



# Saint Basile Residency - 13001

## AUP

(Association of PADA users - Marseille)

## CADAAG

(Centre d'Aide aux Demandeurs d'Asile Auto-géré)

How to create a self organized temporary residency for migrants?

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## Housing, main issue

### POLICE EVICTIONS – no proof of payment, no backup

On the 14th of November 2019, at 8.00 in the morning, the municipal police of Marseille entered in the building we were living in. They said that from today, nobody shall be able to live in this building because it is not secure for us to live in anymore. So you have to go out of this building today and it should be before 2:00. So we thought it was a joke. We were more than 90 people living in this very big building with a lot of apartments. There were people who bought apartment already living there legally. But the police proposed for those people, who are living there legally, to host them in the hotels until they find a house for them. But for us, the Asylum Seekers over there, we rent but we don't have any receipt from the apartment owners.

### BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS – insulting double standard

So they decided to take us to a gymnasium in the 3rd district (arrondissement) of Marseille. We asked about the possibilities for us to have a decent place on the long term, like everyone else, since it was an open space gymnasium and not a proper place to live in. No answer. The same day, on the 14th at 8PM, the police came and said everybody should go to the street tomorrow morning: “we don't have a place for you”. So this one was an insulting attitude, what is this? They said that the building was not secure. But we were there, living a normal life, and we never saw any insecurity. We were renting and now they say we should go to the streets. We mobilized. Now we are not going out on the street, until we have a place to sleep, until we get a proper house, because the street is not secure. So I contacted the person in charge of the gymnasium. I asked him if he could help me to get a number of any journalists. He gave me a number, telling me not to tell anyone he gave it to me.

### MEDIA ATTENTION – facilitates community building

I contacted the journalist. I explained the situation. I said we need his immediate help, because we want you to know, please try to put this problematic in the media, so that people know about our situation. The journalist came the next day in the morning and we did an interview with the people there, the children who were going to school and some ladies.

## Fight within the system

### LEGAL ORGANIZATION – our rights, in the system

We also decided to organize ourselves. We created a collective that was called Collective of Boulevard Dahdah. And finally, the local SIAO proposed hotels for us and they said: “okay, you can stay in these hotels, until we find a permanent housing for you”. But we demanded to sign a document that shows that the hotel nights should be renewed. They provided some papers in French, about the fact that we are responsible for our people who were evacuated from the building: about 50 of us, Asylum Seekers. We signed this agreement that we should stay in the hotel. So until they find a place for us, I was very pleased. And with this agreement, we decided to leave the gymnasium after 5 days. So we were taken to different hotels. We stayed in these hotels for a while. I personally lived in that hotel until the 7th of April 2021: more than a year and a half.

### DEMONSTRATIONS – visibility & dialogue

To strengthen our strategic position, we did many demonstrations at different places in Marseille. We also undertook a negotiation between us and the Préfecture, with the assistance of the Collectif du 5 Novembre. But the city hall refused to apply the charter they did agree upon beforehand[6], about relocation of anyone evacuated from insecure buildings to be relocated to a safer one. Finally, the Préfecture accepted to take responsibility for us to get access to a proper housing, because of the demonstrations. The Préfet sent a representative to us. We wanted to negotiate with them a proper place to stay on our own, not in hotels anymore, since providing housing for Asylum Seekers should be the normal procedure, according to international standards. Then I was personally sent to a CADA: an asylum seekers shelter. And during this time, also, there was a lot of dysfunction in the PADA platform of Marseille: the loss of people's appointment letter who are supposed to go for their interviews, at the OFPRA in Paris, of their delivery after the appointment date. They lost refusal letter from the OFPRA, about people who were supposed to submit a case at the CNDA[ court within 15 days, and other dysfunctional dynamics, like they do not have interpreters for those who do not speak French (and some of us did not go to school so they do not even speak English).

## THE AUP – association des usagers de la PADA

So because of all these issues, and to sustain self-empowerment of asylum seekers, in February 2020 we decided to create an association that is called the AUP, to fight against these dysfunctional dynamics at the PADA platform. At the first general assembly, we were 30 asylum-seekers (including individuals from the Collective of Boulevard Dahdah and also from the ARGAM that we invited), and we created the executive board: the president, the secretary and the treasurer, for us to be able to register our organization with an official administrative ID. Today, the AUP regroups more than 500 members (actual and former asylum seekers) from 28 different nationalities. Then, there was the confinement matching the outbreak of the Covid, so it was very difficult at the time. The AUP members, with other French activists and the collective of El Manba, decided to establish the red Market: food distribution and hygienic items, baby food and diapers; because it was very difficult for Asylum Seekers who had no support from the government, to get these products since everything was closed, while they had to wait for several months for their file to be instructed. You know, a normal procedure. And also, there are some asylum-seekers who were not receiving money from the state, because of delayed process within the administration, due to Covid lock-downs.

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION – basic grassroots needs

That is how we distributed hundreds and hundreds of bags of food, for one month, every Tuesdays and Fridays. So every week we distributed our 300 bags of food, each distribution day. We asked some grants from the French Fondation de France, and also some of us collected food at supermarkets (at the door, asking people to buy us a bit of food). This food distribution was something very, very important for us. You know, we wanted to continue, especially for those of us who don't have any source of income. They don't work and they don't get any money from the state. So I talked with the white people amongst us, and they said they cannot continue but they will sustain us logistically. Up to date, our food distribution is going on: every Saturday, we distribute 150 bags of food for our member who do not have any financial support from the State, or any source of income.

## BY US AND FOR US – a unique initiative in France

And every Wednesday, we also help Asylum Seekers in writing their stories, to prepare for OFPRA interviews, and the CNDA Court of Appeal; or helping to register their children at school and also to get their CMU, and all the administrative work. Today, the AUP provides 3 main services: 1/ the red market food distribution 2/ legal and administrative assistance 3/ access to housing. But still, around 75% of the members of our community live in squats, which are controlled by sleeping Merchants with very expensive rent costs, not to talk about the lack of security in those squats, the hygiene issues, etc. So in 2020, we decided to squat our first building. But at that time we did not establish any rule. We stayed there for height months, and then the police evacuate the entire building. Still, it was an opportunity to learn a lot from that experience. So we said, okay, now in the next squat, we try to organize ourselves very well. You know, it is the only solution.

## CREATING A CADAAG - self organized housing

At the PADA (now called SPADA Marseille) there are five thousand, eight hundred and ninety-nine Asylum Seekers who are registered, and only 1500 are given housing: temporary housing, emergency housing (115); all the rest have to find another solution on their owns, and generally the only solution is the squat. People do squat because it is the only solution, since the State is not providing any support to them. Then in June 2021, some AUP members with the help of activists of Marseille, squatted an abandoned building downtown at 25 rue Saint Basile (13001), unoccupied for 5 years and owned by the EPF. We wanted to negotiate with the owner of this building, so that we can stay temporarily in this 5 storey building, until when they want to start their project in these premises. The NGO called JUST helped us in that process, since we had no idea about how to start this project. They coordinated the project and we explained to Just that we have some electricity problems and water issues that they could help us to fix. The owner was reassured to see that we established inner rules within the community, and that we also renovated partially the building (painting, electricity cables, etc.), with the help of the French Fondation Abbé Pierre, who gave us a grant of 2k Euros for that the initial phase, and the HAS who spent 25k Euros for the main building securing.

## LEGAL CONVENTION – reassuring institutional partners

So the owner finally said that it is possible for us to negotiate with them, through our local institutional partners. That is how we got a legal temporary occupation agreement for 9 month, after 13 months of illegal occupation (so 2 years in total), with the support of the Préfecture, the city hall, three French associations (HAS, Just, Fondation Abbé Pierre). This occupancy has to end on the 31st of March 2023. Today, in this building, we do other provide services such as French Classes, computer classes, and also legal and administrative counseling. We also organized a forum theater about the lives of Saint Basile's residents and the dysfunctions of the SPADA, called "Welcome to France!". There is more than 40 Asylum Seekers sheltered here: like families with children, single Ladies, young Men. And there are seven nationalities: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Mali, Guinea Conakry, Ivory Coast, Serbia and Montenegro.

## A WIN-WIN STRATEGY – helping institutions in their work

And so, we are trying to continue this project because it is vital to provide a temporary housing for Asylum seekers in Marseille. There are more than 30,000 empty buildings in Marseille, and people are living in the streets. With our strategy, we can contact empty building's owners for them to be able to make their building available to us. So we can occupy these buildings and shelter Asylum Seekers there, remove them from the street but also from squats, which are not secured. And we want to continue this project and also to share our experience with other Asylum seekers of different cities, in France. There is a lot of people (politicians, NGO representatives, human rights activists, social workers, students, researchers) who have visited this CADAAG, because it's the first legal housing which is managed by Asylum Seekers in France. It is a solution for everyone: Asylum Seekers of course, but also institutions and authorities, to reduce the flux of migrants looking for a shelter in the streets, by reassuring abandoned building owners and working with local serious expert partners, for a very low amount of money, compared to the money they spend at the state level for a very insufficient result, which puts the lives of these asylum seekers at risk.

<https://aup-marseille-99.website.net>

