

Student Paper for the Annual British Student/ Young Pugwash Conference

Workshop 2: New security context in Europe The 'Jungle'

Europe's Refugee crisis 2016: A Report on the Calais Refugee Camp



Abstract: *Europe is currently experiencing the highest influx of refugees since the Second World War, and according to Angela Merkel the Refugee crisis will define this decade. Britain has long considered itself a nation that provides protection for Asylum seekers and is outspoken about its proud history of accepting Refugees. Yet at this current moment Between 5 to 8 thousand Asylum seekers are in a state of homeless limbo over the English Channel waiting to be granted Asylum or considering undertaking the dangerous and illegal crossing by any means necessary.*

Introduction:

In this Paper I will attempt to briefly outline the situation and problems of the refugee camp within Calais, whilst fitting it into the wider context of the issue that faces Europe in 2016. I hope to highlight particularly the lack of suitable action taken by the EU and nations such as the UK in facing up to this crisis. Finally I will endeavour to indicate the humanitarian aid I took part in whilst volunteering in the Calais 'Jungle' during January 2016 and the effectiveness in the face of the demolition of much of the camp over the last three weeks.

Background:

Wider Refugee Crisis; The European Refugee crisis as we consider it today majorly inflated during 2015, this can be put down to a combination of factors but predominantly it is due to the continued war and instability within the Middle East and significantly Syria. The United Nations High Commissioner, UNCHR, estimates there are '20 million refugees worldwide' (2015), 4.3 million are

Syrians, The majority residing in neighbouring countries like Lebanon which currently accommodates 1.3 Million refugees. This puts Europe's current intake of 1 million refugees to shame, especially when comparing Lebanon's size, population and GDP to that of Europe's, in fact it fundamentally challenges the concept of a, 'European Refugee Crisis', at all.

Many refugees have futile prospects in the exceptionally underfunded United Nations refugee agency camps, therefore they turn to Europe as a viable option for a better life. Europe's strict immigration laws, mean the only option is to take the dangerous journey by land or boat and paying extortionate amounts of money to illegal and potentially dangerous Human Traffickers. These Human Smugglers have extortionately profited from Europe and the wider world's inaction of the Crisis. With the increased demand for travel to Europe by refugees in the Middle East combined with the steady stream of Asylum seekers from other troubled nations such as Afghanistan and Eritrea, the Human Traffickers have opened many routes and increased their activity, with little regard to the safety of the vulnerable Refugees.

The Jungle; After the 1999 Red cross reception centre named Sangatte, was closed in November 2002, the camp now known as the jungle sprang up in the woods located around the port. It was initially bulldozed in April 2009 and again closed with additional arrests of the inhabitants in September of that year, yet the numbers within the camp still lay at under a thousand. In direct connection with the escalating Refugee crisis and the Human traffickers increased routes, the camp had risen to an estimated 6,000 by November 2015. It has no NGO or national agency running it, relying solely on voluntary aid from donation-charities and volunteers. It is mostly used by the refugees as a staging post for nightly attempts at stowing away on Lorries bound for the UK, either by ferry or the Eurotunnel. It was estimated that in the summer of 2015 around forty Asylum seekers and migrants a night were successfully making it into the UK.



(BBC 2015)

Discussion, My Experience:

I volunteered in the Jungle from the 16th to the 23rd of January 2016 with an organisation called 'Building in the Calais Jungle'. They use the donations of the charity, 'Help Refugees', which is essentially the English Branch of L'Aburge des Migrants. These charities are chiefly concerned with instant Humanitarian aid and are responsible for the building the basic accommodation for the Asylum seekers, whilst they are living in the 'Jungle'. Typically this is a flat packed house made out of wooden slates to form a floor, door, and walls respectively, insulated and water proofed with tarpaulin. These basic houses are made by Voluntary carpenters in the charities warehouse on the outskirts of Calais, and assembled by volunteers with the help of the Refugees or in the case of a self-build left with the Refugees to assemble for themselves. Just like any cross section of society, many of the Refugees are very skilled and able labourers, builders or Carpenters and therefore had many more skills and experience than the charity had to offer, in these instances providing the required tools and materials was sufficient.



They also work closely helping with the repairs and construction of other buildings around the camp as refugees attempt to create community centres and more public buildings including;

- Shops,	- Toilets and Showers
- Restaurants,	- Theatre and Art Gallery (Funded by the Royal court theatre London)
- And Religious Buildings (Church and Mosque).	

Other charities including 'Care4Calais', amongst others, are providing additional services ranging from the

- Distribution of donations, (Inc Clothes, tents and food)
- Soup kitchens,
- Legal advice,
- Child/Day care and Women's Refuge
- Teaching, (English and French)
- Health Care (Advice, Vaccination Logistics, Dentist and Doctors)
- Liaison with Police, Media, Courts and MPs



The camp is situated upon a landfill site and as you can imagine this creates a health risk due to the combination of Asbestos in the ground, stagnant water, limited clean water access and humans living in densely populated, damp conditions. With the onset of summer and therefore warmer weather along with the numbers of refugees continuing to rise there is a very serious risk of viral infections and diseases, cases of measles have already been reported in the camp.

Reflection and Conclusion:

Since my return to the UK, the situation has developed quite dramatically with the French authorities undertaking the demolishing of much of the camp, this has displaced many of the refugees and has caused them to be further exposed to the elements, taking what little privacy and safety they had acquired for themselves in the camp. The alternatives of accommodation provided for the refugees do not seem to fully engage with the problems at hand and are a far cry from taking the refugees intentions into consideration. If Europe truly intends to solve the issues relating to the refugee crisis within Europe, it could only be achievable through a united and consistent approach. *"None of these efforts will be effective without opening up more opportunities for people to come legally to Europe and find safety upon arrival"* (UNHCR, 2015)

The camp is divided into respective national or ethnic groups and therefore another major part of the organisations work was communication between groups about prospective houses and designated for whom the house was intended. Priority cases also had to be taken into consideration for accommodation, Families and unaccompanied women and/or children obviously took precedence. Other jobs I took part in included levelling and plotting the land for houses and the prevention, maintenance and extinguishing of unkempt fires within the camp. The densely populated camp has plenty of flammable material left lying around is certainly at risk of major fire, especially as both the refugees and the French authorities are using fire as a quick way of clearing large areas of the camp.

References:

BBC. (2015). Calais migrant camp grows as winter approaches. Available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34594790>. Last accessed 15th Feb 2016.

Green, J. (2015). *Understanding the Refugee Crisis in Europe, Syria, and around the World*. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVV6_1Sef9M. Last accessed 14th Mar 2016.

Kurgesagt. (2015). *The European Refugee Crisis and Syria Explained*. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvOnXh3NN9w>. Last accessed 14th Mar 2016.

Sengupta, S. (2015). *Migrant or Refugee? There is a Difference, With Legal Implications*. Available: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/28/world/migrants-refugees-europe-syria.html?_r=1. Last accessed 14th Mar 2016.

Taylor, C. (2015). *Migrant or refugee? Why it matters which word you choose*. Available: <https://theconversation.com/migrant-or-refugee-why-it-matters-which-word-you-choose-47227>. Last accessed 14th Mar 2016.

UNHCR. (2015). *2015 likely to break records for forced displacement - study*. Available: <http://www.unhcr.org/5672c2576.html>. Last accessed 14th Mar 2016.