

## CALAIS - STATUS REPORT JANUARY 2017

### Executive summary

- The clearance of the Calais camp has not addressed the underlying reasons why refugees arrive in Northern France, and so in the long term will not stop refugees from gathering there.
- Hugely alarming is the situation of over 1,000 minors who remain scattered around France. The UK Home Office's failure to fulfil its promise to support these vulnerable children to come to the UK means they are now leaving the comparative safety of the French centres to resume dangerous and illegal attempts to get to the UK. Many are sleeping rough on the streets of Paris and Calais, playing into the hands of traffickers and exposing them to other dangers.
- Refugees are continuing to arrive in Northern France every day. The French response to these new arrivals is predominantly centred on detention, effectively criminalising refugees. There is a lack of basic provisions, legal information and interpreters at detention centres making this even more concerning.
- This humanitarian crisis continues to worsen with refugees facing deportation to dangerous home environments and an increasing number living in squalid conditions in and around Northern France.
- With over 2,000 refugees in Northern France living outside of the government run CAO program, and more arriving daily, the refugee crisis in Northern France is far from over and far from solved.

### Background

On 28 October 2016 the last refugees were bussed out of the Calais 'Jungle' to more than 160 government run reception centres (CAOs) situated all over France. The following week what remained of the Jungle camp was bulldozed flat, dispersing up to 10,000 people who had been living in the camp at the end of August 2016. However this did not address the underlying reasons why refugees congregate in Northern France and why they have done so for a number of years.

Over the summer of 2015 a sharp increase in conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa led to over a million refugees entering Europe within 12 months. The majority settled in Germany, Sweden, Hungary and France; however, those with a strong tie to the UK, most commonly close living relatives there, often came to Calais in a bid to reach the UK.

There are primarily two reasons why refugees collect in Calais and the surrounding areas:

- If you want to claim UK asylum, you have to physically be in the UK; however, as there is no legal way to gain entry, refugees must enter illegally in order to make a legal claim. Refugees are therefore gathering at points close to the UK border to attempt illegal entry to the UK.
- Secondly the 'Dublin' system of determining which EU member is responsible for processing a refugee's asylum claim states that the claim should be made in the first EU state the refugee enters. Refugees wishing to claim asylum in France but who have been fingerprinted in Italy or Greece risk being sent back to these countries that are already



heavily overburdened by the refugee crisis and struggling to cope. However there is a six month time limit and in the second half of 2016 we saw more refugees staying in the Calais camp in order to avoid the Dublin fingerprint risk.

### **Unaccompanied minors**

1,900 minors were among the refugees bussed out of the Calais jungle in October 2016. Although it had been promised that the minors would be sent to special children's centres, many of the centres did not find out that they were receiving minors until the night before they arrived and no special provisions or facilities were provided. We are aware of one centre where the minors were housed in a shelter for French homeless adults, some of whom had alcohol and drug problems.

Due in part to public pressure, the UK government had agreed to accept between 1,000 and 3,000 refugee children from Europe. British Home Office officials visited the minors in the French centres after the demolitions to determine their eligibility for transfer, either under 'Dublin' family reunification provisions or under the 'Dubs amendment' that applies to children who are considered particularly vulnerable. However, on 9 December 2016 the *Guardian* reported that the Home Office had ended this process after accepting only 750 children for transfer.

On 21 December Human Rights Watch reported that that the process for children to seek transfer to the UK had been non-transparent and arbitrary, and they had not been given information about the outcome of their cases. It also reported that the Dubs amendment criteria adopted by the Home Office had been restrictive, with the child's best interest not being used as the predominant factor<sup>(1)</sup>.

Since then Care4Calais has received a number of phone calls from these minors, and also from their relatives in the UK, who do not understand why their claims have been rejected. The children are shocked and despairing and many are leaving or threatening to leave the French reception centres. This is a grave concern because there is nowhere else that is safe for them to stay. In Paris refugees are sleeping in the streets in appalling conditions and we have been warned of trafficking; similarly in Calais and the surrounding areas refugees are also sleeping rough and similar concerns regarding trafficking arise.

We have recently spoken to 115 minors from 13 CAOs. Out of these, 17 have already left the centres. Daily we take food and aid to around 50 minors who are sleeping rough in the Calais area. Given that these minors are in hiding it is reasonable to assume that there are many more that we have not yet found. In Calais, temperatures are down to minus four at night and we are extremely concerned for their wellbeing. Just three nights ago the police came upon a group and blocked up the place they were sheltering, so they could not access their belongings including sleeping bags and blankets.

The state run children's centre at St Omer reported that over 200 children have passed through their doors in each of December and January. They have recently increased capacity from 45 to 75 places. They also reported that 90% of their arrivals are delivered by the police, and that a new procedure has been adopted whereby on arrest of a migrant, the police themselves now undertake the

preliminary age assessment, and it is based on this that the decision is made whether to take the migrant to a detention centre or to St Omer.

Last week a minor in Chambéry contacted us and said he had tried to kill himself. Minors in Lyon called us as they were told to leave their centre as they have been age assessed to be 18 years old. We have no idea how this was judged.

### **New arrivals: Calais and surrounding areas**

One of the biggest gaps in the French authorities' plan for the Calais camp is the total lack of provision for new arrivals post the closure of the camp. And of course refugees have continued to arrive. The Minister of the Interior has said that the French authorities are considering this. Two options are available: either maintaining a reception centre in Calais, at the risk of creating another Jungle; or maintaining reception centers in all the major French cities in order to "intercept" the exiles in transit. However, so far any announcement in this respect continues to be delayed.

With many people on the move it is hard to gauge the number of new arrivals each day; however we would estimate that at least 10 to 12 people, including minors, continue to arrive in or travel through Calais daily (last Sunday 117 were counted). The French authorities commitment to clear the town of refugees has so far been sustained with multiple patrols of police covering the streets and based 24 hours at the train and bus stations. Arriving refugees are often picked up by the police and taken to detention centres.

At the detention centres there are reports of refugees having their possessions confiscated and they tell us they are provided with minimal food, blankets and toiletries and have little or no access to interpreters or information. The authorities are stopping us from visiting people in detention and not allowing us to take basic provisions in such as toiletries and clothes.

This amounts to the criminalisation of being a refugee, which is fundamentally wrong. Refugees are people with a right to international protection, not criminals.

We have heard reports of increasing deportations to dangerous countries of origin including Sudan and Eritrea, and France is also increasing deportations under the Dublin system to Italy. Last summer the French Interior Minister strengthened legal processes enabling deportation under the 'Dublin' system and asked Prefectures to use systematic application of these legal processes to increase such transfers. According to statistics provided by the Interior Ministry, 17,529 Dublin certificates were issued during the first 11 months of 2016, an unprecedented amount <sup>(2)</sup>.

We are aware of at least two small 'camps' in the region, and several smaller encampments that pop up and move on a sporadic basis. The living conditions are appalling and well below those of the original Calais 'jungle' with no running water, sanitation, cooking, heating or washing facilities. Those living in these camps are in daily fear of the authorities and indeed on 6 January 2017 police visited one of these small encampments and destroyed the tents, sleeping bags and possessions. A small French association that has been assisting the refugees there was subject to fines and ordered

under threat of closure to implement expensive building alterations to accommodate disabled people, although there are no disabled visitors.

### **Paris**

Numbers have increased significantly in Paris and in Dunkirk. An evacuation similar to that in Calais took place in Paris on 4 November transferring 3,800 refugees to CAOs; however, hundreds of people continue to sleep in the streets. An official centre was opened on 10 November that has only 400 places where refugees can stay temporarily before being transferred to centres elsewhere. The situation is so bad that new street camps are springing up with hundreds of people sleeping, ill-equipped for temperatures that often fall to minus six degrees at night. There are reports of fights due to overcrowding.

On 1 January 2017 MSF's mobile clinics began operations in Paris. In just eight days they reported the following:

- They have treated 8 refugees who have been close to hypothermia.
- They are concerned that aggression and harassment from police is making the already bleak situation faced by refugees on the streets of Paris worse, and even putting their lives at risk.
- As the weather has fallen below zero MSF teams have witnessed police confiscating blankets from refugees.

### **Dunkirk**

The camp in Dunkirk had previously shrunk down to around 500 people but it has now increased to 1,300. The wooden huts are steeped in black mould that is highly infectious and the wood in many is so sodden it does not dry out even on dry days. Up to ten people may sleep in a one-room shelter due to overcrowding. Based on a report issued by Care4Calais, MSF have undertaken to investigate this.

### **The CAOs (French reception centres)**

The CAOs were intended as a temporary solution only. The refugees were given a four week period in the COAs to decide whether to claim asylum in France or to leave the country. In some instances this has been extended, but we are now receiving more reports of people leaving, or being thrown out of, the CAOs. This includes a report of three families, with children ranging from just two years old, who were told to leave a CAO in the Alps and had no winter clothing, and a report of five families with very young children who were told if they did not claim asylum in France they would be deported back to their country of origin. These people were so scared that they ran away, and two single mothers with toddlers have since disappeared.

Care4Calais has received feedback from refugees in over 150 CAOs and has visited 25 CAOs. The CAOs vary greatly in nature and standard, from apartments for families with modern appliances to disused school or hospital buildings containing makeshift beds with only two toilets and two showers for 50 people.

In over 50% of cases refugees report being reasonably comfortable. The most commonly cited problem is with food – either not receiving halal food (which they often require for religious reasons) or not getting enough food. In some cases this is being slowly resolved.

Some of the most worrying reports include racial protests, sometime violent, against the centres (Arzon, Vouneuil-sur-Vienne), delayed or withheld access to medical care (Laval, Grenoble, Bou) and lack of access to interpreters (commonly reported across CAOs).

In the coming months problems will increase as those who do not wish to claim asylum in France leave the CAOs and, with nowhere to go, are chased underground or detained. While it is true that France has laws and agencies to look after vulnerable people, recent experience suggests that these are not always applied, that resources are inadequate and that little attempt is made to communicate in relevant languages.

### **Summation**

With people hiding or on the move there can be no certainty over numbers; however, our best current estimate would be: 1,400 people in the Dunkirk camp; 400 people on the streets of Paris and outside the government run centre; 200 people in small camps in the Pas de Calais region and 100 sleeping rough in and around the town. Added to this would be an unknown number in the detention centres in Calais, Lille and Paris. With at least 2,000 refugees in Northern France living outside of the government run CAO program, and more arriving daily, the refugee crisis in Calais is far from over and far from solved.

### **The UK's responsibility**

Any sustainable long term solution to the refugee problem in Northern France requires recognition of the underlying reasons that refugees travel there; many have close family or community ties to the UK, have served with the British army in Afghanistan or have lived in the UK previously. To date the UK has refused to take any responsibility for these people who are now in desperate need through no fault of their own.

There is no morally acceptable reason why the UK should not do its fair share to help out in what has now become one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time. This applies equally in Northern France as it does to the refugee crisis across the whole of Europe.

In addition to providing a fair share of places we must also create safe passage for genuine refugees and establish a means whereby those in genuine need of UK asylum can be safely processed without the need for them to risk their lives by attempting to enter the UK illegally.

The Home Office has issued guidance on unaccompanied minors that places a number of harmful restrictions on the transfer of minors over the age of 12 to the UK, and backtracks on previous commitments made by the Government and codified in the Dubs amendment.

We are extremely disappointed to see the Government falling short of its commitments to help refugees yet again. The guidance shows a failure to ensure that the UK's vow to take in 3,000 unaccompanied child refugees is fulfilled – and more widely, a refusal by the Government to take responsibility for the pledges we have made to alleviate the plight of refugees.

Until the UK government recognises the vital role it must play to achieve a longer term solution, the situation only looks to worsen. Many vulnerable people have been abandoned and are urgently at risk.

<sup>(1)</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/21/france/uk-lone-children-calais-left-limbo>

<sup>(2)</sup> <http://www.lacimade.org/dublin-vers-un-durcissement/>