

Dame Diana Johnson MP
Select Committee Team
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

6 February 2023

Dear Dame Diana

Thank you for your letter, and we would like to thank you and the Committee members for visiting us in Calais. We appreciated the opportunity to demonstrate to Committee members the conditions faced by refugees in Calais and to arrange for Committee members to meet some of the individuals we work with in Calais to hear, first-hand, their experiences. We were grateful to have the chance to hold a full and frank discussion with Committee members and to answer their questions directly, hopefully providing the Committee with the benefit of our extensive experience of working with refugees in Calais and other areas of Northern France over a number of years.

We also appreciate the opportunity to respond to the questions, and views, that you have put to us. As you suspected, they are points that we have responded to many times, but we are grateful to be given the chance to respond directly to the Committee and explain our position, and confirm the work that we undertake with refugees in Calais and Northern France.

Taking each of your questions / comments in turn:

- 1. We heard from the French authorities that NGOs, such as Care4Calais, that provide humanitarian support to migrants in Calais can act as a 'pull factor' in drawing migrants to the area and encouraging them to continue pursuing their journey to the UK, rather than claiming asylum in France. What is your response to this view?***

We strongly believe that the humanitarian support that we provide to refugees in Calais and Northern France does not have a 'pull' effect, to any extent.

First, we believe that the view articulated above demonstrates a misunderstanding of why refugees travel, and why a small proportion of them reach Calais. The individuals we work with are fleeing conflict and persecution. They have experienced torture, oppression, human rights violations, the death of family members and similar in their home countries; in short, the worst things individuals can experience in this world. Those factors drive them from their homes.

When they flee, individuals will have different destinations in mind for different reasons, but the common objective is to reach safety at the end of their journey. As you will be aware, the vast majority of refugees who arrive in Europe do not seek to come to the UK – indeed, considering the 27 EU nations and the UK together, in 2021: only 8% of asylum applications were made in the UK; France, Germany and Spain all received more asylum applications than the UK; and per head of

population, a full 15 EU countries received more asylum applications than the UK¹. However, some do have the UK as their destination when they flee, for different reasons, including the presence of family members (often the only family they have left in the world), language abilities or legacy colonial links to the UK, which results in refugees seeing the UK as a bastion of safety and human rights.

Individuals who come to Calais are focused on that destination – often their intention is to reach the UK, and the conditions that they face on the way and in Calais do not affect that. It is uncommon for refugees to be in Calais, or have travelled as far north as Calais, unless they have the intention of travelling to the UK. Those who want to claim asylum in France will have stopped and done so further south in France. Those who travel as far as Calais have already made a decision to travel to the UK; it therefore follows that nothing that happens in Calais is relevant to that decision.

Our understanding of studies of refugees' motivations is that 'pull factors' such as economic benefits or humanitarian assistance are insignificant in the context of the overwhelming strength of the push factors that drive refugees to run from their homes and propel them throughout their journeys.

We refer, firstly, to a review of literature on push and pull factors related to migration (although not specifically asylum) undertaken in November 2016, by Maastricht University and the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre of the International Organization for Migration, for the European Asylum Support Office.² With regard to forced migration, the review suggests that the decision to move is as a result of push factors, and the choice of destination country is often something that emerges on route, and might change. The consensus is that the choice of destination is driven by factors specific to the individual or their nationality or social group, i.e. there are no hard and fast 'rules'. However, the presence of family and/or networks, speaking the language, and historic, including colonial, ties between countries are noted.

The review notes that the more dangerous the situation an individual is fleeing from, the more likely that person is to endure further danger on route to their destination. This supports the view that we have expressed many times – the reason why some refugees endanger their lives attempting to cross the Channel is that they have endured even worse dangers in their homelands and on their journeys. In that context, it should be clear that some hardship caused by lack of humanitarian aid in Calais (or anywhere else on their journey) will not deter refugees from the choices they have already made, and the presence of humanitarian aid certainly would not attract them to change that choice. It is telling, in our view, that the Maastricht University review, an extensive analysis of texts on migration theory, does not once refer to humanitarian aid as even a possible factor in migration choices.

¹ Asylum Statistics from the House of Commons Library –
<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01403/SN01403.pdf>

²

<https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/The%20Push%20and%20Pull%20Factors%20of%20Asylum%20-%20Related%20Migration.pdf>

The studies referenced in the review appear to be inconclusive as to whether more restrictive migration policies affect destination choice; which in our view, supports the point we make below, that there is little, if any, evidence that deterrence policies, or hostile environments, are effective in influencing asylum-seekers' behaviours. It logically follows that the availability of basic humanitarian assistance (even if the refugees are aware of its existence – see below) should not be considered to have any relevance. The review does note, though, that such restrictive migration policies would be likely to drive more irregular migration and smuggling networks, which is why we continue to be in favour of safe and legal routes for refugees to reach the UK.

Lucy Mayblin's article which examines the 'pull factor' thesis in the context of asylum-seekers' right to work³ summarises prior studies into whether economic rights of asylum seekers (employment rights, welfare) have an influence on their choice of destination, and notes that there is "no significant link" between the two; and critically, that research participants in such studies "have been found to have very little knowledge of the United Kingdom or the UK asylum system before they came to the country", and notes that "other factors such as histories of colonial relations between countries of origin and reception ... are found to have the strongest influence on destination choice". This article does not consider the influence, if any, of humanitarian assistance, but such basic assistance is hardly comparable, in terms of importance to asylum seekers, to their right to work in their chosen destination, and so the article again provides support for such assistance not representing a pull factor. Indeed, the article refers to economic rights of asylum seekers in the destination country as being an 'imaginary', which influences policy decisions despite the lack of evidence for it.

We also refer to two studies that examine the impact of NGO search and rescue in the Mediterranean. The first, by the European University Institute⁴ concluded "we find no relationship between the presence of NGOs at sea and the number of migrants leaving Libyan shores". The second, by scholars Elias Steinhilper and Rob Gruijters⁵ compared periods of high rescue capacity and low rescue capacity in the Mediterranean to demonstrate that that NGO rescue is not a pull factor. This is an example of humanitarian assistance which is, of course, far more urgent than that which we provide in Calais; rescue at sea is often immediately life-saving. Again however, the evidence suggests no pull factor relationship.

The above research accords entirely with our experience on the ground. Put simply, the things the individuals we work with have experienced in their home countries and throughout their journeys are so bad, and their resulting trauma, distress and frame of mind when they arrive in Calais are such, that that the provision of basic humanitarian assistance in Calais will have little impact on a decision-making process which is, by that time, well progressed and dominated by their desire to reach what they see as their destination of safety. With the greatest of respect for the question posed (and we understand why it has been posed, as it is a common challenge), we consider it absurd to take the view that some cheap jogging trousers or second hand shoes could factor into

³ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1369148116656986>

⁴ <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/65024>

⁵ <https://blogs.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2017/03/border-deaths>

individuals' decisions as to whether to journey to Calais, when they have suffered such horrendous atrocities.

Further, the view that the availability of humanitarian assistance could *attract* people to Calais or Northern France (or at least, be a factor in causing them to reject alternatives) assumes that refugees know that such assistance is available. Our experience is that the vast majority of the individuals that we work with have not heard of us, or other NGOs, when they arrive, and have no idea that any assistance is available. They are grateful for the small amount that we can do to help them survive, but have no expectation of such assistance when they arrive – and as such, it could not possibly be an attracting factor. Our experience of refugees' knowledge of conditions in Calais, prior to arriving, is consistent with the studies referred to in Lucy Mayblin's article referenced above, and that article quotes Robinson and Sergott's (2002) study for the Home Office: "There was very little evidence that the sample respondents had a detailed knowledge of: UK immigration or asylum procedures; entitlements to benefits in the UK; or the availability of work in the UK. There was even less evidence that the respondents had a comparative knowledge of how these phenomena varied between different European countries." Similarly, in our experience, refugees' decisions to reach Calais (for the small proportion that do travel there) have been made without knowing what awaits them there.

We believe this view is further supported by considering the impact of the UK and French Government policies in relation to refugees in Calais and Northern France, which have been almost-entirely based on deterrence, and on creating as hostile an environment as possible for those refugees. And yet, that very small proportion of refugees who want to reach the UK continue to come, regardless of the level of hostility and the deterrents put in place.

Indeed, the Home Office's own advice in relation to the Rwanda scheme supports the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of deterrents – "*Value for money of the policy is dependent on it being effective as a deterrent. Evidence of a deterrent effect is highly uncertain...*". By the time they reach Calais, refugees' lives have been in danger for so long that being poorly treated for a further period of time, and undertaking a further life-threatening journey, does not put them off. It makes sense that if hostility has no impact as deterrence, the converse (i.e. welcoming treatment, no matter how basic), would likewise have no impact as a pull. We find the suggestion that being provided with basic humanitarian assistance in Calais might make the difference to whether a person comes to Northern France and attempts the life threatening journey across the Channel to simply not be grounded in reality.

Our charity's history also supports the above. Care4Calais was formed in late 2015 as a response to the inhumane conditions faced by several thousand refugees in Calais, and the lack of humanitarian assistance available to them – but the refugees had already been there for many years before Care4Calais existed. The lack of humanitarian assistance had not prevented those refugees from travelling there, nor had it caused them to leave or seek alternatives when they arrived.

In summary, refugees who want to come to the UK, for their own personal reasons, will come to Calais and Northern France, regardless of any humanitarian assistance available and regardless of the hostility of the environment that they face there. That is our experience based on discussions

with thousands of refugees since we have been operating in Calais, but also supported by the points above, which also point to a lack of effectiveness generally of deterrents.

In terms of the assistance that we do provide to refugees in Calais and Northern France, our sole purpose is to provide humanitarian assistance, to help keep people clothed, fed and ultimately alive. Our objective is to give vulnerable people, who have suffered unimaginably, a little bit of food, water, warmth, shelter and friendship when, without organisations like ours, they would have nothing. They are simply seeking the safety and protection to which they are entitled under international law. It is not the concern of our charity where they find that safety and protection; we just try to help them to survive while they seek it. We believe that the individuals we support have the right to both dignity and personal agency and we do not seek to influence the decisions that they make.

- 2. *Members who met the young men that you kindly introduced to us in Calais, who were mainly of Sundanese origin, were struck by the fact that many did not speak English or have family or friend networks in the UK. Consequently, there was some concern that Care4Calais, in assisting the young men to learn English and discussing asylum processes in the UK, plays a role in assisting and encouraging them in their aim to travel to UK. What is your response to this observation?***

It may be that the people the Committee Members talked to did not express that they had family members in the UK; however, having family and family connections in the UK is something that we have heard often and repeatedly across the seven years that we have operated in Northern France. When Members visited, we invited them to the site of a distribution but the people who choose to turn up there on any one day are random and those spoken to were similarly encountered at random. We cannot say that they were a representative sample, and would note that the sample would in any case be small. We would refer you to a study undertaken by MSF in 2016⁶, which found that more than half of refugees in Calais had family members in the UK, and another that we undertook in 2019⁷, which found that 48% had family in the UK.

We have observed that having family members in the UK is particularly common in the context of unaccompanied minors who we estimate, at any one point in time, generally make up approximately 20% of the population of refugees in Calais. On the day in question, it is likely that many of this group will have been in attendance at the day centre in Calais. Conversely at the weekend, at the site visited, it is not unusual for attendance to be around 400 people, and 80 unaccompanied minors would not be improbable. Many of these boys and young men tell us they have uncles, cousins and other relatives in the UK and that is why they wish to go there. We have also commented further below on the reasons why some refugees seek to travel to the UK, including the importance of historic links with particular countries.

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

⁷ <https://metro.co.uk/2019/01/26/i-spoke-to-48-refugees-trying-to-reach-britain-about-why-they-want-to-come-here-8394103/>

To clarify the work that we perform in Calais and Northern France, we do not discuss UK asylum processes with people there. We only provide humanitarian aid to the individuals that we work with, and seek to provide some friendship, dignity, normality and hope through activities like English lessons, football matches, simple teas and coffees. Providing assistance with asylum claims or processes – in relation to any country – is not a part of our activities in France.

We provide different assistance to asylum seekers who are in the UK, from our UK charity – including helping them to secure the legal assistance to which they are entitled, to navigate the asylum process in the UK. However, this is only for individuals in the UK, provided by our staff and volunteers in the UK; our operations in France with individuals in Calais and Northern France are simpler, and comprise only the provision of humanitarian aid.

For completeness, the leaflets that we give out in Calais relating to the UK Government's Rwanda scheme may have been mentioned to Members. These leaflets simply state that if a refugee is given a piece of paper by the Home Office in the UK that mentions 'Rwanda', they can contact Care4Calais in the UK, and provides a free phone number. That is the entirety of the information. The reason we felt compelled to do this was because in 2022 a significant number of refugees were taken, on arrival in the UK, straight to detention and given notices that they were to be sent to Rwanda. This posed significant challenges in respect of access to justice, as they were newly arrived in the UK and had no chance to make connections with NGOs and had no idea how to contact lawyers or other assistance from inside a detention centre. Our solution was to ensure that as many people as possible have a phone number for Care4Calais in the UK.

We provide no assistance to refugees in Calais and Northern France with journeys to the UK or asylum claims in the UK, and no encouragement. We simply try to help them to survive whilst they seek the protection and safety to which they are entitled, wherever that safety and protection may be secured – as noted above, it is no concern of ours where the individuals we work with find that safety. If they do seek to travel to the UK, that is their own choice and we have no part in it. For people that reach the UK and contact our UK charity, we will provide what assistance, humanitarian and administrative, we can.

To be absolutely clear, we do not want any individual to attempt to cross the Channel in a small boat, or attempt dangerous journeys by other means (lorries, trains etc.). Such journeys are life-threatening. Indeed, we have extensive experience of the impacts of such journeys – we have had long and heart-breaking conversations with many of the families of those 32 individuals who lost their lives in the November 21 Channel tragedy, and we do not want to ever have such conversations again. However, without a major change in Government policy, we believe it is inevitable that more people will die in the Channel and that is why we were so keen to discuss safe passage with you in Calais. We certainly offer no assistance or encouragement whatsoever, in connection with any individual's aim to travel to the UK. We offer English lessons, arrange football matches and other similar activities simply to provide the individuals we work with some friendship, dignity and hope – which has been sorely lacking throughout their journey.

Indeed, our charity's hope is to cease to exist, because we are no longer necessary – we hope to see a time when refugees receive protection and safety, and have their humanitarian needs met by States whilst they seek that protection and safety.

Returning to the reasons why refugees want to come to the UK, firstly we would reiterate the point made above that only a small fraction of refugees in Europe want to come to the UK – the vast majority claim asylum in other European countries. For that small fraction who do want to come to the UK, the reasons vary and are individual – for many, it is the presence of family in the UK (often the only family they have left in the world), for others it is language, for others it is a legacy of colonial history – historical ties mean that they see the UK as a place of safety, in contrast to what they may have experienced in their home country or in countries through which they have travelled. The academic studies we refer to above both note this importance of colonial (and similar) ties, and of course the UK has such ties with Sudan, to pick up on the example in your question.

The reason why those people come to Calais and Northern France, and may decide to attempt to make it to the UK via boat / lorry / train, is the lack of any safe and legal route outside of the very limited schemes in place for particular nationalities (people from Ukraine, Hong Kong, previously Afghanistan) – as so effectively illustrated by Tim Loughton MP in the Home Affairs Select Committee hearing on 23 November 2022. This is why, in our work in the UK, we advocate for such safe and legal routes as the most effective way to stop small boat crossings and save lives, given the clear evidence that deterrence strategies do not work.

The reasons for people ending up in Calais / Northern France and making the decision to attempt to reach the UK are, therefore, individual and personal, and unaffected by the availability (or otherwise) of humanitarian assistance in the area. We have no part in refugees' individual decisions and motivations, and as above, do not want anyone to risk their lives on dangerous journeys. We merely try to help them survive whilst they are in Calais and Northern France, by providing them with humanitarian assistance that no-one else would provide if we, and NGOs like us, were not there.

To repeat a comment that we make in response to point 1 above, we consider the suggestion that the basic food, water, shelter and clothes that we can provide, and the small amount of normality that we can give to refugees through activities like English lessons, football matches etc., plays any part in their decisions to come to Calais / Northern France and to travel to the UK to be, with respect, absurd – particularly given that, as noted above, the vast majority of the refugees we work with have no idea that we, or NGOs like us, exist when they arrive.

We would make a final point in relation to English lessons specifically. As noted above, these are amongst a range of activities that we provide to refugees to give them some normality, to satisfy their desire to learn and to provide them with something to do and a small amount of purpose and hope when their lives have been so short of it. On a practical level, such lessons can provide no assistance to the refugees in actually travelling to the UK or claiming asylum when they arrive, for those individuals who choose to seek to reach the UK. The lessons can provide only basic skills, given the length of time we work with people and the limited time that our volunteers can spare. As the Committee is no doubt aware, asylum applications and interviews in the UK should be (and

routinely are) undertaken in the presence of an interpreter. This is essential, given that an asylum seeker is clearly going to be able to present their case most accurately and thoroughly in their natural (first) language. Basic English skills will therefore, quite rightly, make no difference to that process.

I hope that our responses are clear and, again, thank you for the opportunity to provide them to you directly. We would of course be happy to answer any further questions or provide more detailed explanations, on any matters that occur to you following your visit and in your subsequent work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C Moseley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'C' at the beginning.

Clare Moseley
Care4Calais