

# REFUGEE RIGHTS EUROPE

Presenting data collected by the  
**Dunkirk Legal Support Team**

## **THE "OTHER" CAMP**

**FILLING DATA GAPS RELATING TO REFUGEES  
AND DISPLACED PEOPLE IN DUNKIRK**



## DATES OF RESEARCH

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## REPORT AUTHORS

Natalie Stanton  
Marta Welander  
Musashi Fujimura

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

RRE would like to express its gratitude and appreciation towards the Dunkirk Legal Support Team for seeking out this partnership with Refugee Rights Europe, allowing us to gain an insight into the humanitarian and human rights situation experienced by people living in the Dunkirk camp.

## SURVEY DESIGN

Dunkirk Legal Support Team

## GRAPHIC DESIGN

## FIELD RESEARCHERS

Dunkirk Legal Support Team

Pippa Stanton  
Me And You Create  
[www.meandyoucreate.com](http://www.meandyoucreate.com)  
[hello@meandyoucreate.com](mailto:hello@meandyoucreate.com)

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Mohamad Alhusein Saoud  
Diarmaid Finnerty  
*With the support of Seth Wolpin*

## PHOTO CREDITS

Elisa Vari  
[elisavari14@gmail.com](mailto:elisavari14@gmail.com)

The team's resilience and tireless work while surveying hundreds of camp residents is a humbling and invaluable endeavour which helps to fill gaps on an under-reported context in and around Dunkirk.





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# INTRODUCTION

A mere 40 kilometres from the Calais camp in northern France, a settlement in the Dunkirk suburb of Grande-Synthe has been host to thousands of refugees and displaced people at any one time.

Far less spoken of than its nearby neighbour, the Dunkirk camp is under-researched. It does not receive the same level of media attention, or such vocal outcry for help by volunteers and grassroots organisations.

In early January 2016, a group of eight long-term volunteers issued a detailed, independent assessment of the situation in the camp. At the time, government restrictions were placed on volunteers trying to provide aid and support to the

camp residents. This assessment helped document and highlight the dire conditions and very poor humanitarian standards that existed in the camp whilst also calling for action on a number of specific points.<sup>1</sup>

The camp was later relocated to a new site nearby, where Médecins Sans Frontières built a large number of wooden shelters, transforming the landscape from a muddy sea of tents into rows of identical shelters along pebble stone paths. In this context, the Dunkirk Legal Support Team set out to conduct a first-hand research study, aiming to gain an insight into humanitarian standards, the overall human rights situation and unmet needs among those living in the camp.



<sup>1</sup> 'Grande Synthe Refugee Camp Assessment by Volunteers', 3 January 2016.

For further details, contact Maddie Harris ([maddie@thedarkhorses.com](mailto:maddie@thedarkhorses.com)) or Phoenix Clough ([ruffledfeathersdesign@gmail.com](mailto:ruffledfeathersdesign@gmail.com))



# METHODOLOGY

\*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.



**A team of five long-term volunteers affiliated with the Dunkirk Legal Support Team invited residents of each of the camp's wooden shelters to complete a survey.**

They achieved this by delivering surveys to each shelter in sequence, then revisiting any shelters that (for a number of reasons) were unavailable the first time round. Having revisited all missing shelters at least once, they managed to collect a total of 506 surveys, or 29.8% of the estimated population of 1,700.<sup>2</sup>

In order to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, the team used a semi-structured questionnaire featuring a number of open-ended questions. The questionnaires were translated into the three main languages/dialects spoken in the Dunkirk camp: Kurdish Sorani, Kurdish Badini and Farsi. On almost every occasion, the forms were filled out in the mother tongue of respondents to ensure that our data was both accurate and rich in detail.

Following completion of the research, these answers were translated into English.

The data collected was processed and analysed by the Refugee Rights Europe in June 2016. Detailed notes concerning the data processing and analysis, as well as limitations to the methodology as identified by the Refugee Rights Europe, are available on request.

The study is, to our best knowledge, the most extensive research study to take place in the Dunkirk camp to-date, and thus helps fill important information gaps. Some of the key research findings are now made public through this report.

<sup>2</sup> Dunkirk Legal Support Team estimated that the population at the time of the research reached approximately 1,700 people. The total number of surveys filled out was greater than 506, but the Refugee Rights Europe later had to discard a number of surveys due to signs of corrupted or incomplete data. Therefore, the number of surveys analysed was 506, or 28.9% of the estimated population; which constitutes a strong sample in statistical terms.



*There were a significant number  
of families in the camp.*





# DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

At the time of the study, there were an estimated 1,700 people residing in the Dunkirk camp.

The data collected by the Dunkirk Legal Support Team suggests that the demographic composition of the Dunkirk camp consisted of a vast majority of Iraqi Kurds (81.9%), followed by Iranians (13%), as well as small minorities of Vietnamese, Syrian and Kuwaiti residents.

There were a significant number of families in the camp. Some 89.9% of respondents

were men and boys, and 10.1% women and girls. The average age of all respondents was 23.8 years old, while the average age among minors included in the study was just 12 years old.

On average, respondents had spent 4.8 months in France - a figure which was slightly higher for minors (5 months).



# HEALTH

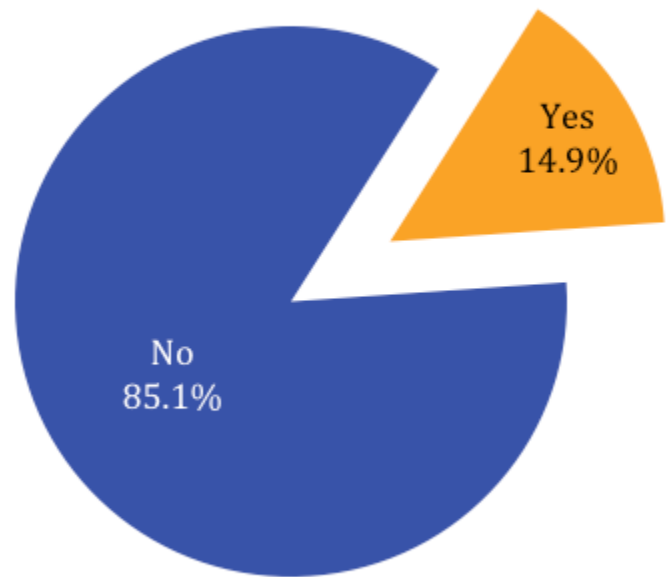
At the time of the study, a significant number of camp residents (more than 50 people, or 14.9%) reported that they were unwell.

This percentage was higher for women (22.2%) and slightly lower for children (6.8%). Overall, the data indicated that older people tended to be in relatively worse health than their younger peers.

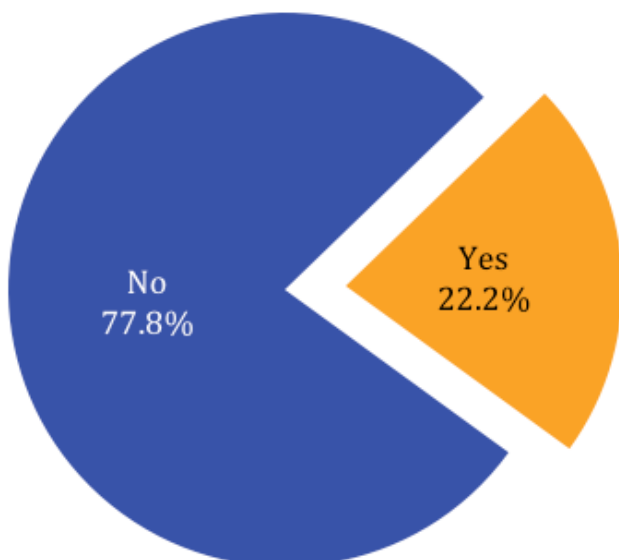
Analysis of the data indicates that those who had spent a longer period of time in France were more likely to be unwell than those who had arrived more recently.

More than half (51.3%) of respondents reported receiving on-site medical help on at least one occasion whilst in Dunkirk, which signals a strong presence of service providers from the health sector.

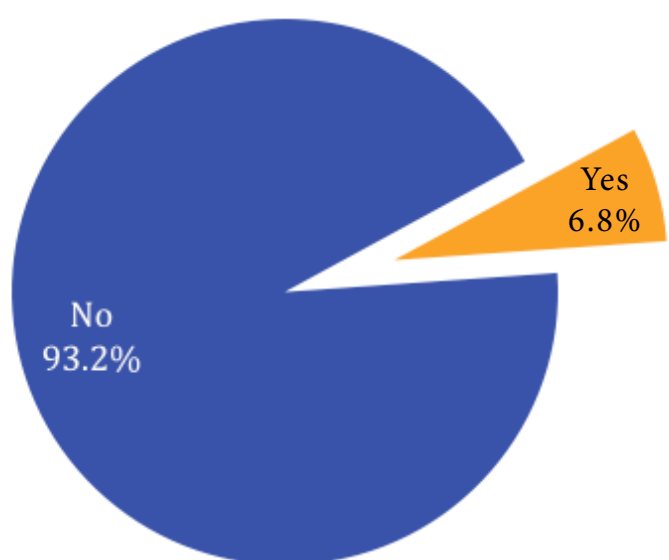
## ARE YOU UNWELL? ALL RESPONDENTS



## ARE YOU UNWELL? WOMEN ONLY



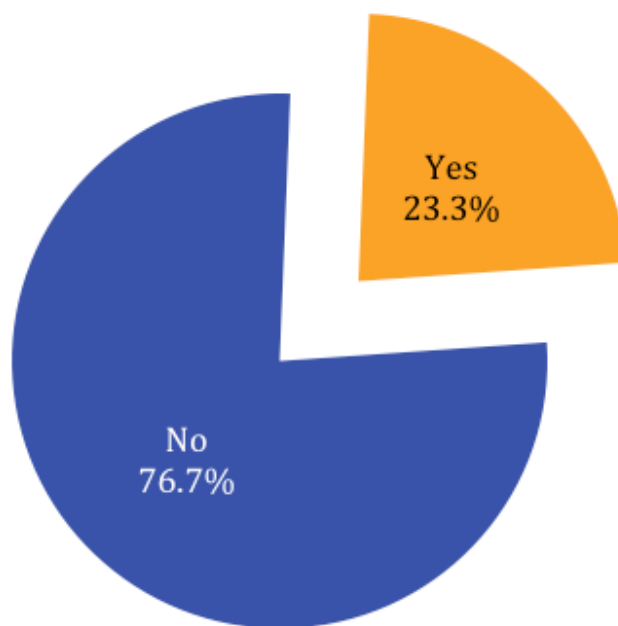
## ARE YOU UNWELL? MINORS ONLY





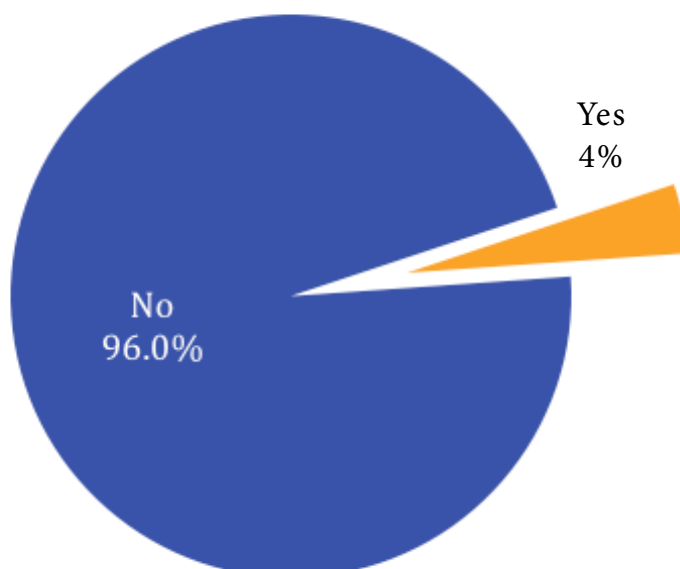
It is striking that almost a quarter of women respondents (23.3%), reported that they were pregnant at the time of the study - a figure which included one underage girl. These figures raise particular concerns given the unhealthy environment in the camp, and the absence of adequate care for women who are at different stages of childbearing, let alone for giving birth.

### ARE YOU PREGENANT? WOMEN ONLY



Moreover, around 4% of respondents reported that they had at least one disability. The conditions of the Dunkirk camp are likely to be particularly unsuitable for these individuals, given the absence of specialised support and the overall demanding living conditions.

### DO YOU HAVE A DISABILITY? ALL RESPONDENTS





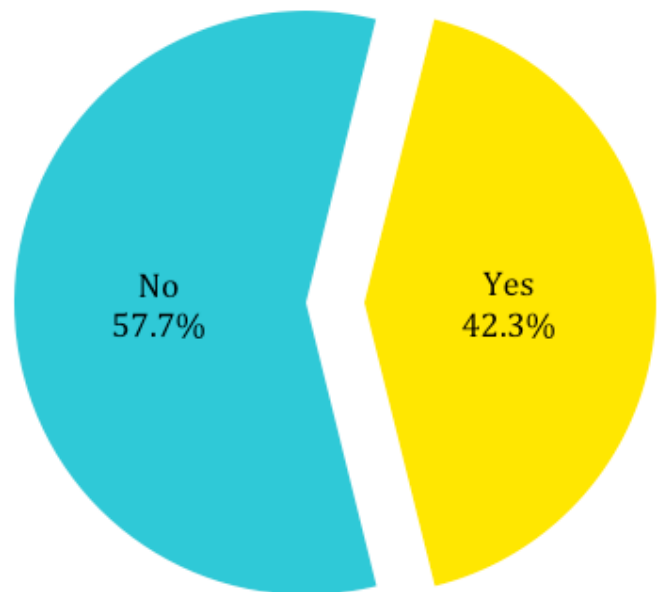
# POLICE VIOLENCE

Among the respondents, 42.3% reported that they had experienced police violence.<sup>3</sup>

This figure was somewhat lower among minors, at 30%. Meanwhile, 13.3% of women and girls reported that they had been subjected to this form of violence. Analysis of the data suggests that police violence affected all age groups equally.

The longer people had been in France, the more likely they were to have experienced police violence. There was also a correlation between individuals who had experienced police violence and those who had had their fingerprints taken, suggesting that the process of taking fingerprints may be accompanied by a heavy-handed approach by police.

## HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED POLICE VIOLENCE? ALL RESPONDENTS



<sup>3</sup> The Dunkirk Legal Support Team chose to use the term 'police brutality' in the survey.



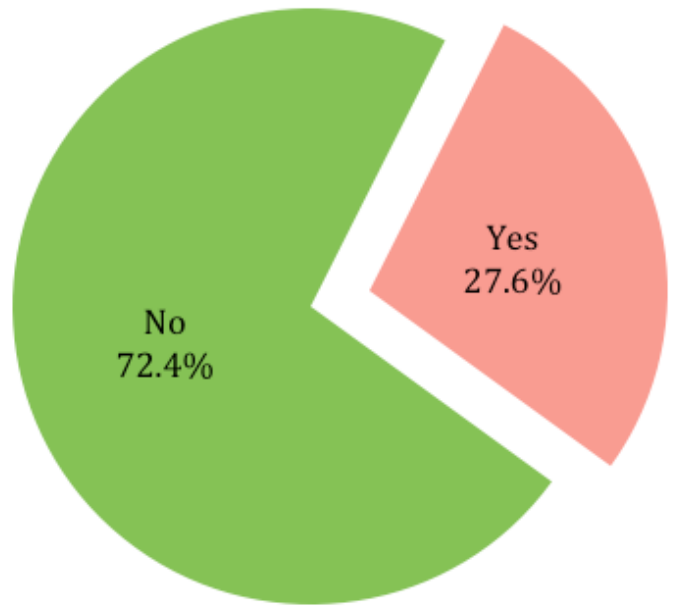
# DETENTION

More than a quarter (28%) of all respondents reported that they had been detained during their stay in France.

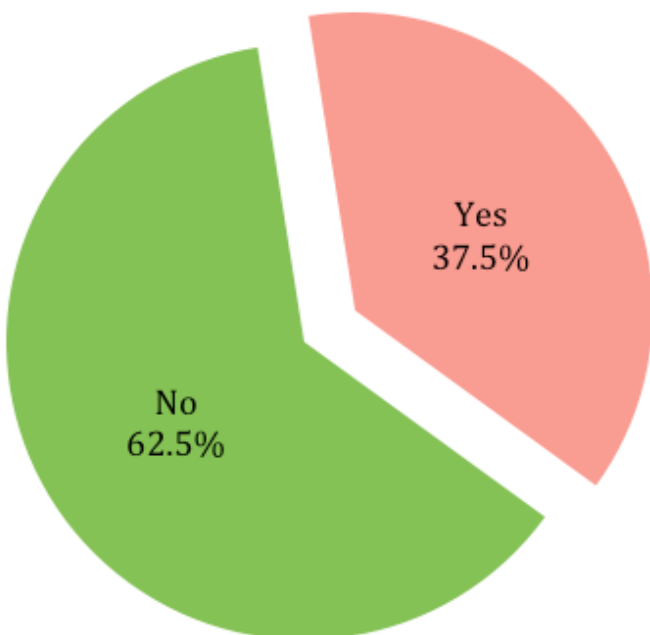
Interestingly, the figure is higher among women, among whom 37.5% said they had been detained. However, it is children aged below 18 years of age who have been most heavily impacted by the detention process, with some 47% claiming to have experienced this since arriving in the country.

The study found that respondents who had spent longer in France were more likely to have been detained or jailed than those who had been there a shorter period of time.

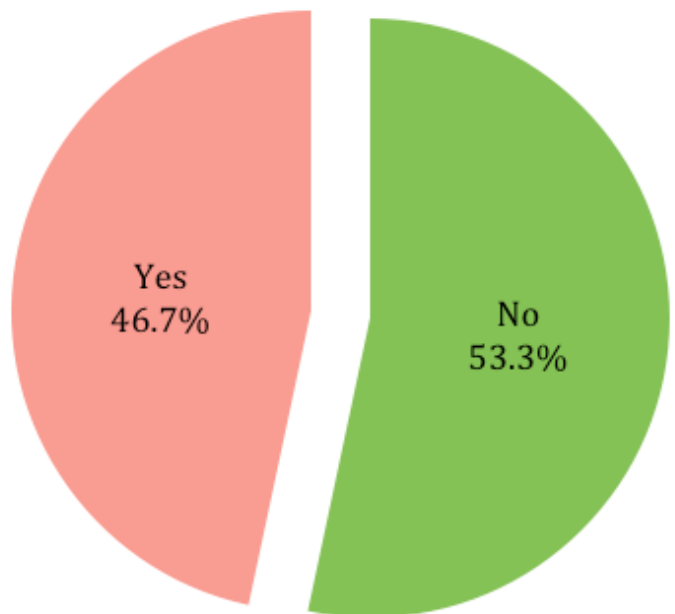
## HAVE YOU BEEN DETAINED OR JAILED? ALL RESPONDENTS



## HAVE YOU BEEN DETAINED OR JAILED? WOMEN ONLY



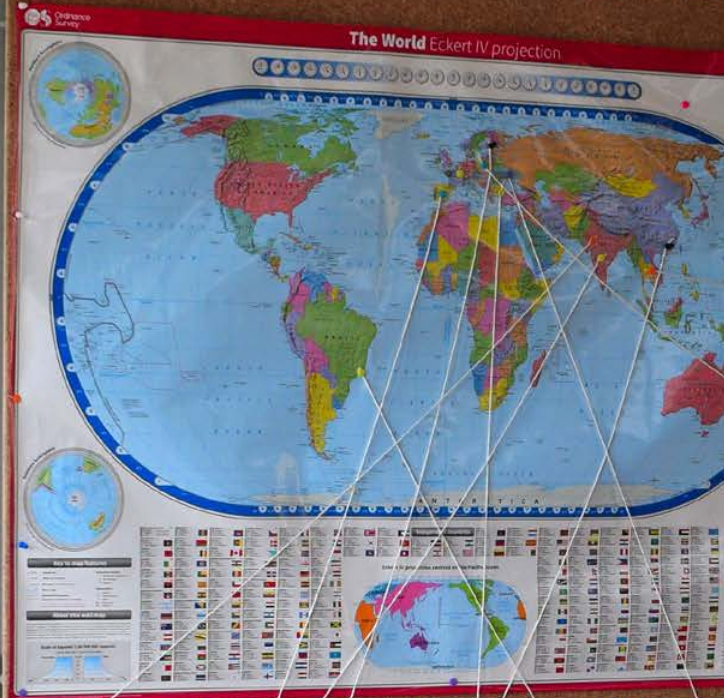
## HAVE YOU BEEN DETAINED OR JAILED? MINORS ONLY







*Those who had spent longer time in France were more likely to have been detained or jailed.*





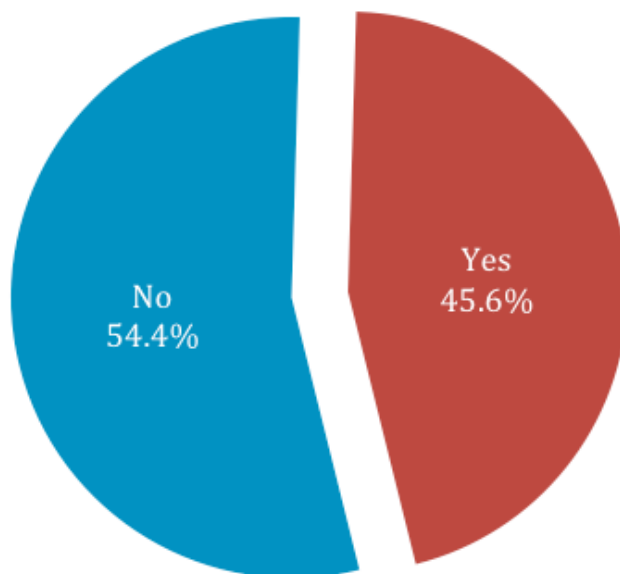
# ACCESS TO INFORMATION

It is deeply concerning that 54.4% of respondents reported that they did not have knowledge of asylum processes in their target country. This figure was somewhat lower among women (50%) and minors (39.4%).

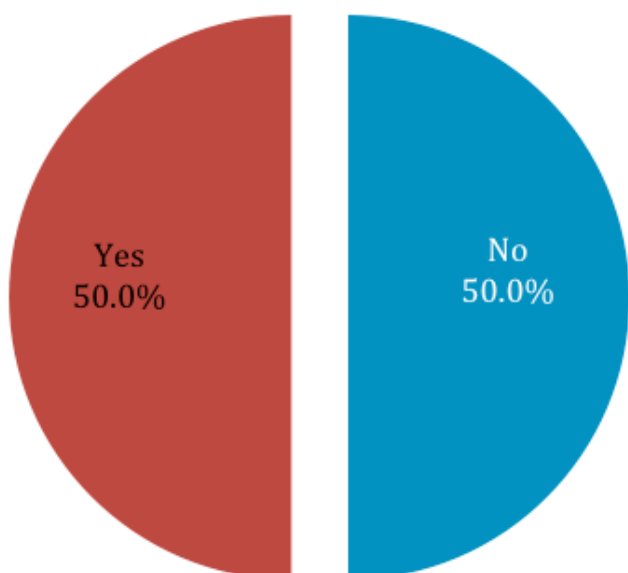
The lack of asylum information is counterproductive to any sustainable solution to the situation in Dunkirk and the wider region. This vast knowledge gap relating to asylum processes among refugees and displaced people in Europe has been recognised by a number of grassroots initiatives. The Dunkirk Legal Support Team, the Calais Legal Centre, and the Refugee Info Bus which is present in the larger Calais camp are all working relentlessly to tackle this issue. Meanwhile, efforts by the authorities, to our knowledge, remain very limited.

The study did not show any correlation between respondents' knowledge of asylum law and their experience of being detained or jailed; those with a stronger understanding were just as likely to have been detained as their peers.

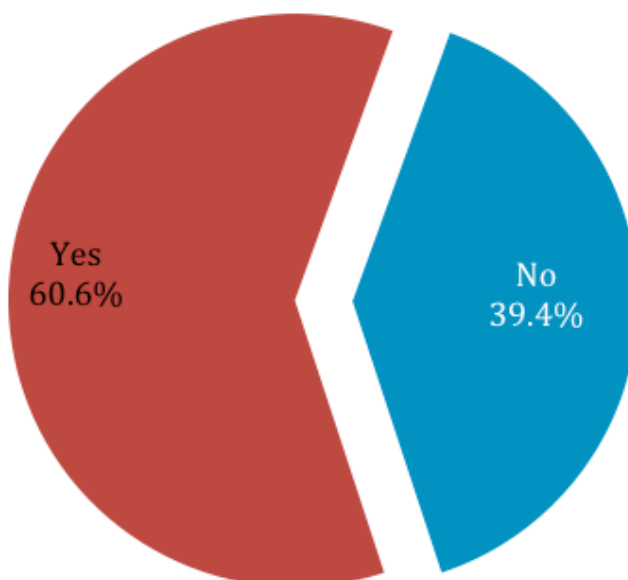
## DO YOU KNOW HOW TO SEEK ASYLUM IN THE COUNTRY YOU ARE HEADING TO? ALL RESPONDENTS



## DO YOU KNOW HOW TO SEEK ASYLUM IN THE COUNTRY YOU ARE HEADING TO? WOMEN ONLY



## DO YOU KNOW HOW TO SEEK ASYLUM IN THE COUNTRY YOU ARE HEADING TO? MINORS ONLY







*Any future government decision to shut down the camp ... is unlikely to be conducive to any sustainable solution.*

# CONCLUSION

**The situation in the Dunkirk camp tends to be relatively under-reported, particularly when compared to its next door neighbour, the Calais camp.**

The research conducted by the Dunkirk Legal Support Team in spring 2016 – which to our knowledge constituted the largest ever research study to take place in the camp – is therefore of high importance. Not only does it document the situation, but underlines the urgency of resolving the unhealthy and unsustainable environment in and around the settlement.

Many of the research findings resonate with those of the Calais camp, as outlined in Refugee Rights Europe's previous report 'The Long Wait' which was published in April 2016.<sup>4</sup> While the experience of police violence by Dunkirk residents (42.3%) was lower than in Calais (75.9%), these figures nonetheless indicate a similarly endemic presence of this form of violence against refugees

and displaced people. By the same token, the proportion of people having been detained was very similar in both camps (49.5% for Calais; 46.7% for Dunkirk).

The main discrepancy between the two studies were the findings relating to health concerns. In Calais, 76.7% of respondents reported having experienced at least one health issue since arriving in camp (many of them ongoing). Only 14.9% of Dunkirk respondents were unwell at the time of the study.<sup>5</sup>

In both camps, there is an alarming absence of asylum information, with 74.3% of Calais respondents reporting that they did not have access to this information compared to 54.4% in Dunkirk.

Since this research was conducted, the situation in Dunkirk has changed once again, and the French government has taken over management of the camp. We are yet to see whether the human experience will improve in any meaningful manner.

In any event, the research findings suggest that any future government decision to shut down the camp or to reduce access to only certain groups of displaced people – without providing a viable alternative – is unlikely to be conducive to any sustainable solution for the displaced women, men and children in Dunkirk and its surrounding area. The majority of people are lacking information regarding asylum processes and have been living in limbo and dire conditions for many months, which suggests that a viable solution is long overdue.

<sup>4</sup> RRE (2016) 'The Long Wait: Filling Data Gaps Relating to Refugees and Displaced People in the Calais Camp,' available here: [www.RefugeeRights.org.uk/Reports](http://www.RefugeeRights.org.uk/Reports)

<sup>5</sup> These two findings are not directly comparable, but nonetheless suggest a potential aggravated health situation in Calais compared to that of Dunkirk.



