

Solidarity Across the Channel – Dover, 20 October, 2018.

Over 90 people (a third of them from the Pas-de-Calais area) attended a gathering in St Paul's Church, Dover on 20 October, organised by the Justice and Peace Commissions of the Westminster and Southwark dioceses, together with Kent-based Seeking Sanctuary and the Maria Skobstova House of Welcome in Calais.

1. WELCOME

Barbara Kentish of Westminster J&P outlined the plan for the day, which had been inspired by the fact that there is a widespread belief among people living more than 100km (60m) from the coast that “the Calais situation has gone away”. In fact, voluntary organisations and individuals are still working very hard for the rights of a large number of migrants who exist in an extremely hostile environment: their right to a welcome, food, clothing, shelter, dignity, and to have their stories heard. This event enabled concerned people to share experiences, efforts and hopes for those in need and to try discern ways ahead and share ideas for action.

The intention was first to hear factual accounts, secondly to discuss them, and finally to name the injustices and determine ways in which we might all work more effectively, and also to list the topics where a number of people still need more information, both to help them to avoid duplicating efforts and to better judge how to move ahead. All contributions were translated into either English or French, as appropriate.

The parish priest, Fr Jeff Cridland welcomed us all, pointing out that activists play a vital part in raising awareness and advocating changes for the better. He was very pleased to be able to provide space for people to briefly step aside from their tasks and share their stories, so that new ways of working and methods of collaboration could start to emerge.

2. DRAMA

After a hot lunch, produced by Dover parishioners, discussions were enlivened and provoked by a short interactive play “Stage 3”, presented by students from Queen Mary University, London, on behalf of the “Safe Passage” campaign, which seeks to gain pledges in the UK to accept another 10,000 displaced children over the next 10 years, to mark this year's 80th anniversary of 'Kindertransport'. The piece - presented for the first time in a bilingual format – looks at the bureaucracy and power of the naturalisation system and young people's sense of belonging and citizenship rights. By addressing the process through which individuals are dehumanised and arbitrarily categorised on the basis of race, age and socio-economic background, the performance highlights questions about perceptions of power and powerlessness.

3. FACTS FROM FRANCE

3.1 ORGANISATIONS ACTIVE IN THE PAS DE CALAIS

Before lunch, Phil Kerton of Southwark J&P oversaw a session in which first we heard briefly from

various people about the current situation, and the work done by the following organisations.

Secours Catholique – running a Day Centre, where people can relax out of the weather, to chat, take a cup of tea or coffee, get a haircut, watch videos, play indoor games (and outdoor in the yard, in fine weather), seek advice from volunteers, get involved in arts and crafts work, etc.

L'Auberge des Migrants – founded in 2008, operates from a warehouse in one of the commercial zones near the discount wine outlets alongside the port access road in Calais. This receives and distributes, clothes, bedding, tents, toiletries and other goods. (Care4Calais has a similar operation in different location.) Warehouse operations are managed by “Help Refugees”, and the compound is also a base for several other organisations concerned with matters such as providing information, language classes, legal advice, services to young people, collecting testimony to support publicity campaigns and lobbying activities. Its work extends beyond the camps near Calais, to the network of people supporting migrants who have been transferred to various other places, in centres for “reception and orientation”. “Utopia56” organises nightly and daily patrols around the town and surrounding villages to identify new migrant settlements and find out what they need. Another important task is to ensure the well-being of all volunteers and to produce factual reports and arrange gatherings where the problems can be made better known to the public and to decision-makers. The annual budget approaches €100,000 – 90% covered by donations.

Refugee Community Kitchen – another venture based in the Auberge compound, deserves a separate description. Over 2.6 million nourishing hot meals have been produced and distributed “without judgement” to those who need them. The current output is over 1200 meals daily, produced in compliance with the strictest of hygiene regulations. Food distributions recreate a sense of community and provide a safe space for medical and legal services, safeguarding groups and other support. Meals and ingredients are provided to other towns, including a London operation that operates for 5 nights a week.

Salam – also prepares and distributes meals regularly, especially in towns between Calais and Dunkirk. In addition, help is given with emergency health care and hygiene and in finding shelter. Migrants are helped with asylum applications and reports are provided to the public about the situation along the coast.

W.I.S.E (Dunkirk and Luxembourg) – has worked since 2003 for excluded people, for the young, for intergenerational relationships and international solidarity, arranging talks and concerts to encourage support across Belgium. In Dunkirk, it liaises with the Women and Children's centre.

Mobile Refugee Support – keeping track of people who are hiding from riot police and local anti-migrant groups, and making sure that they get humanitarian aid.

Association Maria Skobstova – a Catholic Worker House of Welcome. This is a residential community, serving people pushed to the margins of society since February 2016. They do not just try to 'help' refugees, but prefer to be there with them, providing support and friendship. Everyone lives as a community, sharing meals, friendship, and daily prayer; and supporting one another in the work that is done. Neighbours are invited to join the extended community and be part of the work that is done. The main ministry is to youths who are suffering in mind or body

and, as at the Secours Catholique centre, efforts are made to treat each person with dignity, as individuals each with their own hopes and concerns.

3.2 NUMBERS AND ATTITUDES

All the above, and other support groups, constantly need fresh volunteers and donations of supplies. Not least because police patrols on most nights confiscate and destroy all tents, bedding and other belongings, having been ordered to stop the coast becoming a “magnet”.

The number of displaced people living in Calais is fairly constant at 600 to 800, while the number sleeping rough in woods at Grande-Synthe, near Dunkirk, had very recently more than doubled to above 1800. These are mainly Kurds, including many women and children. Dozens more can be found near any port or harbour between Bilbao and Flushing and near their approach roads, not to mention hundreds eking out a precarious existence on the streets of Paris and Brussels.

The region is quite deprived, due to closure of coal mines and steel plants, and reductions in job opportunities in other traditional heavy industries. The National Front has regularly increased its share of the votes in elections, leading to a hardening of attitudes among local politicians from the mainstream political parties. There is also suspicion that the arrangements for border controls on either side of the Channel mean that UK has callously imposed all its burdens to Calais. Local politicians in the Dunkirk area, however, are careful to respond as far as they can to genuine humanitarian needs.

4. IN THE UK

4.1 APPLYING FOR ASYLUM

Phil Kerton presented an overview of the UK asylum system, which is simple in principle, but which suffers in practice from many delays and obstacles that are not easy to understand. For example, almost half the appeals against an initial refusal of any right to remain get overturned upon appeal, with many applicants deprived of any state benefits and legal aid during the many months or even years of delay.

The Home Office still continues to use the practice of indefinite detention without trial for people who have committed no crime. They are deprived of liberty for administrative convenience in measures which are costly, ineffective and harmful to mental health and well-being. Listlessness soon develops under the Limbo of indefinite detention. One week stretches into a month or three, and a sense of hopelessness is etched on every face and strains every conversation. It is particularly galling that over half the detainees are eventually released into the community, confirming their incarceration was pointless.

Claiming asylum is a right under international law; but applications can only be made in-country. Having applied one becomes an 'asylum seeker' with legal status, and not an 'illegal immigrant'. It is important to apply as soon as possible, either immediately upon arrival on British soil, or soon afterwards at the office of the UK Border Agency in Croydon (in south London): delays in application arouse suspicion among officials who are already accustomed to being sceptical. A specific member of staff (a 'case owner') is responsible for each case, and decisions should take

a few weeks, though a year ago 49% waited for over six months.

There is an initial ‘screening interview’ and few days later, a ‘first reporting event’. The ‘substantive interview’, or ‘asylum interview’, is held within the next couple of weeks. This is when applicants describe what has happened to them and what they fear in their own country. Afterwards, a letter should arrive from the Home Office within 30 days, though the wait can actually be 6 months (or more).

Misunderstandings in interviews or filling in forms can cause problems later in the process: it is important to understand the questions and to try to check what officials write down – and ask for the interview to be recorded. Only the applicant, the interviewer and an interpreter can attend. It's wise to submit a written statement beforehand, to ensure that complete information is conveyed. One has 5 days afterwards to send in a statement (or ‘make representations’), mentioning any additional information. (NB. It is very important to be consistent in supplying facts.)

Asylum seekers may be told to go to reporting meetings with local UK Border Agency staff at all stages. In addition to submitted evidence, decisions take account of other information such as reports on the political and human rights situation in the country of origin (often very optimistic!), and previous UK legal decisions about asylum.

If refused asylum, an appeal may be lodged with the “First Tier Tribunal” within 14 days. This must make a case against legal errors, eg failure to apply the correct law or wrong interpretation of the law, incorrect procedures followed; no evidence to support the decision, or not enough evidence.

People can usually remain in the UK while waiting for their appeal, but some must leave. The aim – frequently missed – is for appeals to be heard within two months and the subsequent deadlines for making a further appeal application are very short. Publicly funded legal representation (legal aid) is only available if an appeal is judged to have at least a 50 per cent chance of success. In practice, more than 50% do succeed, despite initial official disbelief!

Once the appeal is heard (probably after some delay!), decisions usually arrive within 15 days. Further appeals can only be made on a point of law. Legal advice will be necessary. Many get processed without adequate legal support, or at a considerable speed in fast-track cases, or without all the evidence having been found.

Courts have long recognised and protected the right to make a second asylum claim (or a “fresh claim”) with new evidence.

Asylum seekers can only work if awaiting a decision for more than a year through no fault of their own, when they can apply for permission – but only for jobs that are on the “Shortage Occupation List” (an incredibly restrictive list with jobs such as ballet dancer and nuclear medicine practitioner). If considered destitute, financial support is available whilst awaiting a decision, comprising accommodation and £37.75 per person per week, loaded on a debit card. (In December 2017, a total of 40,736 were in receipt of support.)

Free, fully-furnished accommodation comes on a no-choice basis outside of the South-East, with

utility costs covered. Support ceases after applications have been granted or refused and appeal rights exhausted.

If claim is allowed on the grounds of the 1951 Geneva Convention, the applicant gets **Refugee Status**, which lasts for 5 years. The Border Agency can review this during that period if there is good reason. After 5 years, if it is still unsafe for the person to return, they will be able to apply for the legal status of **Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)** in the UK. For protection on human rights grounds, applicants usually get **Humanitarian Protection** – also for five years and subject to review.

There is also a more limited status called **Discretionary Leave**, initially for up to 3 years, after which an extension may be granted if they still cannot be removed. After 6 years they can apply for ILR. This leave is usually used for children under 18 who cannot be returned home: they get leave until they are 17½ years old, even if refused asylum.

Overstayers may be apprehended in dawn raids at their home addresses, or after rough sleeping, or if found working illegally or even while depositing applications for permission to remain.

4.2 UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

If applying for asylum, Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Child Victims of Trafficking and Modern Slavery are accepted into the care of Local Councils, who have the legal obligation to care for all youngsters. (There have been challenges in getting the Home Office to refund all the costs, but new 2018 official guidance may have resolved matters.) Many have been trafficked, persecuted or witnessed or been subject to horrific violence. Government guidance states that they must have access to a specialist legal representative and to necessary specialist support from a variety of organisations and agencies.

Trafficking is covered by the 2015 Modern Slavery Act, along with servitude and forced or compulsory labour. The a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) grants a minimum 14-day reflection and recovery period for victims – about to rise to 45-days. Trained people decide within 5 days whether individuals referred should be considered to be victims of trafficking. They must judge if “From the information available so far I believe, but cannot prove, that the individual is a potential victim of trafficking.”

The potential victim can then get a place in a Government funded safe house and is granted a reflection and recovery period although the weekly subsistence payment is only £37.75. Sadly, the NRM does not always provide the envisioned results. Some victims are held in detention – a failure of the support promised by the Home Office.

Victim safety is the top police priority, working with others, such as the Salvation Army, to provide protection, shelter and support. The Salvation Army offers specialist support for all adult victims of modern slavery through a government contract awarded in 2011. There is a specialist support programme and a confidential Referral Helpline, 0300 3038151.

5. THE CHALLENGES AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM

After lunch, we divided into small groups and discussed what we had heard, recording suggestions on sticky notes that were later collated to produce a list that concludes this report. After this, Ben Bano of Seeking Sanctuary arranged for someone from each group to present their main concerns to the assembly.

6. CONCLUSION

We walked 1km (0.6m) to the seafront near the Ferry Terminal, where a plaque has long commemorated the death of 58 young Chinese found dead in a sealed lorry in June 2000, Their story can be read on this Web page (www.indcatholicnews.com/news/35881). We paused there to reflect and inspect a second plaque had been erected a few days earlier, remembering all those who had lost their lives attempting to reach and cross the English Channel – at least 200 of them in just the past 20 years.

After this, there was still time to take a cup of English tea or coffee and buy ice cream and souvenirs in the sunshine before starting our journeys home.

The organisers – delighted by the great number who decided to join in – have received my words of thanks and praise for undertaking this initiative and will be following up the suggestion of setting up a small cross-Channel liaison group which can meet occasionally to take forward the ideas and questions that are recorded here, and consider how a further gathering might be arranged – and when and where.



Suggestions: on what can be done/put-in-place on the situation of migrants

1. Campaigns

a) Right to work

Remove the ban on being unable to work while waiting for a decision on the right of asylum
Right to work for asylum seekers
The right to paid work should be granted [x2]

What is being done in the UK to campaign for the right to work?

b) Citizens UK's "Extension of Reception" campaign

The draft law on the restriction of the detention of asylum seekers to 28 days ("28 against 28" campaign of the group "Refugee Tales")
Limit detention to 28 days [x2]
Put an end to inhumane conditions in detention centres

c) Campaign to use the Dublin III Agreement to speed up family reunification

Kindertransport campaign for unaccompanied minors
We need to find legal and safe ways for people to enter the UK.
What happened to the Dubs Amendment to the UK Immigration Act?
Support the Safe Passage and Alf Dubs campaign for the admission of 10,000 minors to the UK
Accept vulnerable children under Dubs amendment

d) Harassment by the police (in France) must cease

Explain the role of the CRS in France
How to pressure MPs to campaign against the hostile environment when they think they will win no vote by doing so (and they are probably right). Impasse!

Need to disseminate information on police theft and destruction of sleeping bags and blankets

e) Include anti-trafficking organizations

Suggestions: sur ce qui peut être fait/mis-en-place sur la situation des migrants

1. Campagnes

a) Le droit au travail

Lever l'interdiction de ne pas pouvoir travailler pendant l'attente d'une décision sur le droit d'asile
Droit de travailler pour les demandeurs d'asile
Le droit au travail rémunéré devrait être accordé [x2]

Que fait-on au Royaume-Uni pour faire campagne pour le droit au travail?

b) La campagne "Extension de l'accueil" de Citizens UK

Le projet de loi sur la limitation de la détention des demandeurs d'asile à 28 jours (campagne "28 contre 28" du groupe "Refugee Tales")
Limiter la détention à 28 jours [x2]
Mettre fin aux conditions inhumaines dans les centres de détention

c) Campagne en faveur de l'utilisation de l'accord de Dublin III pour accélérer la réunion des familles Campagne "Kindertransport" pour les mineurs non accompagnés

Nous devons trouver des voies légales et sûres pour les personnes arrivant au Royaume-Uni.
Qu'est-il arrivé à l'amendement Dubs de la loi britannique sur l'immigration?
Soutenez la campagne de Safe Passage et Alf Dubs pour l'admission de 10000 mineurs au R-U
Accepter les enfants vulnérables en vertu de l'amendement Dubs

d) Le harcèlement par la police (en France) doit cesser

Expliquer le rôle des CRS en France
Comment faire pression sur les députés pour qu'ils fassent campagne contre l'environnement hostile lorsqu'ils pensent qu'ils ne remporteront aucun vote en le faisant (et ils ont probablement raison) – impasse!

Nécessité de diffuser des informations sur le vol et la destruction par la police de sacs de couchage et de couvertures

e) Inclure les organisations anti-traite

2. Raising awareness/education

The education of children and young people concerning refugees

Joint action: UK citizens stand on UK soil in Dover and light a beacon, while the French do the same on their side, and light beacons/bonfires simultaneously

How to raise awareness – across the nation, in parishes, and to persuade the clergy that this is sacramental work.

To learn more about migrants' situation, to continue informing others, to support the project (?)

To try and understand the situation. Why is there a stand off between France and England in Calais/on the border?

What can I do? This has not been addressed at all. Information could have been distributed ahead of time

3. Specific needs

Places of shelter need to be provided
We need to develop hydroponic food production for people in regions that produce migrants

How does food distribution work (in Calais and district)?

There should be spiritual and psychological support

How to reach the 'disappeared' asylum seekers who have been refused?

How to help with schools for children in the camps?

Are there addresses or telephone numbers to give to young people who arrive in the UK without knowing anyone?

4. General

To work together with Christians, Jews and Muslims to support asylum seekers

We should be aware of international issues of war, the arms trade, climate change, oil, resources and the readiness of governments to allow death.

2. Sensibilisation / éducation

L'éducation des enfants et des jeunes concernant les réfugiés

Action commune: des citoyens britanniques se tiennent sur le sol britannique à Douvres et allument un phare, tandis que les Français en font de même et allument simultanément des balises / feux de joie

Comment sensibiliser – à travers le pays, dans les paroisses, et persuader le clergé qu'il s'agit d'un travail sacramentel.

En savoir plus sur la situation des migrants, continuer à informer les autres, soutenir le projet (?)

Essayer de comprendre la situation. Pourquoi existe-t-il une impasse entre la France et l'Angleterre à Calais / à la frontière?

Que puis-je faire? Cela n'a pas du tout été abordé. L'information aurait pu être distribuée à l'avance

3. Besoins spécifiques

Des abris doivent être fournis
Nous devons développer la production de nourriture hydroponique pour les habitants des régions productrices de migrants

Comment fonctionne la distribution de nourriture (à Calais et ses environs)?

Il devrait y avoir un soutien spirituel et psychologique

Comment atteindre les demandeurs d'asile «disparus» qui ont été refusés?

Comment aider avec les écoles pour les enfants dans les camps?

Y a-t-il des adresses ou des numéros de téléphone à donner aux jeunes qui arrivent au Royaume-Uni sans connaître personne?

4. Général

Travailler avec les chrétiens, les juifs et les musulmans pour soutenir les demandeurs d'asile
Nous devons être conscients des problèmes internationaux liés à la guerre, au commerce des armes, au changement climatique, au pétrole, aux ressources et à la volonté des gouvernements d'autoriser la mort.

5. France

What is done in France to counteract prejudice?

Who is lobbying the French government?

Where are the representatives of our political parties

What do the refugees in Calais and Dunkirk say or think about England? Why do people still want to get to the UK?

To remember the physical needs of the migrants arriving in Calais

What advice should be given to people to help them to give a positive impression to sceptical UK citizens?

6. UK – France relations, information exchange and joint actions

Campaign to change the 'Le Touquet' agreement, which sites the UK border in Calais

Amazing goodness of all the different groups working in Calais and Northern France

This is a day that has shown us that there are many friends from across the Channel

Are the organisations in the UK and France in touch with each other?

Not much contact between UK & French organisations. We need contact addresses

There should be coordination of aid between different groups

Collaboration between UK and France

There should be close collaboration between organisations both within countries and between those in the UK and France

Can we have a directory of organisations and contacts?

We need a database of all organisations (respecting GDPR requirements)

We need a summary report of all organisations

5. France

Que fait-on en France pour lutter contre les préjugés?

Qui fait du lobbying auprès du gouvernement français?

Où sont les représentants de nos partis politiques

Qu'est-ce que les réfugiés de Calais et de Dunkerque disent ou pensent de l'Angleterre?

Pourquoi les gens veulent toujours aller au Royaume-Uni?

Se souvenir des besoins physiques des migrants arrivant à Calais

Quels conseils donner aux gens pour les aider à donner une impression positive aux citoyens britanniques sceptiques?

6. Relations entre le Royaume-Uni et la France, échange d'informations et actions communes

Campagne pour changer l'accord 'Le Touquet', qui situe la frontière britannique à Calais

Une bonté incroyable de tous les groupes travaillant à Calais et dans le nord de la France

C'est une journée qui nous a montré qu'il y avait beaucoup d'amis de l'autre côté de la Manche

Les organisations du Royaume-Uni et de la France sont-elles en contact?

Peu de contacts entre les organisations britanniques et françaises. Nous avons besoin d'adresses de contact

Il devrait y avoir une coordination de l'aide entre différents groupes

Collaboration entre le Royaume-Uni et la France

Une étroite collaboration devrait exister entre les organisations à l'intérieur des pays et entre celles du Royaume-Uni et de la France.

Pouvons-nous avoir un répertoire des organisations et des contacts?

Nous avons besoin d'une base de données de toutes les organisations (avec le respect de la loi RGPD)

Nous avons besoin d'un rapport de synthèse de toutes les organisations



