

**REFUGEE RIGHTS
EUROPE**

In collaboration with

**Paris Refugee
Ground Support**

and

**Denise Charlton
Associates**



**LIFE ON THE STREETS:
DATA RELATING TO REFUGEES AND
DISPLACED PEOPLE IN PARIS**

DATES OF RESEARCH

18 - 22 January 2017

RESEARCH COORDINATOR

Marta Welander

STATISTICAL ANALYST

Mohammed Alhussein Saoud

FIELD RESEARCHERS

Nahzley Anvarian

Sandra El Gemayel

Mohamad Alhussein Saoud

Natalie Stanton

REPORT AUTHORS

Natalie Stanton

Marta Welander

PHOTO CREDITS

Nahzley Anvarian

Mohamad Alhussein Saoud

Natalie Stanton

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Me And You Create

www.meandyoucreate.com

hello@meandyoucreate.com

TRANSLATORS

AMHARIC:

Kiya Gurmesa

ARABIC:

Khoulood Nasri

Mohamad Saoud

DARI:

Nahzley Anvarian

KURDISH:

Zhyan Sharif

WITH SPECIAL THANKS ...

HEATHER YOUNG AND COLLEAGUES

at Paris Refugee Ground Support for invaluable guidance and support, making the study possible.

DENISE CHARLTON & ASSOCIATES AND THE IMMIGRANT COUNCIL OF IRELAND

for financial support.

NETTY MILES

of Help Refugees for making invaluable connections with partners on the ground.

PIPPA STANTON

at Me And You Create for graphic design.

ALL RRE VOLUNTEERS

working behind the scenes throughout the year.

And above all, THE COURAGEOUS PEOPLE IN DISPLACEMENT

who took part in this study.

SINCERE GRATITUDE TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE DONATED VIA OUR CROWDFUNDING PAGE.

This study would not have been possible without your generous support:

Aaron Rowlands, Alexia Smithson, Angela Stanton, Anna Orrling Welander, Aoife Collins, Avikal Malik, Beata Ekert, Bjorn Welander, Bradley Edward, Chloe Turner, Christine Bennett, Claire Henderson-Howat, Diarmaid Finnerty, Eleanor Harrison, Eleanor Paton, Elizabeth Epsom, Ellen Travers, Fenella Taylor, Fredrika Johansson, Gabriele Bertolli, Graham Judge, Grzegorz Drozd, Helena Puhakka-Tarvainen, Ione Wright, Israel Bennun, Jane Bennun, Janet Buchanan-Smith, Jen L, Jessica Arczynski, Joanne Harris, Johan Ekstedt, John Wilson, Kari Connolly, Linda Westberg, Luna Atkins, M Harrison, Margaret Buchanan-Smith, Marian Bennun, Mark Bennun, Matthew Crompton, Maurice Walsh, Mouska Safi, Nahzley Anvarian, Noura Ismail, Paul Bennun, Rachel Smith, Salma Kasmani, Sam Livingstone, Sara Sundholm, Sheila F Tatum, Simon Georgi, Stephanie Needleman, Susanne Jaspars, Tim Castle, Ziga Drobnic

INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS	PAGE 4
DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE RESPONDENTS	PAGE 6
POLICE TREATMENT	PAGE 8
LOSS OF BELONGINGS	PAGE 12
CITIZEN VIOLENCE	PAGE 14
FATALITIES	PAGE 17
HEALTH CONDITIONS	PAGE 18
FUTURE PLANS	PAGE 20
CHILDREN ON THE STREETS OF PARIS	PAGE 23
CONCLUSION	PAGE 28

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

INTRODUCTION

During winter 2016 / 2017, a number of community groups and NGOs highlighted the highly alarming living conditions faced by refugees and displaced people in Paris, and the inadequate provisions made. In a report released in early January 2017, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) warned of “systemic police violence” and cases of hypothermia ¹.

Other groups have released important anecdotal evidence of similar situations.

In this context, Refugee Rights Europe mobilised a team of independent, trained field researchers to investigate the situation further, in a systematic manner. The research findings are presented in this report, and raise serious

concerns about the precarious living conditions of refugees and displaced people in the city of Paris, the treatment by police, and the apparent lack of alternatives to destitution for many.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of our first-hand data collection is to provide policymakers, advocacy groups and the general public with an insight into the conditions faced by refugees and displaced people within European borders.

From 18 to 22 January 2017, a RRE delegation of four trained independent researchers visited Paris. They conducted 342 surveys in the city’s La Chapelle district, in Amharic, Arabic, Dari, English, or Kurdish, in partnership with local organisation Paris Refugee Ground Support. The format was semi-structured, and focused predominately on individuals over the age of 18.

OUR RESEARCH TEAM WAS ABLE TO OBTAIN A LARGE AMOUNT OF DATA RELATING TO THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PEOPLE ARE FORCED TO LIVE WITHIN EUROPEAN BORDERS.

Each member of the research team had field experience of working with refugees and displaced people, or similar groups. The researchers included native speakers in Arabic and Dari. The study was guided by ethical checklists that are underpinned by data

protection policies, child safeguarding policies and a robust risk register to ensure the security and dignity of all participants. All researchers had previously attended a compulsory induction day to stress the importance of strict adherence to all RRE policies.

In most cases, RRE’s research teams adopt a methodology of random selection - using stratification and continuously monitoring the breakdown of demographic groups within the sample, to ensure that the final data is representative of a given situation. In the context of Paris, it was not entirely feasible given the absence of demographic data and the highly precarious and volatile situation.

This made it necessary for us to be flexible in our approach, as it limited our ability to follow the methodology of random selection sampling and monitoring, leading us instead onto a path of so-called snowball sampling and bus stop methodology.

As a result of these factors, selection bias could not always be avoided, and we were at times unable to steer the sample and stratification as much as we would ideally have liked. Nonetheless, despite these many challenges and constraints, our research team was able to obtain a large amount of data relating to the conditions in which refugees and displaced people are forced to live within European borders.

THE STUDY WAS GUIDED BY ETHICAL CHECKLISTS THAT ARE UNDERPINNED BY DATA PROTECTION POLICIES, CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICIES AND A ROBUST RISK REGISTER TO ENSURE THE SECURITY AND DIGNITY OF ALL PARTICIPANTS.

This report seeks to highlight some of these issues and raise awareness of the status of human rights in Paris, demonstrating how the EU is falling short of expectations in its treatment of those who arrive at its shores to seek protection through the asylum system.

¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/french-police-stealing-blankets-migrants-paris-msf-a7516171.html>

*Refugee Rights Europe relays the voices of displaced people in Europe, reporting what respondents tell us. Meanwhile, we have not been able to verify claims through official sources. Throughout the report, wording such as “30% had experienced police violence” means that 30% of respondents said they had experienced police violence, but such claims have not been possible to verify.

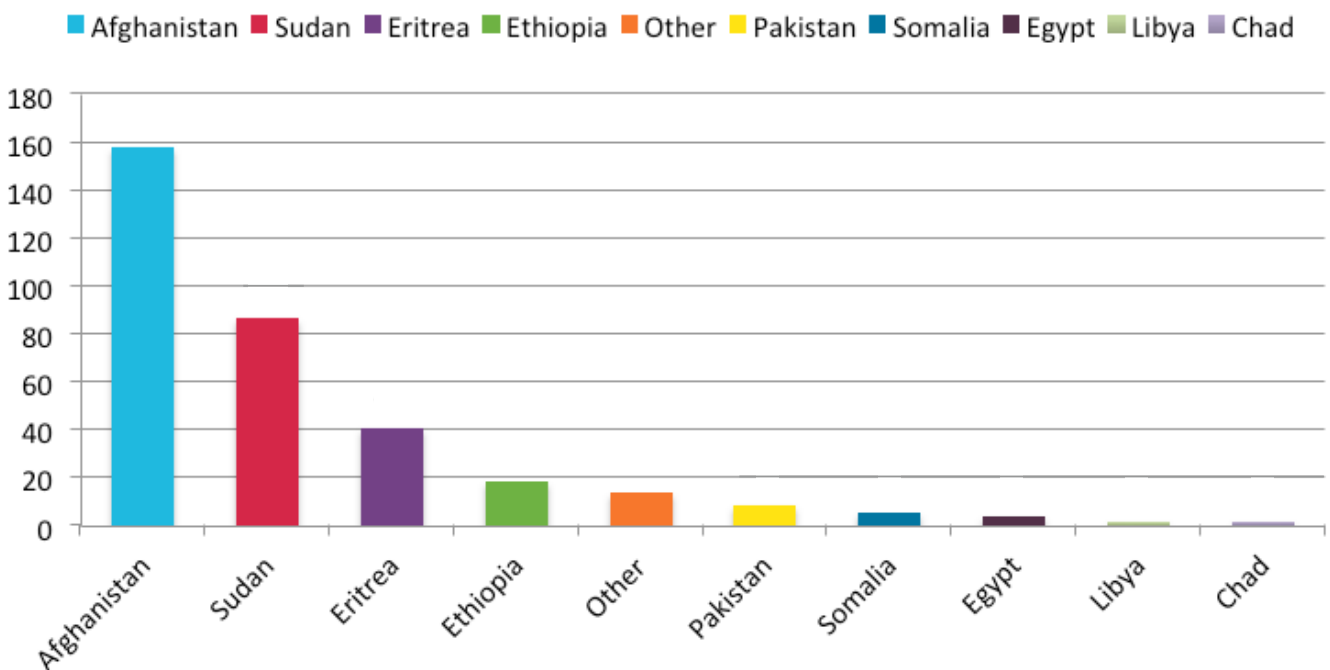
CHAPTER TWO

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The vast majority of our sample, 98.8%, were men. Only 1.2% were women. In total, 68.1% were aged 25 or under – 15.2% were under 18, and 52.9% were between 18 and 25. A further 27.9% were aged 26 to 35, 2.9% were aged 36 to 45, and 1.2% were 46 to 60 years old.

The three largest country groups represented were Afghanistan, Sudan and Eritrea (see Chart 1). The research did not identify any significant differences between the country groups in terms of their lived experiences on the streets.

CHART 1 – COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



Most respondents, 89.5%, were travelling alone, while 8.2% were accompanied by one or more friends. Only 2.3% were travelling with at least one family member.

Most individuals surveyed told us they had been living in Paris for up to eight months, and many arrived during the period of our study, despite the temperature plunging to around -7°C at times.

While some of the respondents were provided with accommodation – in a charity or government-run shelter or another form of very basic accommodation (referred to by respondents as a “hotel”) – most were sleeping rough at the time of our interviews, or had previously spent time sleeping on the streets in Paris.



CHAPTER THREE

POLICE TREATMENT

In total, 59.6% of respondents told us had been asked to move by police from where they were sleeping. Some 53.9% described this as a 'violent' experience, while 52.5% said they 'felt scared' during these incidents. 25% described the relocation as 'peaceful', and 21.1% said it was 'OK'. However, only 4.9% of respondents understood why they had been asked to move from where they were sleeping.

Many respondents explained that they were woken up repeatedly throughout the night - being told to move from one place to another specific location, before being woken up there

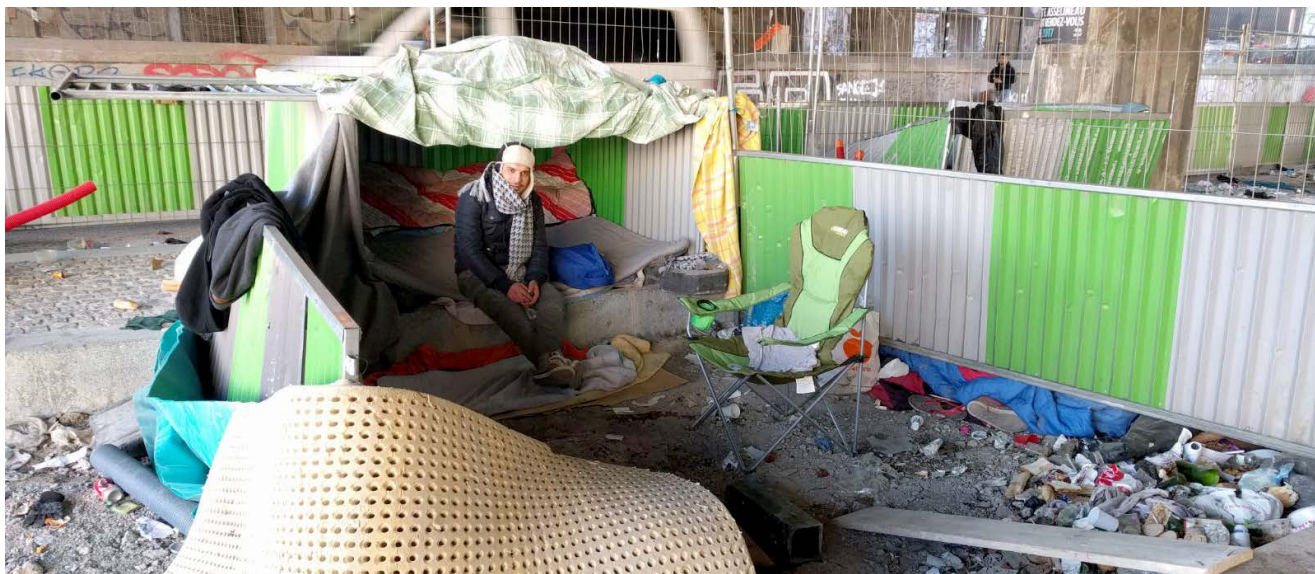
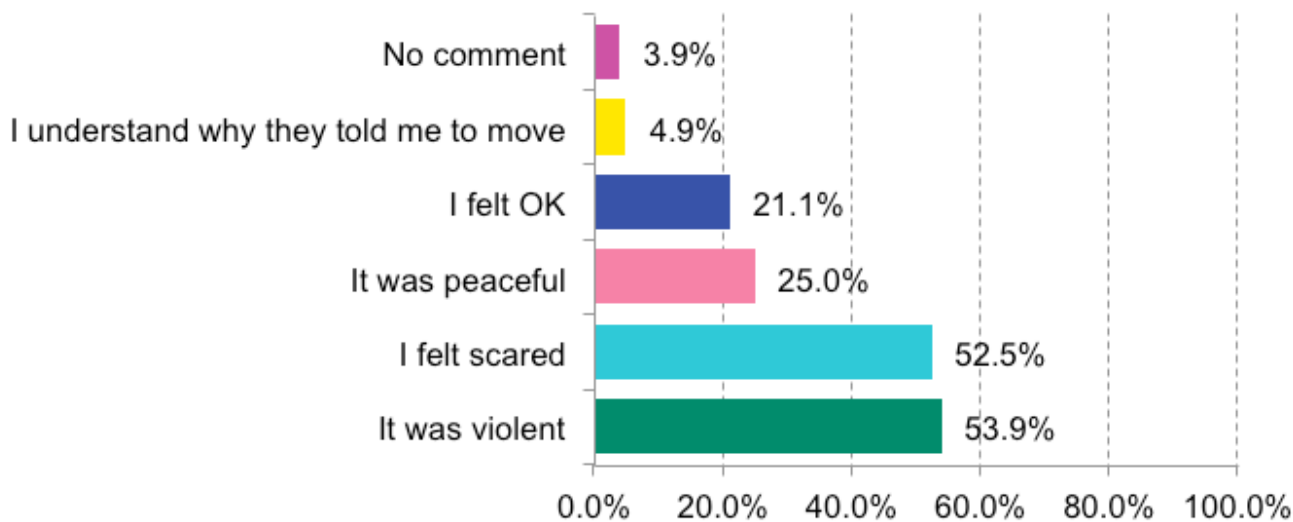
and told to move on yet again. "The police tell us to move from place to place," said one man.

Others said that they hadn't been forced to move by police, because they ensure to sleep out of sight. "The police don't move me because I sleep under the bridge where no one can see me," explained one.

A large number recounted being kicked or hit with police batons during this relocation process. One 45-year-old man recalled being kicked so hard in the shoulder that he was admitted to hospital for the next 20 days.

"THE POLICE TELL US TO MOVE FROM PLACE TO PLACE"

CHART 2 - HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE EXPERIENCE?



"IF WE QUESTION THEM
OR SAY WE HAVE NOWHERE
TO GO, THEY BRING OUT
THE TEAR GAS."





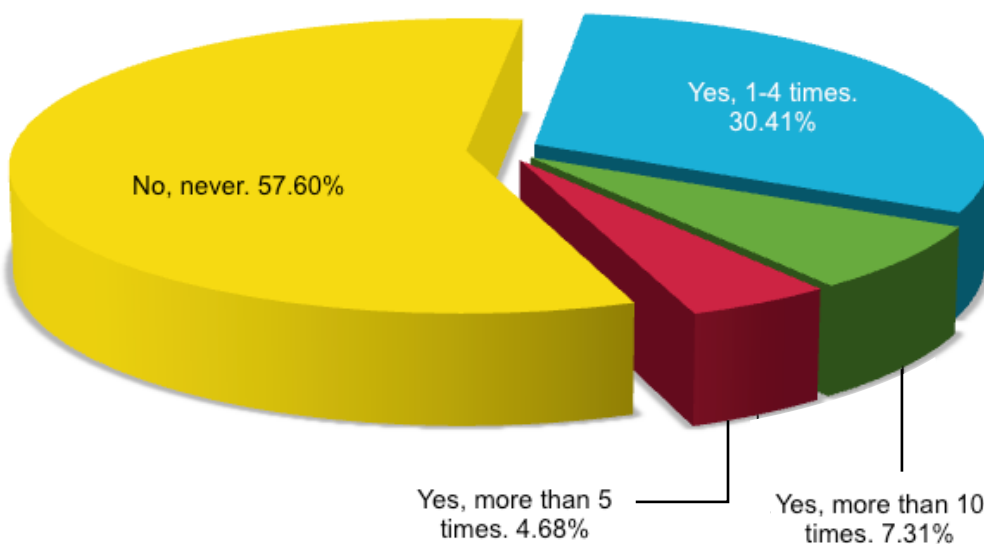
The police employed tear gas frequently in Paris. 30.4% of respondents had experienced tear gas one to four times since they arrived in the city. 4.7% had experienced it between five and 10 times, and 7.3% said they had been exposed to the gas more than 10 times (see Chart 3).

Respondents reported that police frequently used tear gas while asking people to move during the night. According to one young Afghan man: *“If we question them or say we have nowhere to go, they bring out the tear gas”*.

Meanwhile, a young man explained that the police sprayed tear gas directly into his sleeping bag while he was inside, causing him to suffer from nausea and vomiting for an extended period of time.

Many reported tear gas being used by police to disperse gatherings outside of the so-called ‘bubble camp’ – a 400-bed humanitarian centre managed by Emmaüs Solidarité² (with assistance from Utopia 56), which also provides food, medical care, and asylum information to those who manage to secure a spot inside for up to 10 days.

CHART 3 – HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED TEAR GAS IN PARIS?



In total, 36.5% had experienced other forms of police violence – 16.1% physical violence, 20.2% verbal abuse and 0.29% sexual violence. A number of respondents recalled the police swearing or using what they referred to as ‘racist language’ while dealing with refugees in the city.

² <http://emmaus-france.org/ouverture-a-paris-dun-centre-humanitaire-pour-migrants/>

CHAPTER FOUR

LOSS OF BELONGINGS

32.7% of respondents said they had belongings taken from them while in Paris. 47.3% reported that these had been taken by the police, 27.7% by other refugees or citizens, and 31.3% didn't know who was responsible (see Chart 4).

"THEY SAID WE HAD TO GET OUT OF FRANCE."

61.6% said their blanket or sleeping bag had been taken, while 20.5% had been robbed of their tent – particularly alarming given the cold weather conditions at the time of the study. Many claimed that police threw

away their tents or blankets, after asking them to move from where they were sleeping. This was confirmed by researchers, who witnessed police approach a group of people from Eritrea – including women and children – and demand they move elsewhere, throwing away their blankets. One of the group members reported, *"They said we had to get out of France"*.

Meanwhile, 52.7% of respondents had their clothes or shoes taken from them, and 35.7% their mobile phone, allegedly by other refugees, by citizens or in a few cases by police. The loss of property adds to the precarious situation faced by many.

RESEARCHERS WITNESSED POLICE OFFICERS TAKING PEOPLES' BLANKETS, AND THROWING THEM INTO A RUBBISH COLLECTION TRUCK.

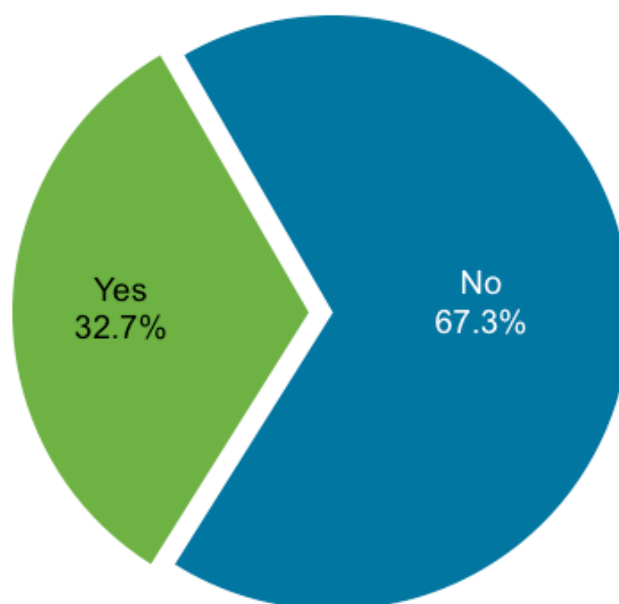
During the period of our study, the French interior minister, Bruno Le Roux, unveiled a nation-wide government plan aimed at getting all homeless people – refugees or not – off the streets for their own health and safety. The minister announced that he wanted everything to be done so there are no deaths or injuries in the cold, and that there would be room for everyone.

The plan involved extending an already existing phone service, whereby homeless people – or citizens witnessing homelessness – could call the number '115' to ensure that the individual was picked up and taken to a shelter.³

In reality however, only a tiny handful of respondents had been able to make use of the '115' system. The vast majority had called the number, but said nobody answered. One respondent reported that he got through, but was informed the shelter was full.

"IT IS SO DANGEROUS ON THE STREETS. I HAVE NO ONE HERE, AND I AM AFRAID TO SLEEP ON THE STREETS WITH SO MANY MEN AROUND."

CHART 4 – HAS ANYONE TAKEN ANY OF YOUR BELONGINGS FROM YOU WHILE YOU WERE IN PARIS?



One woman explained, *"I have been in Paris for one month. I came alone. I live on the streets and have no protection at all. I called 115 three times and they never showed up. It is so dangerous on the streets. I have no one here, and I am afraid to sleep on the streets with so many men around. I always sleep in different locations"*.⁴

Meanwhile, on the same evening that the government plan was announced, researchers witnessed police officers taking peoples' blankets, and throwing them into a rubbish collection truck. This represents a huge gap between the official narrative, and the situation on the ground in northern Paris.

³ <http://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/paris-ile-de-france/meteo-grand-froid-il-y-aura-place-monde-dit-ministre-interieur-1176037.html#xtref=http://m.facebook.com>

⁴ This case has been referred by RRE's researchers to a partner organisation operating on the ground.

CHAPTER FIVE

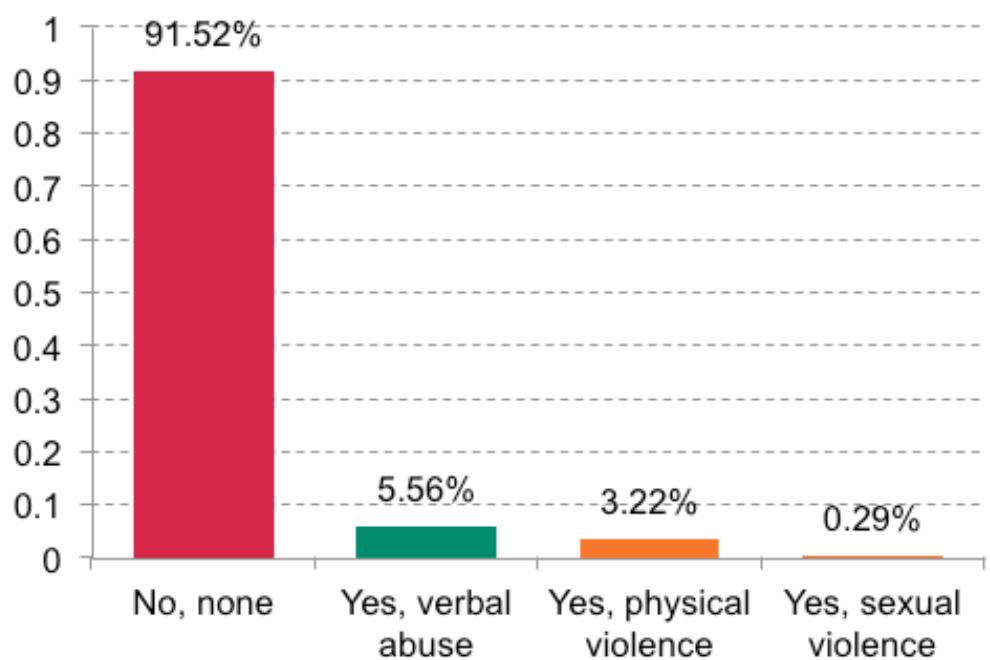
CITIZEN VIOLENCE



9.1% of respondents had experienced violence by citizens, which included verbal abuse (5.6%), physical violence (3.2%) and sexual violence (0.29%) (see Chart 5). One young Afghan boy recalled how he was using a public phone charging point in the Gare de L'Est train station, when a French woman shouted that the facility wasn't for use by refugees. However, in general, respondents praised local people in Paris for their support, including their regular distributions of food and warm clothes.

There was concern among respondents that the police had been dispersing people who donate food, hot drinks, clothes and blankets. As a result, these distributions had become increasingly sparse. *"They leave us on the street and don't give us any food. What sort of democracy is this?"* asked one Afghan man.

CHART 5 - HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE BY CITIZENS IN PARIS?



CHAPTER SIX

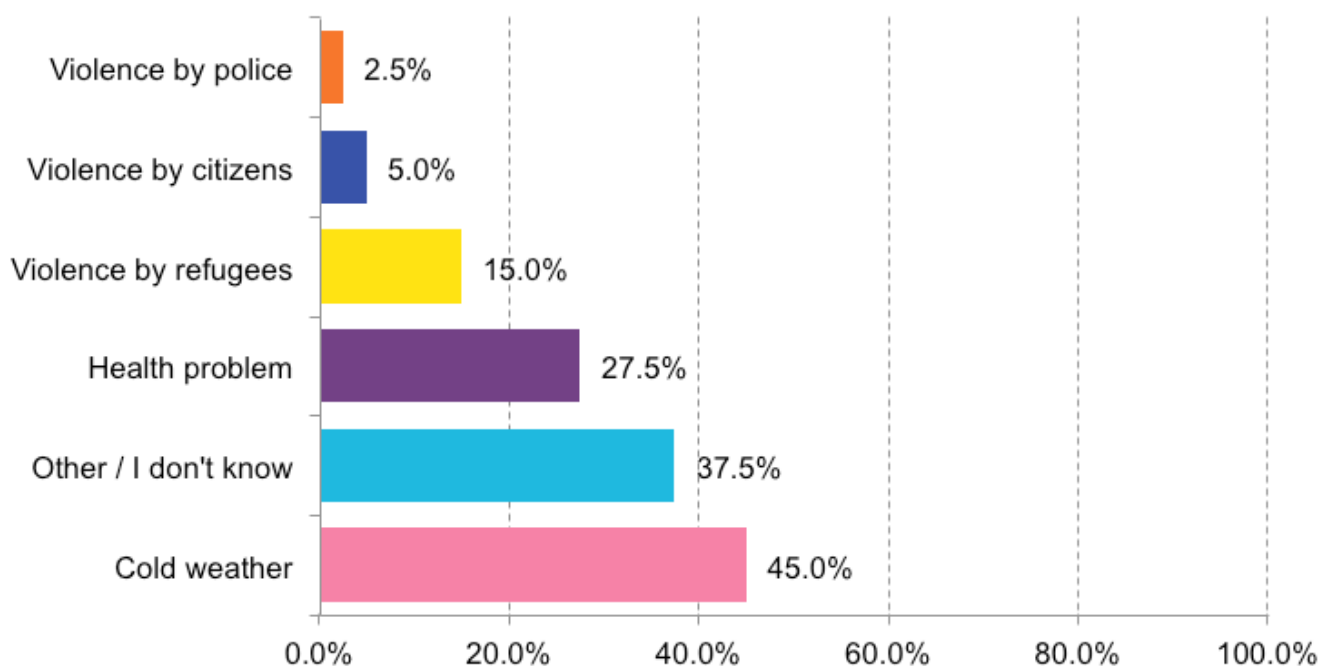
FATALITIES

11.7% of respondents had heard about another refugee dying in Paris. 45% reported that the death occurred due to the cold conditions experienced when sleeping on the streets. 27.5% cited health problems, 25.5% violence and 37.5% didn't know the reason for the death (see Chart 6).

Some reported that a man was killed when hit by a car as he crossed the street, while another had heard of a refugee who committed suicide in Paris – “he went to the top of a building and jumped off”.



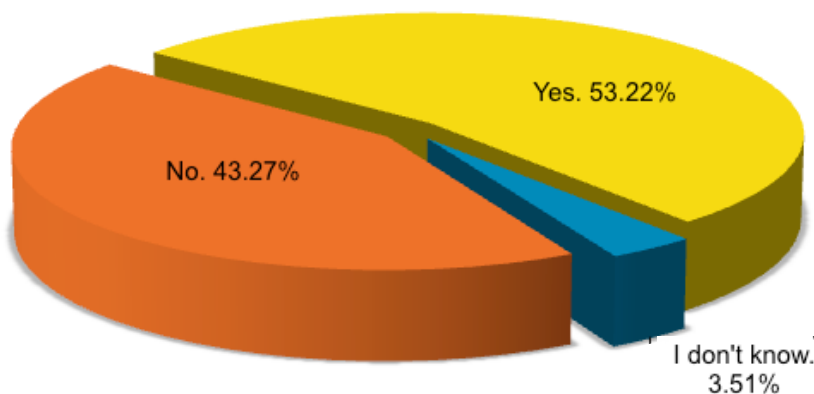
CHART 6 – WHAT WAS THE REASON FOR THE DEATH?



CHAPTER SEVEN

HEALTH CONDITIONS

CHART 7 – DO YOU HAVE ANY HEALTH PROBLEMS AT THE MOMENT?



ONE RESPONDENT SAID HE WAITED 16 HOURS AT THE HOSPITAL, AND WAS ULTIMATELY DENIED MEDICAL HELP.

53.2% of respondents said that they were experiencing a health problem at the time of the study (see Chart 7). For many, these problems were related to sleeping in freezing conditions without adequate warmth or shelter. One man explained how he had been sleeping rough for about 21 days and was painfully cold.

"THEY COULD TREAT US WITH RESPECT AND BE ORGANISED AND GIVE US TICKETS SO WE DON'T HAVE TO WAIT OUT HERE, BUT THEY WANT TO DEGRADE US."

Others complained of skin problems – which they believed was a result of sleeping in such close proximity to others, or in unhygienic living conditions. Two young Sudanese boys explained they shared a room with about 50 people, sleeping in bunk-beds arranged in five-tiers.

A number of respondents were suffering due to inadequate post-surgical care. One young Afghan man had been rushed to hospital to have his appendix removed, but sent back to sleep on the streets the next day. Meanwhile, a woman bearing the scar from an IV drip, explained how she needed to leave the hospital to queue for two hours outside for an asylum appointment. *"They could treat us with respect and be organised and give us tickets so we don't have to wait out here, but they want to degrade us,"* said her husband.

Some respondents were deeply concerned that they couldn't access the healthcare they needed because they hadn't applied for asylum and therefore did not have the necessary health insurance. One respondent said he waited for 16 hours at the hospital, and was ultimately denied medical help.

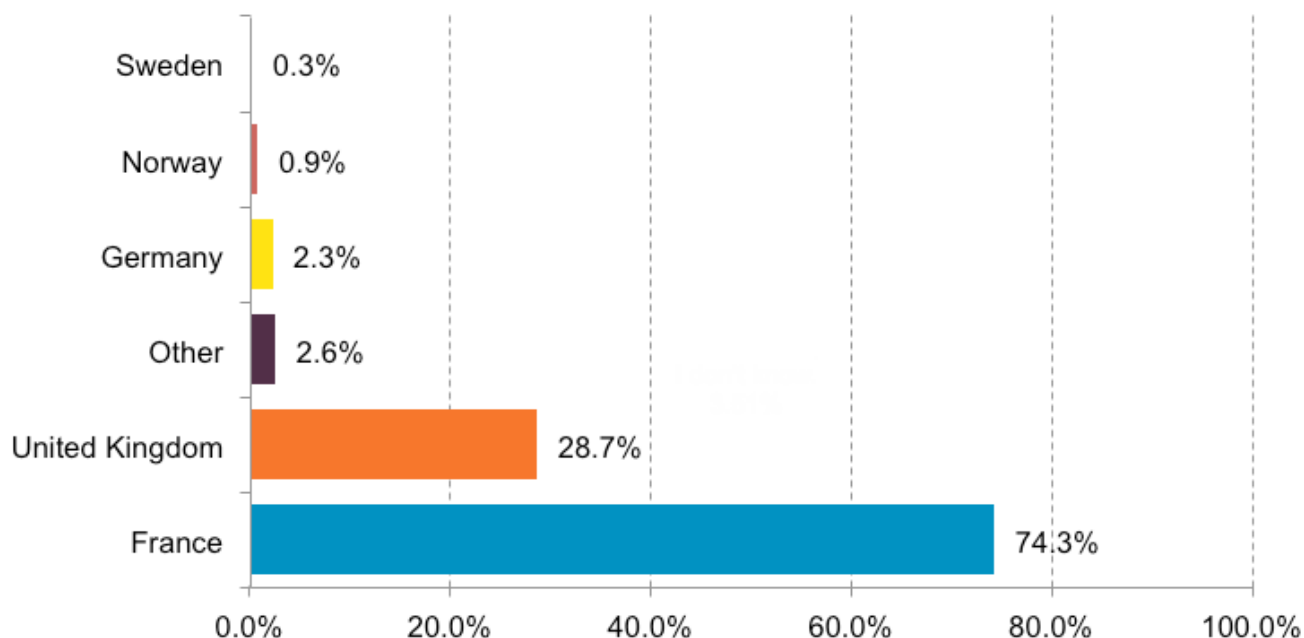
Mental health issues also appeared to be a major problem in Paris. One man noted that *"everybody is crazy here"*, while a number of others reported similar problems or suffering from constant headaches. An older Pakistani man, voluntarily and without being prompted by our researchers, revealed his official medical records, stating he suffered from a wide range of problems including memory loss, depression and suicidal thoughts.



CHAPTER EIGHT

FUTURE PLANS

CHART 8 - WHERE ARE YOU TRYING TO GO?



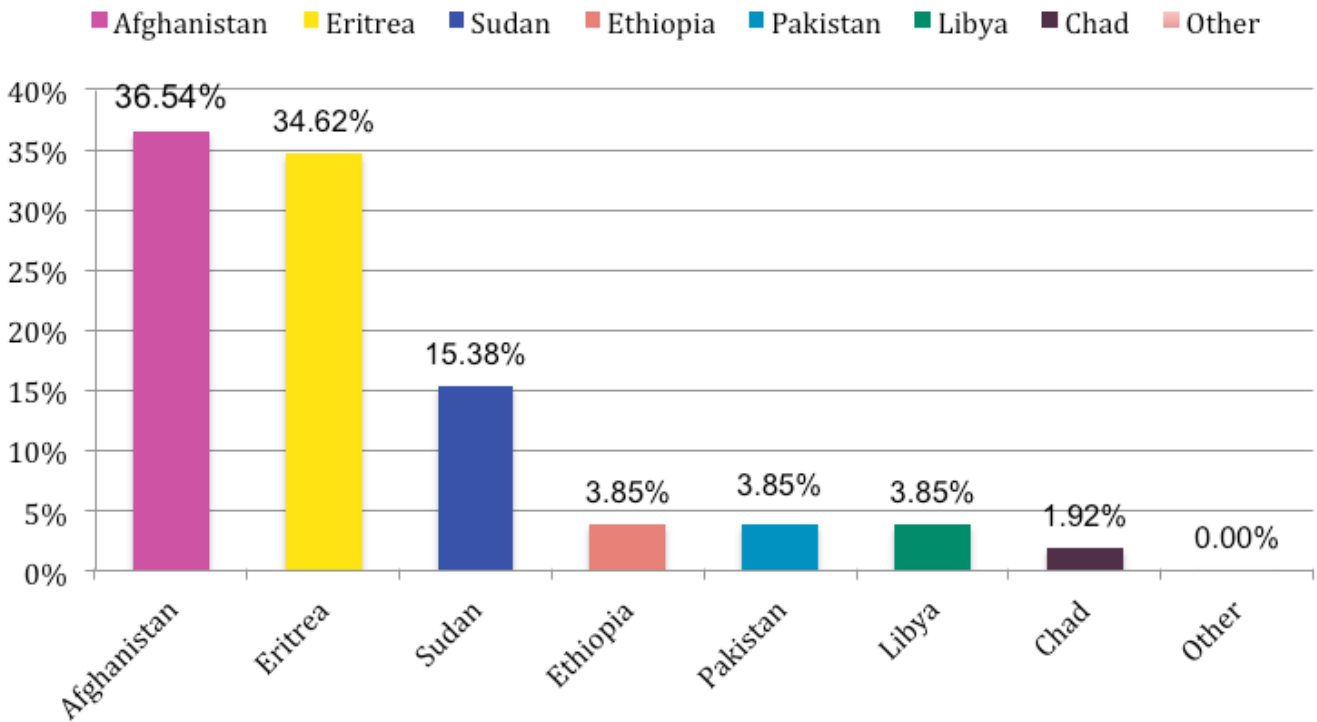
Some 25.7% of respondents had previously spent time living in the camps in Calais or Dunkirk, suggesting that they had hoped to reach the UK. While a similar number, 28.7%, said they wanted to go to the UK, the vast majority, 74.3% explained they wanted to stay in France. Others cited Germany (2.3%), Norway (0.9%) or Sweden (0.3%) as their target country. 2.6% didn't specify where they would like to go (see Chart 8).

There appeared to be a chronic absence of asylum information in Paris, which reportedly left many respondents feeling "confused". One man explained how he had his fingerprint taken for asylum purposes, but hadn't received an update on his application in two months. Another explained, "The biggest problem is the asylum process and the Dublin regulation. People who had their fingerprints taken in Italy have no idea what is happening. I've been here for eight months now. When I arrived, I was told that the Dublin Regulation would be cancelled in six months but it was not. Many people have been forced to go back to Italy".

CHAPTER NINE

CHILDREN ON THE STREETS OF PARIS

CHART 9 – COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN
CHILDREN ONLY



15.2% of respondents were aged under 18 – all of them boys. The majority were from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Sudan (see Chart 9).

96.2% of the children were unaccompanied, i.e. without a

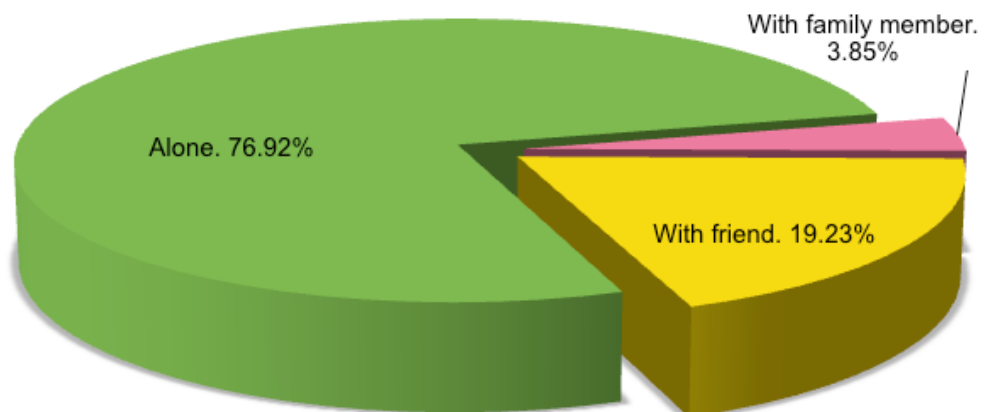
guardian, in Paris. Meanwhile, 19.2% of children said they had travelled to Paris with one or more “friend” (see Chart 10).

A number of these children were provided with shelters. However, some respondents were concerned about their hygiene standards, explaining, “I live in a hotel but it is very dirty. I

share the room with three other people but we are getting allergies and itchininess because of the dirt”. Others said that the facilities shut down during the day, forcing minors out onto the streets. One 14-year-old boy explained that he had been told he would be transferred to a “hotel”, and had instead been sleeping rough for two weeks.

“I LIVE IN A HOTEL BUT IT IS VERY DIRTY.”

CHART 10 – ARE YOU TRAVELLING ALONE?
CHILDREN ONLY

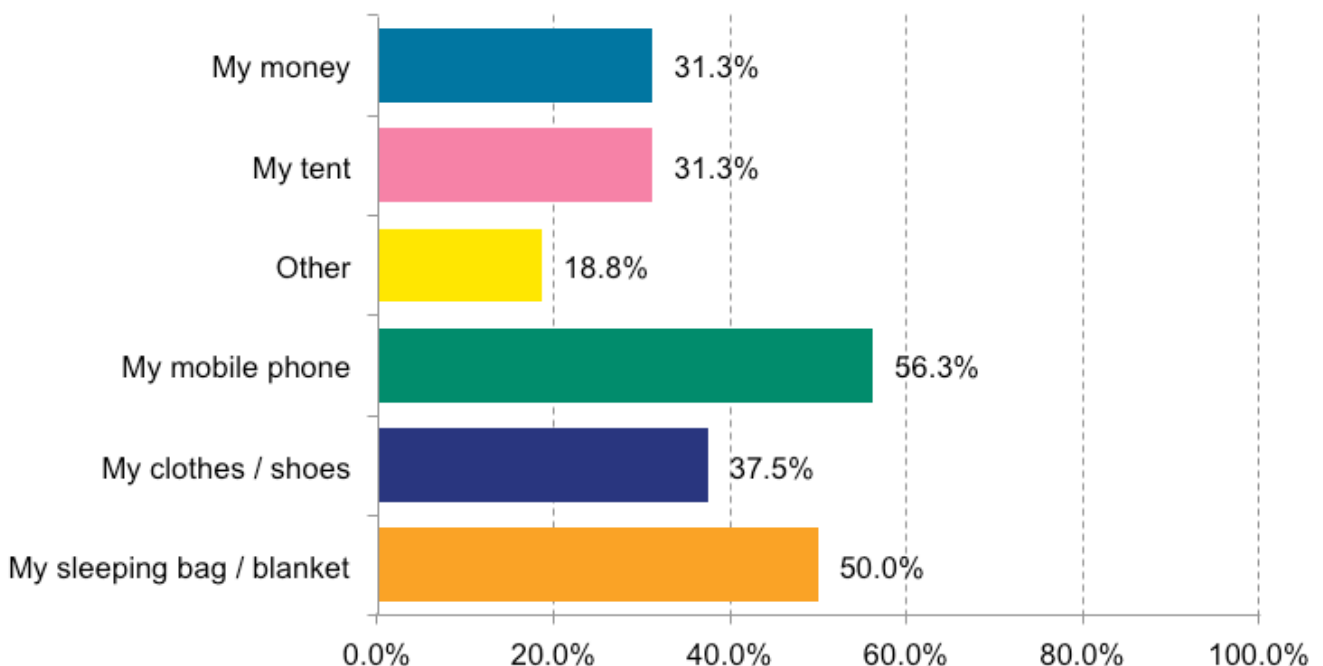


50% of children had been asked by police to move from where they were sleeping, without being given a secure alternative. More than half, 57.7%, described the experience as 'violent' and the same proportion said they had been 'scared' when it happened. 11.5% described the incident as 'peaceful', while 15.4% said it felt 'OK'. Only 7.7% of children understood why they had been asked to move from their sleeping spot.

30.8% had had some of their belongings taken, including sleeping bags, mobile phones and clothing (see Chart 11). Around one third said these items were taken by police, and another third said they were taken by refugees. 12.5% reported that the belongings had been taken from them by citizens.



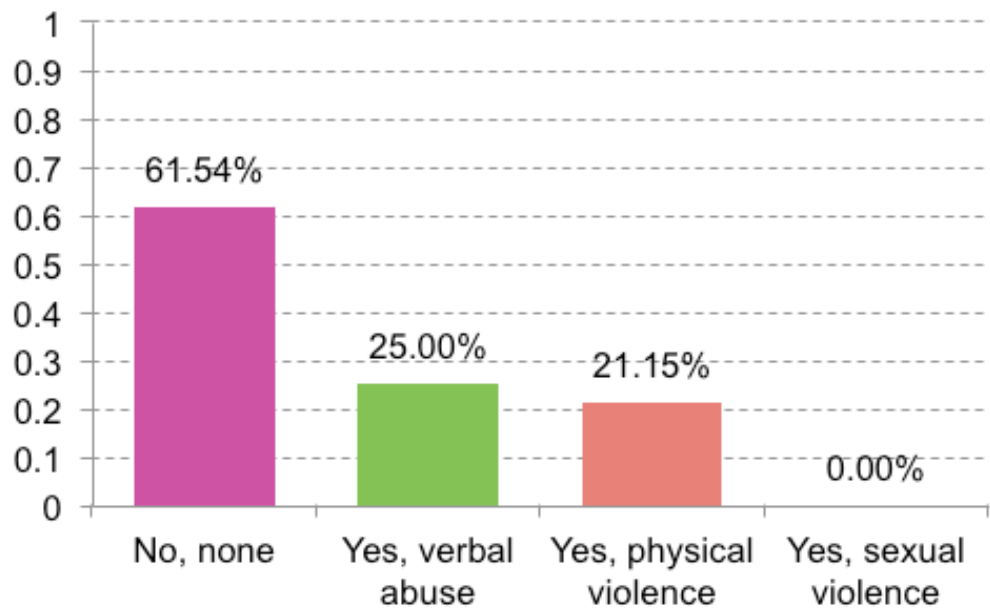
CHART 11 - WHAT BELONGINGS WERE TAKEN FROM YOU?
CHILDREN ONLY



30.8% of children had experienced tear gas one to four times while in Paris, 3.9% had experienced tear gas more than five times, and 9.6% had been exposed more than 10 times.

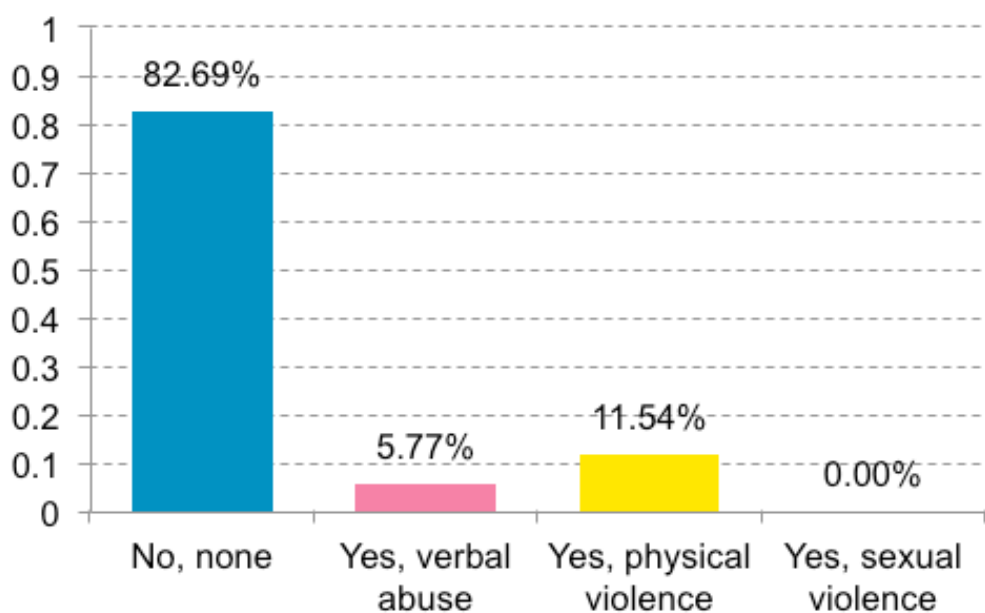
Children had also faced other forms of violence by police, including verbal abuse and physical violence (see Chart 12).

**CHART 12 - HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED POLICE VIOLENCE IN PARIS?
CHILDREN ONLY**



Fewer children reported experiencing verbal abuse and physical violence by citizens (see Chart 13).

**CHART 13 - HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE BY CITIZENS IN PARIS?
CHILDREN ONLY**



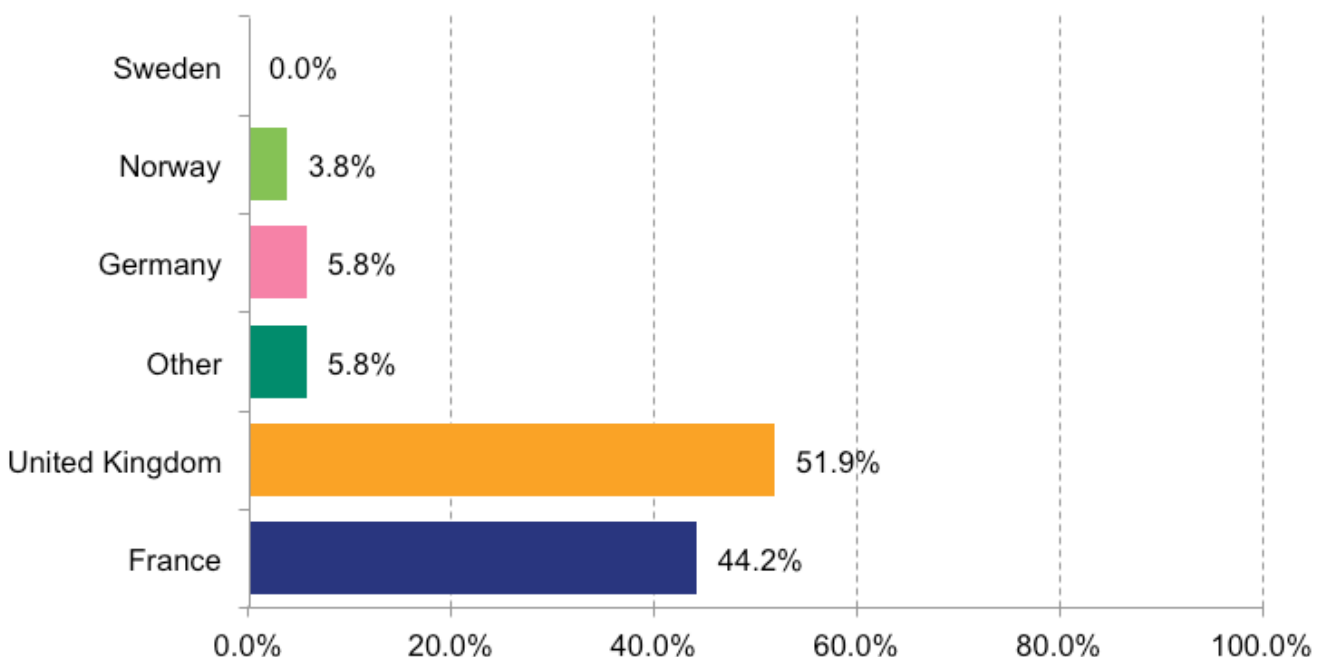


44.2% of children surveyed reported they were experiencing health problems at the time of the study – again, largely due to the cold weather conditions in Paris.

28.9% had previously spent time in the Calais or Dunkirk camps – a slightly higher proportion than the general sample. However, minors differed significantly from adults in their future aspirations. Some 51.9% said they wanted to go to the United Kingdom, while just 44.2% wanted to live in France. Others cited Germany, Sweden and Norway as their target destinations, and a small proportion didn't specify (5.8%) (see Chart 14).

As with adults, minors suffered from a seemingly alarming absence of asylum information. One 16-year old boy said he had applied for reunification with his family in the UK where he has two sisters and two brothers, but had not had a response and was feeling very confused. Meanwhile, another unaccompanied minor explained that his application to join family in the UK had been rejected, and was deeply concerned about his options.

CHART 14 - WHERE ARE YOU TRYING TO GO TO?
CHILDREN ONLY





CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

Our research highlights a number of key issues faced by refugees and displaced people in Paris:

- The police regularly wake individuals up during the night, and force them to move from one part of the city to another. They often use force in the process, and can be quick to resort to tear gas if people do not comply immediately with these requests.
- Both at night and during the day, police remove blankets and sleeping bags from the streets and throw them away, regardless of the freezing temperatures outside.
- French citizens and charitable organisations have been filling gaps left by the state and leading international NGOs and agencies, providing food, hot drinks, and clothing distributions.
- The majority of respondents are hoping to stay in France, and many have begun embarking on the asylum process, but are still unable to access suitable accommodation and resort to sleeping rough.
- There appears to be a chronic absence of information about asylum laws, leading to a great deal of confusion about individuals' rights and opportunities – both in regards to healthcare, and their future plans.

In short, the research findings raise serious concerns about the precarious living conditions of refugees and displaced people in the city of Paris, including their treatment by police, and the apparent lack of alternatives to destitution for many.

Firm and sustainable action is required by the French authorities to ensure that each of these individuals is protected, including women, children and those experiencing deteriorating physical and mental health.







www.refugeerights.org.uk | info@refugeerights.org.uk | [@Refugee_RE](https://twitter.com/Refugee_RE)

