



## EconoMag

The Show that demystifies Economics

### Restos du Cœur ©

by Max Farrington and Abby Klein

Restos du Cœur is the foremost charity in France for the distribution of food and support to the needy during the colder months. Created in 1985 by the famous comedian and actor, Coluche, the association has enjoyed extensive media coverage in the past and present; this attention is fortified by “Les Enfoirés,” or “the Bastards,” a group of singers and comedians who perform every year to raise money for the organization. The group also releases an annual album for the occasion, which has reached #1 on the charts every year since 2000, all the profits of which are used to fund the charity’s activities. This year’s fundraising campaign has just begun, so it’s the perfect time for a piece on the subject.

It’s not off to a great start this year, partly because it began just two weeks after the tragic attacks in Paris. Also, a record nearly 1 million people are seeking help from one of the organization’s 2111 centers in France, which are divided into 119 different associations throughout the 96 French departments. Last year, 950,000 people benefitted from this aid, a figure far greater than the original 80,000 recipients in 1985.

This staggering number of needy reflects France’s difficult social atmosphere. The country’s homeless population has increased significantly since 2008, but at the same time, people are giving more than ever before. In 2015, there have been nearly 70,000 people who volunteered to help the needy. But according to Olivier Berthe, the president of the Restos du Cœur, they still need more people to help out. He blames French administration for the dearth of volunteers, citing complex and discouraging procedures keeping people away, particularly the younger generation, who may not have the time to deal with the extra bureaucratic hurdles.

The State has received this message and has decided to act, in an attempt to make monetary donations easier and more beneficial to both give and receive. One of these actions is the review and update of the “Loi Coluche”: Originally created in 1989, this law gives tax relief for some charities, such as the Restos du Cœur. Let’s say you donate 30€, it will actually only cost you 7.50€ as you will receive 75% of the donation back in

tax relief. With a maximum donation of €529, it will actually cost you €132, with tax relief of €396. It is important to note that this tax relief is not automatic, but rather a deduction that you will have to include yourself on your income tax form.

This method has proven to be very effective: when it was extended in 2003, donations jumped from €37 million in 2004 to €84 million in 2014, ultimately helping more people by offering more hot meals and other necessities. These other goods can take the form of healthy foods, medical treatments, and doctor visits, and also housing benefits, such as the "*Centre d'hébergement d'urgence*," which helps give homeless people emergency shelter at least through the winter.

The Restos du Cœur also receives help from the Food Bank, which is a nonprofit, charitable organization that distributes food and provides housing. This is a program for MDP, or Most Deprived Persons. It also specializes in supplying food to people who are in need and are not covered by the official benefits system.

Some representatives of the organization fear that this year's numbers of needy will go through the roof, particularly due to the influx of migrants and refugees, who are not used to harsh European winters, and who come with little or nothing at all: no home, no food and no money. France is no stranger to providing services for the needy however, having twice the number of food banks as Britain.

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