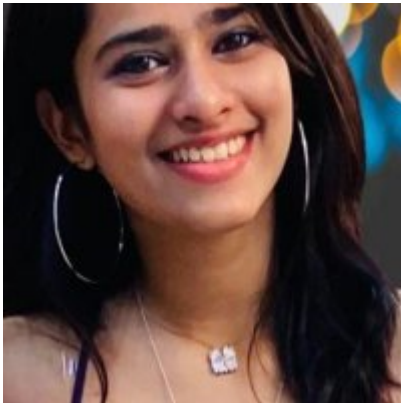


# Civic service means growing together

From the bustling streets of Delhi to the peaceful little town of Beaumont-de-Lomagne in Tarn-et-Garonne, Poornima admits that she has embarked on a whole new chapter in her life. 'It turned out that this experience changed my life.'

We interviewed Poornima MAHAJAN to find out what matters most to her.

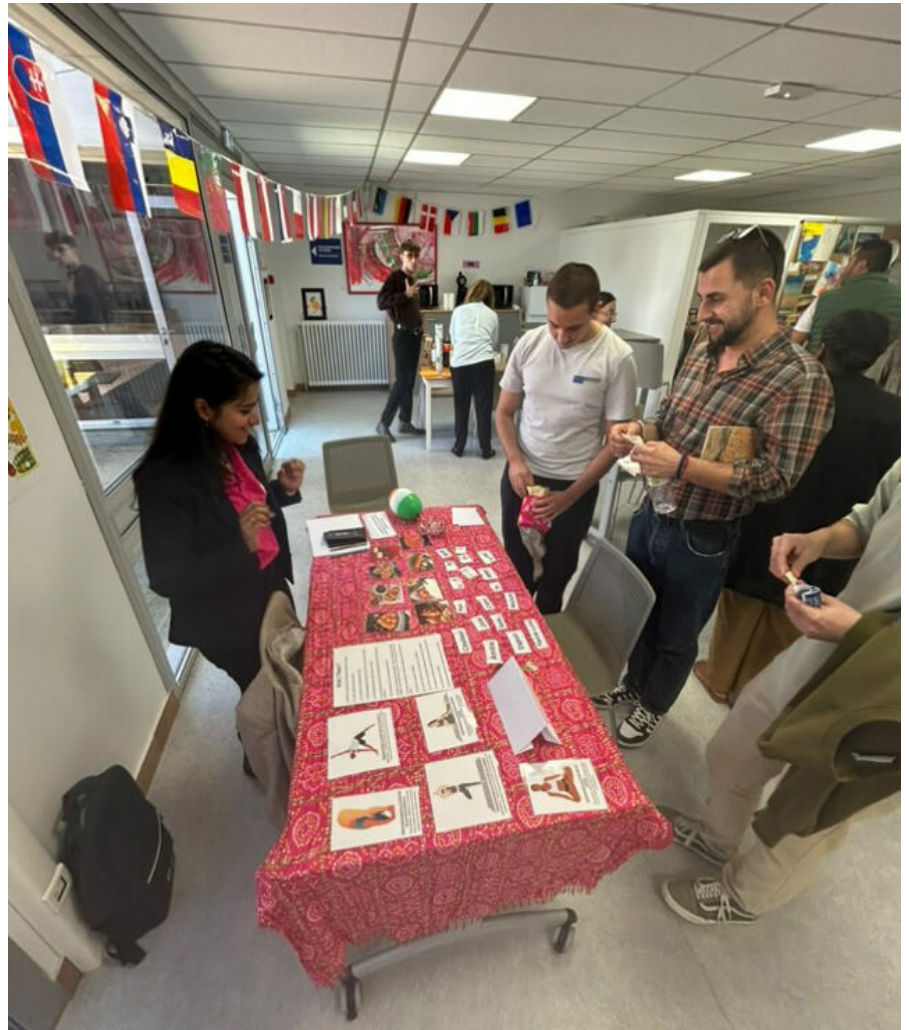


*My name is Poornima. I am Indian. I am doing international civic service in the field of education and interculturality and work at LEAP LESTONNAC secondary school (Occitanie) as an English language assistant. I introduce students to Indian culture in order to encourage them to participate in international mobility and engage in international solidarity.*

**What was your motivation for starting this experience in France?**

Having been engaged in volunteering for years and deeply believing in the importance of education, I came to France

with a simple yet powerful intention: to learn, to share, and to create a positive impact wherever I go.



The International Civic Service shared my passion and offered me the wonderful opportunity to work in the field of education and interculturality at LEAP Lestonnac, a French private agricultural school.

**Which activities did you carry out during your civic service in France?**



My role was to assist mainly in English classes, but also to participate in others, weaving cultural exchange into daily lessons. I introduced students to the beauty of Indian culture through Bollywood dance workshops, Indian

cooking sessions, festival celebrations, and many small moments that acted as bridges between our worlds.

### **Which impressions of France and lessons learnt do you bring back home?**

I still remember my first step out of the car in Beaumont, breathing in the crisp, fresh air and feeling instantly mesmerised by the endless greenery. Life here moved at a slower pace, and soon, so did I. The warm smiles of colleagues, the curiosity of students, and the gentle rhythm of the town became my daily companions.





Working with the students shaped me in ways I hadn't imagined. At first, the language gap made explanations

challenging. But soon I learned to be creative using gestures, drawings, and role-play and other activities and realised that connection often comes before vocabulary. One afternoon, after achieving good scores in her exam, a student quietly came up to me and said, "Thank you for believing in me when I couldn't." That moment stayed in my heart. It reminded me that teaching is not just about lessons, but about unlocking courage and self-belief in others. These skills will stay with me for life, whether in a classroom or any other professional space.

France surprised me by quietly dismantling the stereotypes the world has created. People were open, kind, and often went out of their way to make me feel at home. Even in a small town, I found richness in conversations, traditions, and shared meals.

### **What did you find quite challenging during your stay?**

Of course, there were challenges. As a vegetarian, finding my kind of food and explaining egg and fish not being vegetarian food for Indians was sometimes tricky. I missed the comfort of homecooked Indian meals, the burst of spices, the warmth of family. Adapting to the French palate took time, but it also taught me to appreciate subtle flavours and to find joy in simplicity, and just like that cheese and baguette became my favourite part of every meal.

## What would you say to sum up your experience?

As a summary of this unique experience, I would say this: volunteering abroad is not just about giving, it's about growing together. It's about stepping into the unknown and discovering that the world has far more kindness than we often believe. "World as a beautiful place, if seen with right lenses." It's about realising that you can carry your culture with pride while embracing another with an open heart.



To anyone considering such an experience, whether as a student, teacher, or professional,

***I can only say: take the leap.***

The skills you gain, the friendships you form, and the perspectives you bring home will stay with you forever. Beaumont-de-Lomagne will always be my reminder that when cultures meet, the world becomes a little smaller and a lot warmer.

*Featured image : Launch of the Franco-Indian 'civic services' alumni network at the French Embassy in New Delhi on 7 July 2025, in the presence of Thierry Mathou, the Ambassador, Yann Delaunay and the General Management of France Volontaires.*

For more information, [visit Poornima's blog on Moveagri](#)

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## **Donut revisited in Franco-Indian colors**

**The Pantnagar University of Agriculture and Technology organized a cooking competition on the theme of coarse grains, to celebrate the national millet festival. Young French agricultural students from the DEFIAA-2023 program, on placement in India, took part in the competition, and third prize was won by a Franco-Indian pair. « The aim was to make a dish from millet. The Indian girl who was with me came up with the idea of making doughnuts » – testifies Nicolas.**

**Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology  
Pantnagar, District- Udham Singh Nagar (Uttarakhand) Cuisine  
competition organized on coarse grains.**





To promote coarse grains in the university, Dr. Sarita Srivastava, Director of Suvarnada Foundation Rudrapur and Dr. Archana Kushwaha, Head of the Department of Food Science and Nutrition, College of Home Science, Pantnagar University together organized a food product competition based on coarse grains. In this competition, students from France as well as university

students participated. The participants cooked various dishes using millets – Pahari Rabdi, Donut, Cake, Muffin, Laddu, Kheer, Chaat, Halwa, Chikki, Tikki and beverages etc. In the competition, Mrs. Sadhna Sharma got the first place, Charu Bisht and Deeksha Semwal reached the second place followed by the Ayushi Joshi and Nicholas Flottes team. Consolation prizes were received by Mrs. Usha Joshi and Clementine Basquin. In the competition, the winners were honored with prizes by Doctor Alka Goyal, Dean, Home Science College. On this occasion, Shri Rohit Goswami, Director and Shafali Srivastava, Advisor Suvarnada Foundation made special contribution. The dishes were evaluated by Dr. Sabbu Sangeeta, Assistant Professor, Department of Food Science and Technology, College of Agriculture, Dr. Sarita Srivastava and Dr. Archana Kushwaha. Professors and students of Home Science College also participated into the program.

*Read more – [Internship report, French students on the DEFIAA programme in India – 2023 August](#)*

# **Defiaa, a wave of color over France**

**Defiaa, a wave of color over France** The India network organizes the reception of Indian students and their internships in a dozen agricultural high schools in France. After a week of integration at the Lycée Agricole Français de Théza in Perpignan, they head off to partner establishments in the DEFIAA program – **Developping French Indian Exchanges in Agroffod and Agronomy** – and experience the French adventure.

Every year since 2015, the India network of agricultural education has welcomed around 20 Indian students from Pantnagar's GBPUAT University to France for just over a month. This government agricultural university is one of the most renowned in India, located in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, at the foot of the Himalayas.





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ian students hosted in March 2023, as part of the DEFIAA program, share their experiences on the Moveagri social network, which is specially dedicated to sharing the experiences of young people in agricultural education. What they all have in common – Indians, French nationals and any other young people who have completed a mobility program abroad – is to share the incredible moments they experienced during their internship or study stay.



They have all set up blogs to describe their impressions and experiences of the DEFIAA mobility program, too, in which they illustrate their stay with numerous photos of their cultural visits from Collioure to Normandy, via Paris and Lyon, as well as the periods they spent attending classes in the various establishments they were assigned to in different French regions.



Mansi talks about her stay at the Chartes – EPL de la Saussaye farm.

*In la Saussaye , we learned a lot of things regarding food processing. We made French baguette , wheat flour, apple juice , biscuits , ice cream , sorbet and croissants. We experienced some new ways of working in laboratory that were slightly different from our country. Alongwith we attended microbiology practicals and some English classes. in English classes we got a chance to communicate with the French students and they prepared a lots of questions for us to know about India. This was really an interactive session for us as well as for them.*

*Annu also tells us what she experienced during her 35 days in France.*

*We took French language classes, and also got a taste of*

*French dance and cuisine. The next day, we went to Collioure and Saint Cyprien for a real-life experience. It's a town full of culinary art, art, wine, food, charming people, beautiful markets representing French culture and the sea offering a full range of pleasures. It's an iconic postcard location. Farid and Charles) and we were lucky enough to visit two institutes (LEGTA les Sardières in Bourg en Bresse and Lycée agricole St Genis Laval in St Genis Laval)...*

*Goel Krati concludes his blog with a very philosophical message about what comes out of this confrontation with the unknown, inherent in every journey far from home.*

*I think it goes without saying that when you live away from home in another country, you quickly build your self-confidence and develop your cultural sensitivity. Eventually, you'll stand out from the crowd, and that's when your learning abroad will be an asset to your success in life. These are life skills that will help you to integrate easily into the global working environment and give you confidence when interacting with people from another culture or country. It can be intimidating at first, but it's only a matter of time before you build up your confidence, but it's definitely a holistic learning experience.*

To understand the feeling of such an adventure, there's nothing better than reading all the blogs they created during their stay and discovering the photos they deliver to us by surfing on the Moveagi platform. 15 young Indians submitted to the exercise and as many blogs were created to follow them step by step during more than a month in France, They criss-crossed the whole of France, going from farm to farm, visiting food-processing factories, discovering French culture and tasting local products.

Read all about the young Indians taking [part in Defiaa 2023 on Moveagri](#).

This summer 2023, their French counterparts will share the

same experience in India, as part of the same study and internship program.

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