are these motivations and relations at the local level different depending on the clusters of the municipalities?

In our two case studies, the territory of Ambert stands out for a more pronounced involvement of the elected municipal officials from the beginning of the reception process, during the creation of the accommodation centers. Despite competing with larger (in size) and specialized associations in the reception of asylum seekers, the association Détours was selected by the central State to create and manage the CADA facilities in the territory of Ambert. This NGO was established in 1994 in Cunlhat and has been developed around the integration of vulnerable inhabitants (especially those facing economic vulnerabilities).

The elected municipal officials informed the local representative of the central state in Ambert (*Sous-Préfet*) of their political demand to consider the local belonging as a key indicator to choose the association that will manage the CADA in the territory of Ambert. The local representative of the central

<sup>8</sup> According to the work of Mathilde Pette and Fabien Eloire (2016), solidarity refers in our research to the support proposed by local associations to welcome and support foreigners, especially asylum seekers.

state does not have the legal competence to decide who will manage the CADA, but his position as a political handover jointly with the national authorities is perceived by the elected municipal officials as important. For them, the reception of asylum seekers outside large metropolitan areas enquires a local association with significant connections to inhabitants, elected municipal officials, teachers, and local activists. In order to negotiate the reception of the asylum seekers in their territory, the elected municipal officials are a “lobbying actor” (Flamant, 2021, p.62). Moreover, one of the four mayors was also the director of the association *Détours*. This dual role was important to promote the involvement of the mayors of the three other municipalities in the creation and the management processes of the CADA *Détours*. The Directory Board of the CADA includes, among others, elected municipal officials from the four municipalities.

Furthermore, the relations with the elected municipal officials enable the associations in charge of the management of the CADA to have a better access to the vacant housing stock. In Cunlhat, for example, the accommodations of the CADA *Détours* are located in appartements that were vacant for five years. Owned by the Public Social Housing Corporation *Ophis du Puy-de-Dôme*, these flats were renovated before they were rented to the CADA *Détours*. The access to these flats was facilitated by the elected municipal officials. They have acted as intermediaries between the association of the CADA and *Ophis du Puy-de-Dôme*. This strategy integrates the reception of asylum seekers into a local spatial planning policy by focusing on the issue of housing.

While the State, through the French Office of Immigration and Integration (*OFII*), decides who are the asylum seekers that should be distributed in each territory, the team managing the CADA decides on the distribution in each locality when the facilities are scattered across several municipalities. For instance, the mayor of Saint-Amant-Roche-Savine, also president of the association *Détours* and director of the CADA, initiated a dispersal policy among the four municipalities. The mayor's intention was to accommodate families with children in his locality with the goal to halt demographic decline. This choice was in line with the availability of accommodations with multiple rooms, giving the possibility to host families with children. Nevertheless, this selection made it possible to enroll asylum seekers' children and to reopen in 2016 the public primary school of Saint-Amant-Roche-Savine, that had to close due to an insufficient number of school children. To achieve this goal, the elected municipal officials liaised with the team managing the CADA to select specific demographic profiles in each municipality, by mixing families and individual persons asking for the refugee status.

In our other case study, the elected municipal officials of the localities of the CADA FOL 74 were not involved in the creation process of the accommodation facilities. This is more notable in Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny (cluster 1) and Montmélian (cluster 2). The elected municipal officials do not feel the need to maintain public services, especially schools. Indeed, these two rural municipalities attract households working in Chambéry and Albertville which ensure population growth.

However, the municipality of Val-d'Arc (cluster 3) appears as more involved in the creation process of the CADA. According to our interviews with social workers, the mayor insisted on accommodating "relocated" asylum seekers: persons who are accommodated in France through the European relocation plan and have much higher possibilities to receive the refugee status. Accommodating this group would avoid the presence of rejected asylum seekers in Val-d'Arc. The rejection of some asylum applications prompted solidarity demonstrations by volunteers opposing the decision. According to social workers, this led to tensions with the mayor of the municipality, who as a result became much less favorable to the presence of accommodations for asylum seekers in the municipality. Moreover, the local dispersal policy of asylum seekers, within the scattered accommodation facilities, can lead to conflicts between social workers and elected municipal officials. In early 2019, the CADA *Détours* recorded several resignations

and long-term medical leaves from social workers due to burnout. Before this rupture, social workers had asked the board of directors of the CADA to increase the number of accommodation places and to group them, from the villages to the small town of Ambert. These two requests would have prevented the CADA budget from being burdened by travel expenses, enabled recruitment, and saved travel time between different municipalities. These proposals were rejected by the board of directors, especially by the elected municipal officials who are part of it, in the name of an “intermunicipal solidarity”<sup>9</sup>. These conflicts deteriorate the relations between elected municipal officials and social workers, the latter feeling that the social purpose of their profession was being undermined by a utilitarian approach of reception.

Regarding our case studies, the elected municipal officials are involved and feel more concerned about the reception of asylum seekers in shrinking municipalities (cluster 3) than others (cluster 1 and 2). This diversity is due to the intertwining of local reception policy with local development policies in municipalities facing demographic fragility and difficulties in maintaining public services.

## **2.2. What Accessibility for Asylum Seekers? Local Dynamics of Solidarity to Address Territorial Challenges**

Beyond the organizational aspect of the two CADA, the territorial differences translate into what kinds of practices volunteers offer - here mobility and healthcare in territories where access to these are not given. This part of the paper focuses on two themes highlighted as major challenges for the reception of asylum seekers outside metropolitan areas in France: the access to mobility and the access to healthcare.<sup>10</sup>

### **a. Access to Mobility**

Studies on the mobility in rural areas and small towns emphasize that one of the main challenges is related to accessibility, due to a lack of infrastructure or offers in public transports (Giroud et al., 2011). The budgets set up by the central State to the NGOs for the reception of asylum seekers do not include mobility costs. Thus, this topic is often delegated to volunteers. While the access to mobility is central in the activities led by volunteers interviewed in the Ambert territory, the situation is different in our study area in Savoie.

In the territory of Ambert, initiatives of solidarity for overcoming transport problems have been implemented. They help the asylum seekers to travel within or outside the Ambert territory, be it for administrative appointments in the regional urban center Clermont-Ferrand, or for accessing products they otherwise would not be able to get a hold on. For example, a volunteer at the CADA Détours assisting asylum seekers accommodated in Cunlhat, purchased Okra powder from an African grocery store in another town called Thiers, near her workplace, for Sudanese asylum seekers in Cunlhat and other localities in the Ambert region where such purchases were not possible due to the lack of shops selling "African products". Mobility assistance also takes the form of carpooling to assist the asylum seekers to access to public transports that are difficult to reach in the territory. Another volunteer at the CADA Détours offers to carpool those who are accommodated in Cunlhat to the Station of Giroux, a bus stop connecting Ambert to Clermont-Ferrand (photo 3).

*Photo 3 : Station for the bus between Ambert and Clermont-Ferrand. Source: Google Earth Pro.*

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<sup>9</sup> In French, the word used by the elected municipal officials is: “*solidarité entre les communes du territoire*”

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the report “*Accueillir et intégrer les personnes réfugiées en milieu rural*” <<https://accueil-integration-refugies.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/230912-guide-ruralite-diair.pdf>>



While carpooling enables asylum seekers to move, there are constraints. For example, they are not free to choose the time of travel since it is limited to the availability of their "drivers." While carpooling facilitates access to mobility, it remains partial. Based on the principle of solidarity, the carpooling is a response to territorial fragility but also to the inability of social workers to respond to mobility demands. Thus, solidarity is part of a dynamic of complementarity between two actors: volunteers and social workers.

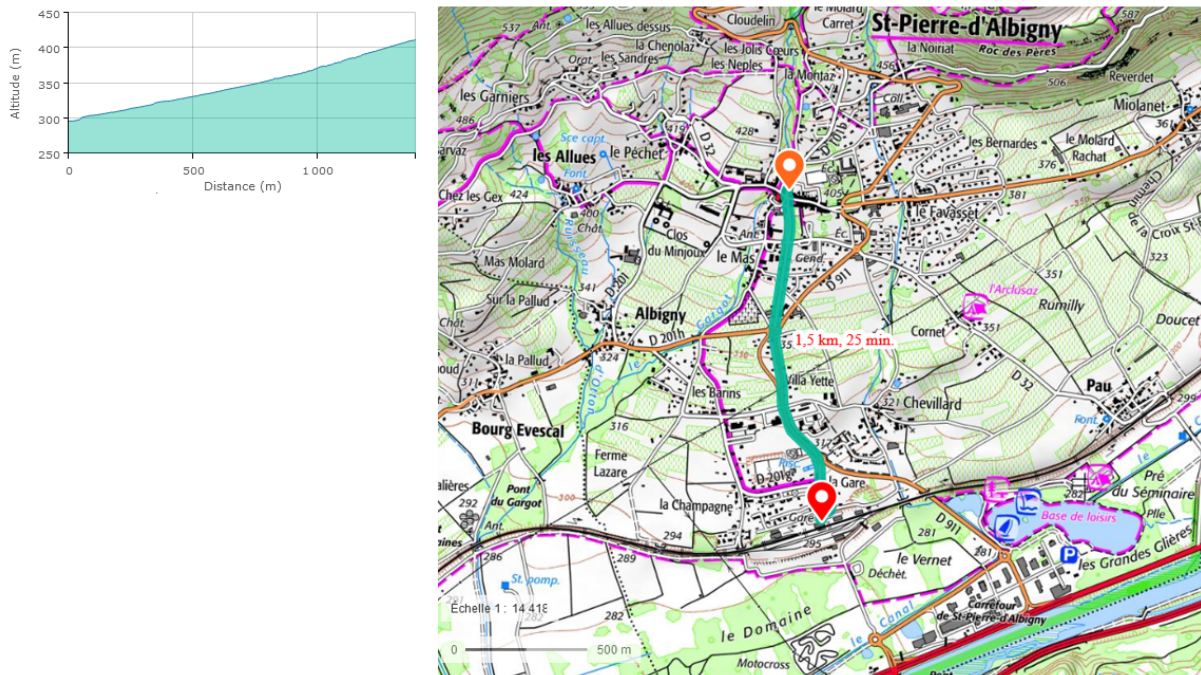
"Moreover, if I go to Clermont, I offer to transport them to Clermont. If I go to Le Puy, I do the same. I transport them if they have an appointment with the doctor, with the ophthalmologist, the team of the CADA is not always very reactive. I think the CADA is a very good structure, but I think they have too much to do" (Volunteer, February 2018, Ambert).

In the territory of Ambert, seven out of ten volunteers interviewed are helping the asylum seekers to have access to mobility. In our study area in Savoie, only five out of fourteen volunteers interviewed declare helping the asylum seekers in relation with the topic of mobility. This relatively low proportion is due to the significant offer of public transport offer in the territory. Indeed, unlike in the territory of Ambert, the three municipalities of the scattered CADA FOL 74 facilities are connected by train to Chambéry or Albertville (the major urban centers in the territory). Moreover, the travel time is short (from Chambéry, it takes less than ten minutes to go to Montmélian, fifteen to twenty minutes to Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny, and thirty minutes to Val d'Arc) and the frequency is high (no less than twelve connections are proposed daily to connect the municipalities with Chambéry, including eight by train). This offer of public transport facilitates the access to Chambéry, where public and private facilities and services are concentrated, as well as shops not found in the territory where the CADA is located. The offer of public transport also facilitates the mobility between the three municipalities of the scattered CADA facilities. In addition, the train transport of the residents of AURA who have a low income – which is the case for the asylum seekers with the low allowance they obtain – is subsidized up to 75% by the Region.

Despite the public transport offer, carpooling is practiced inside the localities. The coordinator of the *Association Cantonale d'Animation de Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny*, highlighted how her husband helps asylum seekers accommodated in the municipality to go to the railway station. Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny is a typical municipality of the *Cluse de Chambéry*, one of the Savoie valleys. The locality is built on a slope, benefiting from a south-facing exposure, and offering landscapes that have greatly contributed to

residential attractiveness. However, this topography has led to a particular organization of this small town. On the one hand, the upper part to the north containing services, small shops, and housing (including the CADA facilities). On the other hand, the lower part to the south where the railway station and large retail stores are located. The difference in elevation between the two parts is more than 110 meters (figure 3). Without public transport inside the locality, the asylum seekers face difficulties to bring back their groceries or to go back home from the railway station. The mobility constraint in Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny is characteristic of small towns facing the difficulty, or even the impossibility, of developing an intra-urban offer of transport (Édouard, 2014).

Figure 1 Itinerary and elevation difference between the railway station of Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny the CADA's facilities. Source: Géoportail



## b. Access to Healthcare

In our two area studies, the team managing the CADA considers the healthcare actors (hospitals, doctors, pharmacies) as key actors for the reception of asylum seekers. Access to healthcare is a legal obligation written in the contract signed between the State and the NGO managing the CADA. Two trends emerge: on the one hand, territorial fragility or dynamism configures the access of asylum seekers to healthcare. On the other hand, the social interactions in our two study areas establishes informal partnerships between healthcare actors and social workers. The access to healthcare is inherently linked to territorial dynamics. Thus, in municipalities of cluster 3, the asylum seekers have more difficulties to access medical appointments than in cluster 1 and 2 localities. Furthermore, municipalities that play a role of centrality within the urban hierarchy have greater accessibility to healthcare, even when they are part of the cluster 3. Thus, asylum seekers accommodated in Ambert, where the hospital is located, have easier access to medical services than those who are accommodated in the three other municipalities where the CADA Détours is located. In the study area of Savoie, the situation is different, since asylum seekers are accommodated in localities who have an access with the train to the hospital in Chambéry.

Moreover, the migratory journey of asylum seekers is punctuated by trauma. Many have experienced disruptions in their countries of departure, during their journey, and upon arrival in France. These disruptions and the traumatic situations they engender impact their mental health. This is being an emergent topic among social workers in the context of forced migration and a challenge in dealing with

asylum seekers (Gardesse, Ielévrier, 2021; Saglio-Yatzimirsky, Wolmark, 2018).

The CADA FOL 74 is the one where asylum seekers have more access to the mental healthcare. This is due to the proximity of services specialized in this topic. The Mobile Psychiatry Precarity Team (*Équipe Mobile Psychiatrie Précarité: EMPP*) of Chambéry and the CADA FOL 74 have co-build several initiatives to take care of the mental health of the asylum seekers. First, mental health consultation is carried out with asylum seekers to identify vulnerabilities and guide them to the appropriate services (psychiatric services, general practitioners, etc.). Then, training sessions for stakeholders involved in the reception of asylum seekers and healthcare professionals (social workers, volunteers, doctors, etc.) were organized by the EMPP. However, these interventions are not carried out in all the localities of the scattered CADA FOL 74 facilities. Field observations have shown that they are mainly carried out in Saint-Pierre-d'Albigny (cluster 1) and Montmélián (cluster 2). Val d'Arc (cluster 3) is considered by the EMPP as geographically far from Chambéry. The persons who are accommodated in Val d'Arc need to go to Montmélián. In this specific case, the determining factor in whether these services are offered is the geographical proximity rather than the clusters.

In the localities of the scattered CADA Détours (cluster 3), there is no structure such as the EMPP. Social workers regret this absence and highlight the dual role they play by improvising themselves as psychologists. However, according to our observations, occasional interventions by psychologists have been set up. The team managing the CADA Détours organized lectures from a psychologist working and living outside the territory to better explain the mental vulnerabilities that characterize asylum seekers. These lectures were addressed to the social workers and the volunteers. Our observations point out the necessity to nuance the lack of mental health access in the small towns (Gardesse, Ielévrier, 2021), by highlighting the differences among the same category of towns (small towns) that don't have the same demographic, social and spatial characteristics. Furthermore, our observations confirm the fact that the local social action is crucial for organizing access to healthcare the asylum seekers (Hoyez, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

Our paper demonstrates territorial dynamics differ, and impact local action. Far from being homogenous, the reception of asylum seekers outside metropolitan areas is plural, depending on the composition of each municipality. There is a convergence between actions implemented in the localities part of clusters 1 and 2, unlike the shrinking localities (cluster 3).

Firstly, the organization of the reception in municipalities from the cluster 3 involves more the elected municipal officials from the opening of the CADA, or even well before (as is the case with the CADA Détours). Elected municipal officials in clusters 1 and 2 are relatively removed from the process of creating and managing the centers of reception. This difference is due to the superposition between the local reception policy and the local development policy in the municipalities of cluster 3. Receiving asylum seekers is considered by the elected municipal official as an opportunity to address issues related to the maintenance of public services (such as schools).

Secondly, local responses to the challenges posed by the access to mobility and healthcare are different between municipalities of cluster 1 and 2 and municipalities of cluster 3. This observation is particularly evident concerning the access to mental health services. For instance, the asylum seekers accommodated in the localities of cluster 1 and 2 of the scattered CADA FOL 74 facilities receive visits from the EMPP, while at the municipalities of the scattered CADA Détours facilities (cluster 3) they don't. However, the access to mobility may vary between the municipalities of cluster 3, particularly when the locality has an offer of public transport (as is the case of Val d'Arc). Beyond the differences between the clusters, this



observation raises the differences between rural spaces and small towns. Indeed, small towns, playing a central role in the urban hierarchy, have better accessibility to public and private services (as in the case of Ambert and Val d'Arc).

Thirdly, the close interactions inside rural communities give a possibility to build alternatives and to respond to the challenges posed by territorial constraints. For instance, cooperations have been established between the social workers and the medical services of the closest large-sized cities to facilitate the access of asylum seekers to mental healthcare.

Finally, our paper invites to analyze the evolution of the geography of reception outside the metropolises in France, between 2015 and 2024. To achieve this aim, we may use the data of OFII on the municipal localisation of the CADAs' facilities.

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## Annex

Figure 2 - Graph of the variables of the PCA – axes 1 & 2

### Plot of PCA variables

