

**Written evidence submitted by Mayor of Grande-Synthe (CHA0025)**

1. As the Mayor of Grande-Synthe since July 2019, I wish to contribute to the topic “Conditions in migrant camps in France” providing evidence on the situation in my municipality.
2. Grande-Synthe, city of about 23 000 inhabitants is located on the Northern French coast, along the highway A16 leading to Calais, 40km away. It is a « drop point » for people in exile: men alone mainly but also women, families and children (within family or unaccompanied).
3. In 2019, population figures ranged between 250 and 1000 persons, while in 2020 they have ranged between 150 and 800 persons. Although the lack of accurate data, civil society organizations and my teams have reckoned an upsurge of the numbers of non accompanied minors and of the numbers of families, more and more numerous (including up to 5 or 6 children).
4. Aware of the inhumane conditions in which those men, women and children live on my territory, I have maintained the participation of the municipality of Grande-Synthe in the project *Snapshots from the Borders* – a consortium of 35 partners in 14 European countries aiming at bringing common voices to local, national and European levels for a human and dignified welcome in respect of the fundamental rights and with a share of responsibilities. Within the same spirit, I wish that my testimony will allow identifying solutions other than the reinforcement of security controls and than repression.
5. Since 2015, three sites only have been officially recognized as camps by the French State: Basroch camp (2015-2016), camp “la Linière” (2016-2017) and “Espace Jeunes du Moulin” (2017-2018). Municipal buildings have also been requisitioned by the State on the territory of the Urban community of Dunkerque during the storm Chiara beginning of 2020. During the so-called “lock-down” time due to the Covid-19 epidemics, most of migrants were sheltered on a private site in the middle of the rubbles of the buildings. Others found shelters in woods in the natural reserve of Grande-Synthe or in former warehouses. Today, people are scattered in several places in Grande-Synthe (woods, former wood dryer factory, railyards, under bridges, etc.). Those camps stand as informal camps; people gather depending on nationalities, ethnicities or clans and by categories (eg.: families). What serves as « accommodation » is as follows: makeshifts shelters, plastic sheeting or nothing. Promiscuity, lack of privacy and insalubrity/unhealthy conditions represent their daily environment. The civil society organizations do a remarkable work to ensure that people in exile have access to health, food and non-food items. But globally, people live in an extreme precarious situation. Get shelter, eat, drink and wash stand as a daily challenge.
6. I want to work in collaboration with the French State. However, in the absence of recognition by the State of those living sites, I cannot propose more than one water point with eight taps. The State departments constantly put forward the risk of “attraction” and of creating « fixed and permanent places ». As soon as the territory brings forward initiatives to ensure appropriate living conditions, there are systematically aborted by the State departments that remind the Sandhurst 2018 agreement.
7. In addition of the unhealthy conditions and promiscuity of the places, I have heard of acts of human trafficking and of the commercializing of goods. Climate is tense; brawls and fights regularly break out.
8. Apart from the deplorable welcoming conditions, I have also noted that the sheltering process (« mise à l’abri » in French) that gravitates around those informal living places is not appropriate : lack of information beforehand and once on site ; high security presence during the step-on buses process (that can intimidate people) ; cases of identity control and seizing of personal belongings

(CHA0025)

were reported in CSO reports ; material conditions insufficient on site ; no social and law support provided right upon arrival on site.

9. All those aspect result in people coming back on the territory of Grande-Synthe, in the multiplication of informal places of living, in conditions always more precarious. Hence, people are forced to perpetually wander. Considering all those factors, people want to flee, escape and find a better life elsewhere.

10. On the specific topics of unaccompanied minors: alerts (“information préoccupantes” in French) sent by the civil society organizations to the North Department Council have rarely lead to appropriate and satisfactory answers enabling the effective protection of minors.

11. A combination of factors: continuous controls by smugglers, traffickers or adults preventing a direct access to the youths; lack of sufficient information (in an understood language) on their rights in France and open possibilities in France or UK; lack of trust of the unaccompanied minors towards the public authorities; system for childhood protection saturated in the department of North France; systems planned for children inappropriate or undersized (sheltering; assessment of the minority and of the vulnerabilities, no sustainable taking in charge process); absence of a dedicated place to welcome the youths beforehand; even when unaccompanied minors wish to beneficiate from the process of temporary emergency sheltering places, they do not systematically have access to it.

12. To add on my testimony, I invite the British parliamentarians to read the report of the French Human rights defender: *Droits Exilés et droits fondamentaux, trois ans après le rapport Calais*. <https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/fr/rapports/2018/12/exiles-et-droits-fondamentaux-trois-ans-apres-le-rapport-calais>

Even if the report dates back from 2018, numerous facts and analysis remain valid up to date. Recommendations are still up-to-date as well.

13. Last but not least, I remain convinced that several little housing structures on the French littoral with appropriate material and immaterial conditions would stand as relevant solutions. Same-wise to avoid deaths on the way between France and the United Kingdom and to ensure legal and safe migratory routes, I strongly believe that the Dublin III treaty and the French-British agreements related to the externalisation of borders must be revised.

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