

Written evidence submitted by Care4Calais (ECM0002)

Background

In November and December 2018 there were around 250 reported cases of migrants crossing the English Channel in small boats. This appeared to be a new development as previously it had been more common for attempts to be made via lorries. We were asked to provide evidence regarding this to the Home Affairs Committee on 22 January 2019.

Care4Calais has been working with migrants in Calais since September 2015. We work with approximately 3,000 refugees who are now dispersed along the North East coast of France and Belgium from Brussels in the north down to Ouistreham in the west, mirroring the South East coast of the UK. Our work includes providing direct aid such as food, clothes and sleeping bags, and spending time with the refugees to combat the depression and despair that we encounter every day.

This report provides information based on our cumulative experience and also on a limited scope survey that we undertook on 20 January 2019 in order to provide information to the Home Affairs Committee. We talked to 48 refugees who were mostly Iranian but included several Afghans and some people from African countries, all ages 14 to 40.

1. Why do people leave their home countries?

In answer to our survey, the most common reason given by Iranians was persecution, mostly political (45%) but some religious (18%) and sexual (2%) too. Most of the Afghans and Africans said they were fleeing war or conflict.

Some respondents wanted to give more detail about why they fled: “The Taliban and Daesh were near and rounded people up from my town. They would have taken me for a soldier.” “Iranian police threatened my life. If you criticise the government, they come in the night and your family will never see you again.” “I am a Christian and I cannot practice my religion safely.” “I will be executed if I return home.” All but one person said they could not return to their home country if they wanted to. For more individual comments see appendix one.

2. Are they ‘genuine’ refugees?

The most common source countries of people in Northern France and Belgium are Afghanistan, Sudan, Eritrean, Iraq and Iran. According to the Global Peace Index, these are literally the most dangerous places in the world¹, so it makes sense that people fleeing from there would be in genuine fear for their lives. “No Safe Place”, the Human Rights Watch

¹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/most-dangerous-countries-in-the-world-global-peace-index-2018-6/international?r=UK&IR=T>

report on Afghanistan in May 2018 describes ongoing insurgent attacks on civilians². Amnesty International's 2018 report on Sudan condemns "widespread violations of international humanitarian and human rights law."³ In Eritrea, every citizen must serve an indeterminate period of "national service" after turning 18, with many ending up serving for well over a decade. A UN Commission of Inquiry has characterised the system as "enslavement."⁴

A year after the Calais camp was closed a study was carried out covering those whose asylum claims had been processed. It found that 86% had been granted asylum at that point⁵, with that percentage only like to increase with time. This means that a minimum of 86% of the people formerly living in the Calais 'Jungle' camp were officially recognised as refugees following detailed processing and investigation.

Our experience – the stories we hear every day – are of journeys that are both incredibly dangerous and horrifying, with thousands drowning crossing the Mediterranean, tales of shocking brutality and abuse on the Balkan route, and of human slave markets and torture in Libya; it only makes sense that these are journeys made by people who have no choice.

The best way to tell if someone is 'genuine' is to hear their claim – that is all we are asking for. Not for a blanket entry permit, just for their claims to be fairly heard.

3. Why do they want to come to the UK?

It is critical to remember that the idea that all refugees try to get to the UK is a common, and false, misconception. In 2016, 18 times more people claimed asylum in Germany than in the UK. Sweden and Hungary, which both have much smaller populations than the UK, have taken several times more refugees per head of population than the UK has. In 2017, France handled over 100,000 asylum applications compared to 25,000 handled by the UK, i.e. four times more, and Italy handled three times more. When looked at across Europe, the percentage of refugees who aim for the UK is less than 5%.

According to our survey, half (48%) of the small number who are trying to reach the UK, have family here and 15% speak English but no other European languages. This is in line with a more detailed survey that Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) undertook in the old Calais 'Jungle'. That survey found that half of the refugees then had family ties to the UK⁶. The instinct to be with family at times of crisis is a powerful and universal driver. Quotes we heard in January included "I want to be with my uncle." "I want to join my brother and to study." "Maybe in the UK it will be peaceful with no racism, black and white are the same and live together peacefully." For more individual quotes please see appendix one.

² <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/05/08/no-safe-place/insurgent-attacks-civilians-afghanistan>

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/sudan/report-sudan/>

⁴ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=reports+on+eritrea>

⁵ <https://www.thelocal.fr/20171021/crime-down-but-misery-persists-one-year-since-calais-camp-evacuation>

⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/calais-crisis-first-ever-quantitative-survey-in-the-jungle-reveals-thousands-of-refugees-still-a7041541.html>

4. What do people most wish for if they get to the UK?

The answer that we heard again and again (61%) was: “I just want to be safe”. After what they have been through, under the conditions they are living in, people in Calais can’t think about anything else. Ali, a quiet Iranian man, said his dream is “being able to have a decent and human life without being scared and humiliated every day”. This is not just a desire to be safe from the horrors they have originally fled; but a desire to live without the constant threat of police violence and humiliation that is so common in Calais. To see more individual quotes please see appendix one.

5. Would they claim UK asylum while in France if that option was available?

This could be achieved with a UK processing centre based in Northern France where refugees can register. This would be similar to the approach that has been used at an EU level.

Eight in ten (81%) said they would claim UK asylum in France if that option was available. People don’t want to get in boats and risk their lives by crossing the Channel – but they don’t feel they have a choice. “I would [claim UK asylum from France]”, said one respondent, “because then I wouldn’t have to risk my life and maybe die by crossing the Channel unsafely.”

The remaining 19% did not say ‘no’ – they either didn’t answer or did not understand the question.

Care4Calais believes that introducing safe and legal routes for people to claim asylum is easily the most effective way to save lives, prevent harm and remove the ability for people smugglers to make money.

In 2016 we were told by authorities in the UK and in France that closing the Calais camp would stop people coming – it hasn’t. We have continually been told that the incredibly hostile environment in Calais will deter people from coming. It hasn’t. People may be dispersed but numbers across the region are still in the thousands. It is clear that so called deterrents are not working - and the human cost of these policies is high.

The objective of an asylum centre in Calais would have to be to safeguard people who are genuinely at risk – not to limit migration. If the highest-level objectives are set correctly, we have the greatest chance of a functional outcome, and a system that people would trust.

6. Who are the people who are in Calais?

In our survey we asked people what their profession in their home country was. The answers were: 7 students, 5 engineers, 4 school pupils, 3 mechanics, 3 teachers, 3 electricians, and 2 artists, chefs, accountants, salespeople, plus a teacher, technician, car designer, doctor, farmer, driver, architect, soldier, security guard and a lifeguard.

7. How are they trying to get to the UK, by boat or lorry?

When we asked people this question these are the responses that we got:

Answers:

Lorry

Iranians	9
Other	8

Boat

Iranians	7
Africans	2
Not answer	22
	48

“Clandestine entries” are by nature difficult to obtain information about – nearly half of the people we asked were not happy to answer. However, a report by the Migration Advisory Committee released in May 2018 provides estimates for numbers⁷. In 2016-17 these were estimated to be 2,366, and 1,832 in 2017-18. This is approximately 150 per month.

This would suggest that 300 people in the two months to Christmas 2018 is not particularly extraordinary or remarkable – and there must surely be fluctuations over time.

It bears repeating that the only reason people are entering the UK clandestinely is that there is no safe and legal route for them to claim asylum here without doing so.

8. The Dublin Regulation

The Dublin Regulation establishes which European state has the responsibility to examine an asylum application. It is not concerned with whether an asylum application is ‘genuine’ or not, it is simply concerned with *where* that claim will be heard.

A refugee has no legal obligation to claim asylum in the first safe country, and if they do move on they are neither breaking the law by doing so, nor disqualifying themselves from refugee status⁸. Under the Dublin Regulation the most important factor in deciding in which country someone looking for asylum can claim it is family.

In 2016 and 2017 more people were transferred to the UK under this procedure than out of the UK.

2017 Eurostat figures: Implemented transfers	461 ⁹
Implemented transfers	314

⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/755272/ICIB_I_An_inspection_of_South_Coast_Ports.pdf

⁸ https://www.freemovement.org.uk/are-refugees-obliged-to-claim-asylum-in-the-first-safe-country-they-reach/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=are-refugees-obliged-to-claim-asylum-in-the-first-safe-country-they-reach&fbclid=IwAR0CVwTAOiv5rN2kKCectASNwY4awBV60RPk9bkATTq0zTL_CUKrIWuMcM

⁹ http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_dubti&lang=en

The majority of transfers out were to Germany or Italy.

The Dublin Regulation does not give the UK the ability to send just anyone back to France – only certain people are affected and only after a proper procedure has been followed.

Conclusion

What does all this tell us? First, that the people we see on the news arriving in dinghies have been forced to flee horribly dangerous situations. Second, that they have good reasons to want to come to Britain: family and language, among others. Third, that they don't want to be making dangerous Channel crossings but don't feel they have a choice. And finally, that all they want is to live in the UK peacefully, contributing valuable skills, enthusiasm and experience.

Britain could do more to help these people – all they want is to have their asylum claims heard, and all Britain needs to do is to introduce a safe and legal way for them to do that. It is clear that deterrents do not work, and the human cost is high. Introducing safe and legal routes for people to claim asylum would be the most effective way to save lives, prevent harm and remove the ability for people smugglers to make money.

This could be achieved with a UK processing centre based in Northern France where refugees can register. The objective of such an asylum centre in Calais would have to be to safeguard people who are genuinely at risk – not to limit migration. If the highest-level objectives are set correctly, we have the greatest chance of a functional outcome, and a system that people would trust.

February 2019

Appendix – More detailed quotes from Refugee Survey

Q1. Why they had left their home country.

- I cannot be free to support who I want in the government without being in danger.
- I am a Christian and cannot practice my religion safely in Iran.
- I cannot live in Iran as a Christian, I cannot live in Iran if I disagree with the government. If the UK can change the Iranian state, then I will happily go home but if not I must claim asylum in Europe.
- I am scared to answer this question.
- There are no human rights in Iran.
- I faced a lot of persecution because of my religion and because of my father's political views. You cannot express yourself if you disagree with the government. It is not a country where you can be safe, where your democratic views can be expressed
- I am 13 so the whole family left together
- Is migration a choice? Would you leave your home, would you live here in Calais by choice?
- I lost my family. I am alone.
- Taliban came to his town and threatened to kill him
- Taliban and daesh are around and round up people from my town. They will take me for a soldier. Brother and mother are in uk.
- Iranian police threatened his life. The dictatorship is dangerous and a risk to his life. If you criticise the government, they come in the night and your family will never see you again.
- My government is a big dictator and they did a lot of bad things relating to Islamic religion, I do not trust this. I wanted to change religions and didn't feel you could in Iran.

Q1b Could you go back to your home country, if you wanted to?

- Too dangerous.
- It is too dangerous for me as a Christian.
- I would not be safe from the government if I went back.
- I fear for my life in Iran.
- Risk of being executed
- I would be executed
- I cannot live there safely.
- I want to but it's not safe
- I fear for my life in Iran
- I will be killed if I return to Iran
- I will be executed at home.
- My life will be in danger if I return. My father's life was taken and I will risk my family's life if I go home. This is very upsetting for me
- The war is still going on - my whole family left when I was 13
- Taliban daesh will kill them
- Political reasons. Detention. Prison. Maybe death

- I will go back if my government change and there is democracy. When i have equality and i will be safe then i can return. Political and religious and sexual discrimination and persecution can kill you in iran. For this is not ok.
- He was told by the Taliban he will be killed if he returns

Q2. Why do you want to come to the UK?

- See my cousin.
- I want to be with my family
- I want to be with my uncle
- I have family but do not want to say who they are.
- I can speak English and not French.
- I have a brother in the uk
- I can speak English and not French
- I want a safe and stress free life.
- I want to go to the UK for a safe and happy life.
- I am hopefully going to get to the UK where first I can be safe, then I also have my uncle there who i can see and trust. I just want a new life where I can be safe and be happy
- Mistreatment by French, believe the English will be more respectful
- Wants freedom
- To be safe. The uk is not like other European countries who work with Iran
- Speak English
- Because i will be safe and i would like to go there, the UK is the best place to help people like me. Someone who needs help. I don't feel this about other countries that they would help me. Maybe here in the UK it will be peaceful with no racism, black and white re the same and live together peacefully
- To have a better life and so i can save my life
- I lived there from 2000 to 2014
- Join my brother and to study
- For my wife and child
- My family is there and it is safe

Q.3 What do respondents most wish for if they get to the UK?

- To be safe
- For a quite life
- To be happy and safe
- A safe life
- Just to be safe.
- Being able to have a normal life without being humiliated and scared all day
- To have a life. This is no life
- Life without stress.
- Being able to have a decent and human life without being scared and humiliated every day
- To have and continue my life
- Save life
- Just to be safe

- To have a quiet life contributing and working without persecution
- I want to feel safe and do not worry about my life safety anymore
- Safe and quite life
- To continue my study at university
- Quiet life
- A safe and quite life
- Safe and happy life
- A safe life without stress
- University studies
- University studies
- Safety, more than anything.
- To go to university to study medicine and become a doctor
- Medical treatment for his back
- To be a marine officer and continue my dream. But to be safe
- Live a full life
- To see my uncle
- I want to play basketball and live my life
- To carry on my studies in French and English language. I would like to take my English exam then French language. I want to improve my language
- Continue school
- Be safe and to live a normal life
- To go back home, work at veg Market, fish market
- To study and work in care or volunteering
- Settle his life
- Be safe
- I would like to work, i am an author and a poet. I can work any job and i want to. But if i could i would write fiction. Write poetry. But i am willing to work anywhere
- He is free to change religion and pray
- Be safe
- New life with family and start studying.
- To be a good man in the UK and for the UK
- start a new life and meet my best friend, the only close person I have in Europe

Q4. Would you claim UK asylum while in France (if that option was available)?

- We want to be able to have a normal life without feeling at risk all the time
- I just want to be heard.
- I do not want to be in danger anymore
- I would claim here for UK if I could.
- It would be safer than trying to cross by boat.
- Absolutely! If this was real
- Yes he would prefer to do it safely and legally.
- I will do this then I don't have to risk my life and maybe die when I cross unsafely. It is so important for me to get to the UK where I can be part of a good and intelligent society. That is so important to me

Q5. Why have you not claimed asylum in France?

- I do not feel safe here
- I want to be in the UK.
- I want to be with my family in the UK
- We are treated very poorly. I cannot contribute here. I want to work and have a simple life.
- France is not safe for me.
- France is not safe for me.
- I don't feel safe and the conditions are very bad
- The conditions here in France are bad
- France is racist and do not accept us
- My family is in London and I want to be with my family
- No future in France
- Because of how badly I and others are treated here. They treat us like animals, like dogs. We do nothing wrong and still they come, they teargas us, they take our tents, our blankets, in this cold. I would not want to stay here if I can help it
- In Europe we are treated like animals
- Too many reasons. The people protest its not good living conditions
- Colonised by British, i speak English. But in France i am treated badly stomped on, beaten, threatened to be killed
- In France we are treated badly
- he wants to be with his brother
- Iranian spies in France could take him home to be killed
- Iranian government has power in France / better relationship than UK
- my dad is in uk and I want to join him
- Father in the UK

Q6. How are you going to try to get to the UK, by boat or lorry?

- I will try any way that might work
- Anyway that I can
- I will do anything to leave France
- Anything just in order to leave the country.
- I will try everything for a chance
- They would try any transport just to leave France
- I have tried many ways
- I will try and cross by boat, I have tried a lot of lorries and not been successful. i don't want to share more though.
- Anything - I will try anything to get to the UK
- Everything/anything is better than the jungle
- Any way I can
- Depends what i can do. I only care about getting to the UK but i don't know how. Maybe the boat is the best
- Anything
- Not sure how
- Boat is very dangerous
- Easier by boat
- He is scared of boat/water - been in lorries over French border - he is worried he will have to use a boat soon if lorries don't work

- Lorry is safer