

**REFUGEE RIGHTS
EUROPE**

UNSAFE BORDERLANDS

**FILLING DATA GAPS RELATING
TO WOMEN IN THE CALAIS CAMP**



DATES OF RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

The informal Calais refugee camp in northern France is hosting thousands of displaced people – many men and boys, but also an important number of women and girls who are particularly vulnerable, partly because they are in minority.

In February 2016, a team of 20 researchers conducted a survey investigating the camp's demographic composition, potential human rights violations occurring amongst the people currently living there, and their future aspirations and plans. This constituted the largest research study in Calais to-date, and the key findings of the study were published in early April 2016 in the report 'The Long Wait: Filling Data Gaps relating to Refugees and Displaced People in the Calais Camp'. While our report contained gender disaggregated data, its limited scope meant that it was not able to go into any great depth regarding the situation of women in the camp.

Since the publication of The Long Wait, we have processed and analysed additional data relating to women in Calais, which we are presenting in this report. Media coverage consistently tends to highlight that the majority of residents in the

Calais camp are men and boys, while reports and news stories relating to women and girls in the settlement are few and far between. This report hence aims to fill some of the information gaps relating to these women. It sheds light on the specific adversities they face, including gender-based violence¹, a lack of access to reproductive healthcare, and an absence of safety and security, amongst others.

We believe that our independent first-hand data relating to women in Calais can help inform the public debate by providing an evidence-based and nuanced picture of the situation in the camp. We hope that it will encourage firm and gender-sensitive action aimed at resolving the unnecessary human suffering in Calais, whilst taking into account the specific needs and gender-based rights violations endured by women and girls in the context of displacement.



¹ This report adopts a definition of 'gender-based violence' borrowed from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and is understood as encompassing "physical, sexual and psychological violence, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. The violence [...] can encompass violence by family members, and also forms of sexual harassment, alongside other forms of sexual violence, by different perpetrators.

METHODOLOGY

Our research was conducted between 20-26 February 2016, when the southern part of the Calais camp – which has since been demolished – was still intact and highly populated.

A recent census carried out by Help Refugees found that approximately 5,500 people were living in the settlement at the time. Of these, 205 were women. The data sample collected by our research team accounted for 870 individuals, which amounts to approximately 15% of the camp's population. We surveyed 27 women and girls – roughly 13% of its total.

The research sample did not include respondents residing in the Jules Ferry Centre, headed up by La Vie Active, which houses up to 400 women and children in Calais². Therefore, the research findings in this report do not in any way refer to the level of safety, service provision, or living conditions experienced by the women and children hosted in this centre.

RRE recruited a team of 22 independent academic researchers through an open recruitment process. They were subsequently trained by a lecturer from St Joseph University in Beirut, Lebanon who had led similar research studies among Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Researchers conducted a 14-page survey divided into three research areas: the camp's demographic composition, potential human rights violations occurring amongst the people currently living there, and their future aspirations and plans. The survey was created by professional statistician Mohamad Alhussein Saoud, alongside the RRE coordination team – with guidance from St Joseph University and the RRE advisory group.

Our advisory group also provided advice on research ethics which was built into the design of the survey. We were careful to recognise the significance of traumatic experiences that refugees may have been through, cultural sensitivities, child protection, and building trust with the communities in the camp. Verbal interviews were conducted in English or Arabic, and written surveys were available in Arabic, Pashto, Farsi and Amharic.

Country groups tended to reside in particular areas of the Calais camp. In accordance with this, researchers were distributed evenly and allocated to specific regions. The number of researchers per area was proportionate to the approximate number of residents living there, to ensure a representative sample. This stratification enabled us to survey residents with a diverse range of social, economic and political tendencies.

The research team was able to draw on a recently-compiled census by Help Refugees to guide them in respect to the above, and coordinators checked the demographics of completed surveys each day to ensure we were on target in terms of covering reasonable proportions of each country group, different age groups, and men and women.

We believe that some Kurdish respondents cited their state of origin (Iran, Iraq, Syria etc.) while others stated 'Kurdish' as their nationality. There may therefore be slight discrepancies in figures relating to this group.

*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.

² <http://julesferry.vieactive.fr>

"We don't feel safe in our tent and at night we can't sleep till the morning."



SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Each of the women we surveyed was aged between 21 and 40 years old. However, the majority were towards the younger end of this age bracket, with an average age of 29.5.

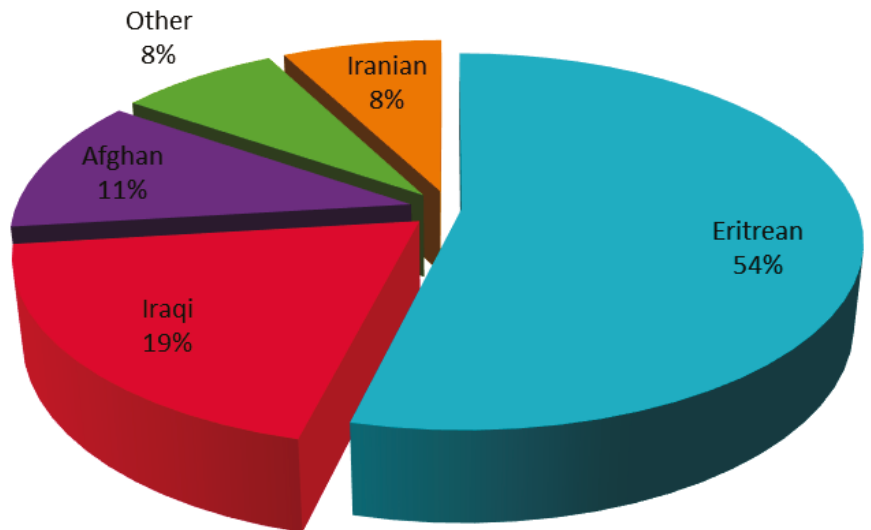
A third of the women surveyed, 33%, were living in the Calais camp without any family members. A further 30% were present with their husband, and 11% with at least one brother. 4% said they were in the camp with their mother. Given the dire living conditions, it is alarming that 22% of the respondents had children with them in Calais. The oldest of these children was an 18-year-old son, and the youngest a daughter aged just one year old. Several women had more than one child in the camp, including a significant number of young girls.

While only 30% of respondents reported that they were in Calais with their husband, some 42% said they were married, suggesting that some married women had made the journey to the camp without their spouse. Meanwhile, 47% responded that they were single. A much smaller proportion, 8%, were widowed, and 4% divorced.

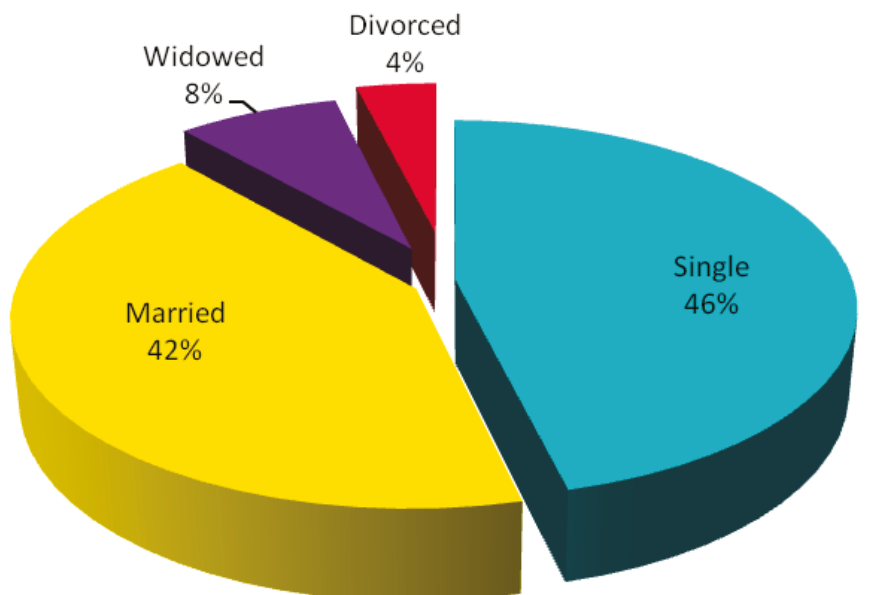
The sample was dominated by Eritreans, who accounted for 54% of the women surveyed. Another 19% were Iraqi, 11% Afghan, 8% Iranian, and 8% from elsewhere.

More than half of those surveyed, 52%, had some form of schooling – whether at primary, preparatory or high school level. And 16% were highly qualified, holding either a bachelor's or master's degree.

NATIONALITIES



MARITAL STATUS



LACK OF SAFETY AND SECURITY

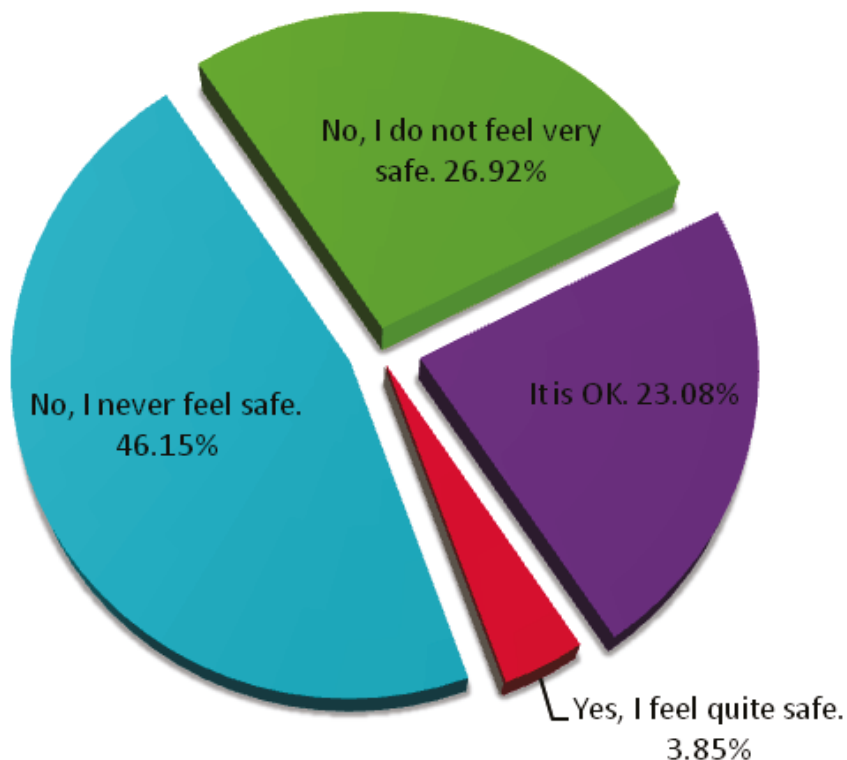
Safety and security are two major concerns for displaced women and girls, wherever they are in the world.

Female refugees generally tend to have less documentation than their male counterparts, which leaves them more vulnerable to exploitation by smugglers and border guards. The safety and security concerns in the Calais camp are further heightened due to the absence of formal refugee assistance by UNHCR and large NGOs who typically provide tailored services and protection in refugee settings around the world. The 'unofficial' women and children's centre and a number of other volunteer-led initiatives in Calais work tirelessly to provide invaluable support and a certain level of safety for women in the camp. However, the absence of formal and better-resourced services

leaves women and girls in the camp particularly vulnerable and exposed to potential physical and psychological harm.

As explained above, the research sample did not include respondents residing in the Jules Ferry Centre headed by La Vie Active which houses up to 400 women and children in Calais. La vie Active aims to provide a safe and secure space for women and children³, and the research findings in this report do not in any way refer to the level of safety, service provision, or living conditions experienced by the women and children hosted in this centre.

DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU ARE SAFE INSIDE THE CAMP?



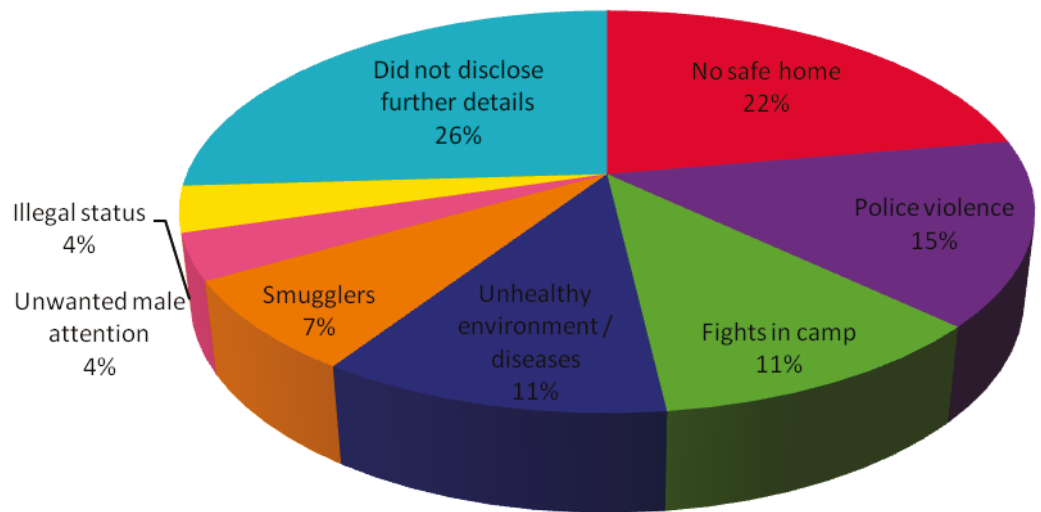
A total of 73% of the women surveyed in Calais reported that they "never feel safe" or "do not feel very safe" in the camp. When asked to explain the reasons for feeling unsafe inside the camp, 22% of respondents highlighted the absence of a secure home, while 11% cited the camp's unhealthy environment. A total of 15% said they felt unsafe due to police violence and 11% mentioned fights inside the camp. 7.4% cited the presence of people smugglers, and 3.7% unwanted male attention. A further 3.7% felt fearful because they did not have legal status in France.

³ <http://julesferry.vieactive.fr>

WHY DO YOU NOT FEEL SAFE IN THE CAMP?

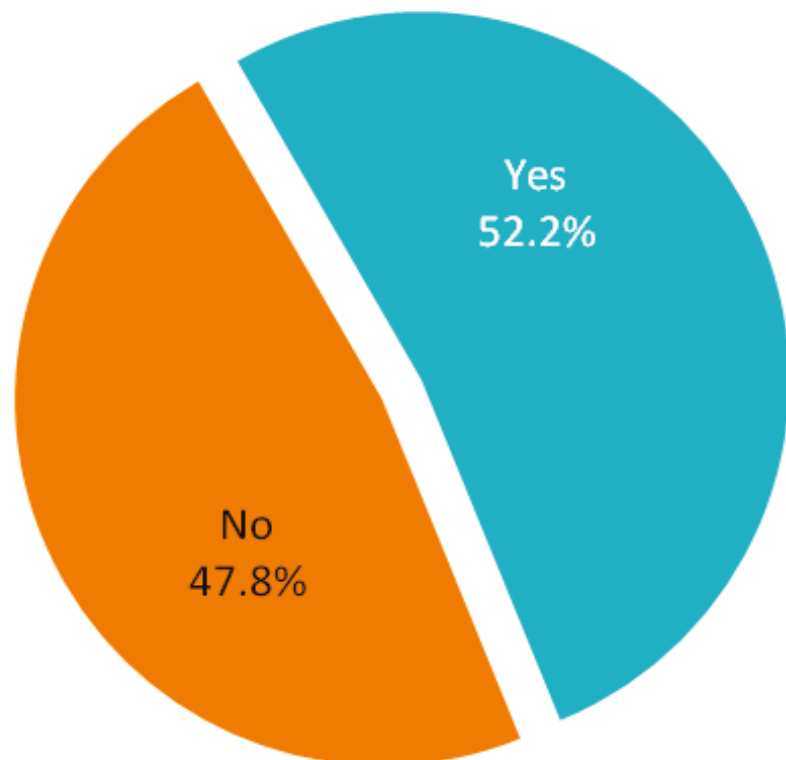
Some 26% declined to disclose further details about the factors that made them feel unsafe, which could be interpreted as testament to women's hesitance to report violence and other forms of ill-treatment due to fears of repercussions⁴.

23% of respondents felt "OK" or "quite safe", largely due to the presence of the 'unofficial' women and children's centre which works relentlessly to provide a level of safety, security and invaluable support to women in the camp with its limited resources.



HAVE YOU KNOWN OF ANY DEATHS IN THE CAMP?

The majority of women surveyed, 52.2%, had known of at least one death within the camp.



⁴ The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reports that "the main causes of the low reporting rates are considered to be: the fear of what impact this could have on the asylum claim of the victim and on the perpetrator (especially in cases of domestic violence), the lack of information for the victim on her rights or where to report and seek help, fear of the perpetrator, stigma and cultural norms", see: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/asylum-migration-borders/overviews/focus-gender-based-violence>

"I'm alone here and I'm afraid of going to any smuggler and male person because everybody here looks at me with angry eyes."



EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

Displaced, stateless, asylum-seeking and refugee women are often subjected to violence, including gender-based violence and sexual exploitation.

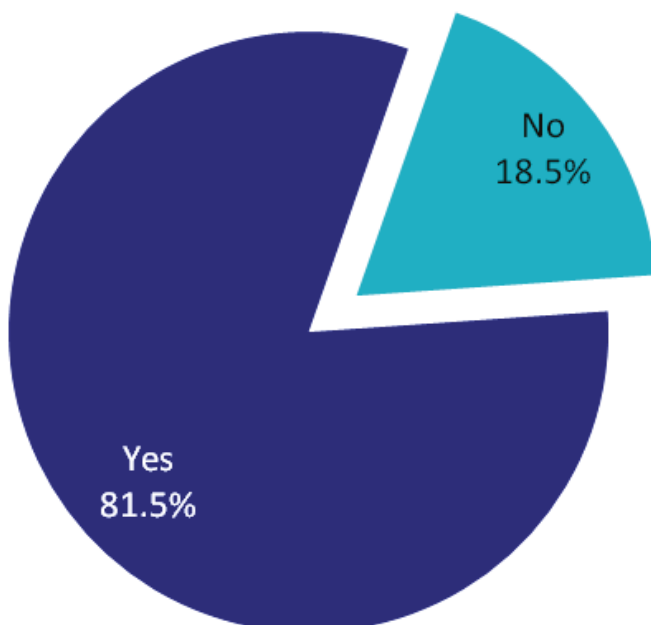
This can take place during their journey, in their host / transit country, and both inside and outside of camps. Gender-based violence is an endemic problem affecting many millions of women

and girls globally, and the lack of protection mechanisms during conflicts and displacement mean that they become more vulnerable to sexual violence and trafficking. The research study in Calais found that women and girls were subjected to different forms of violence by police, citizens, and those inside the camp.

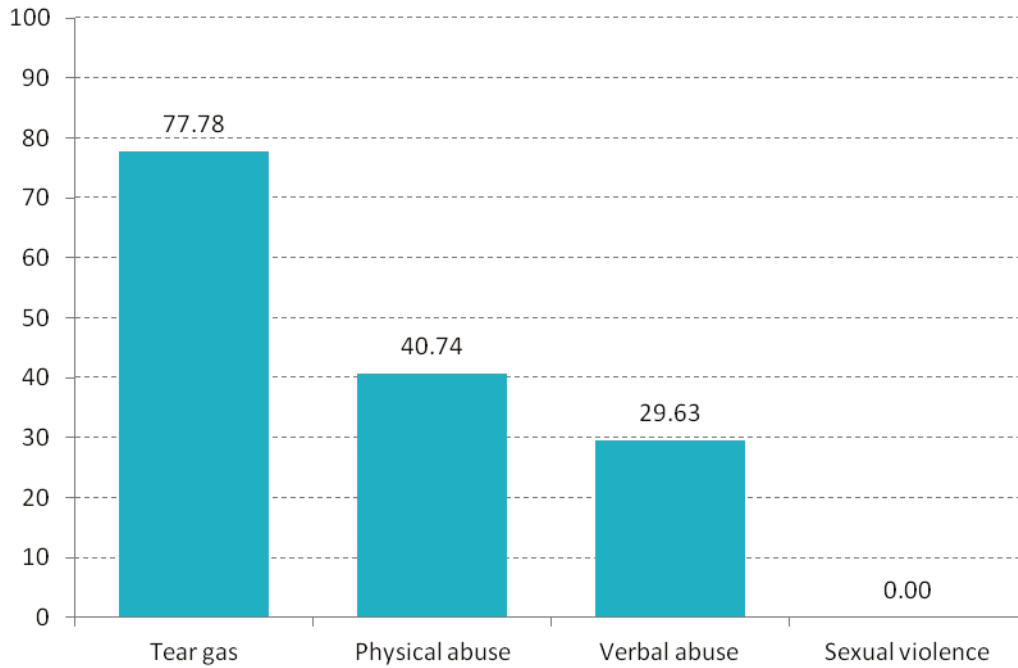
POLICE VIOLENCE

Some 81.5% of women surveyed reported that they had experienced police violence since arriving in Calais. A total of 53% said this police violence occurred while the women were attempting to journey to the UK. However, 27% reported experiencing unprovoked police attacks inside the camp, and 20% when seeking to leave the boundaries of the settlement with the intention of going into Calais town centre, to the supermarket, or as one woman put it, *“to get some fresh air.”*

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED POLICE VIOLENCE IN CALAIS?

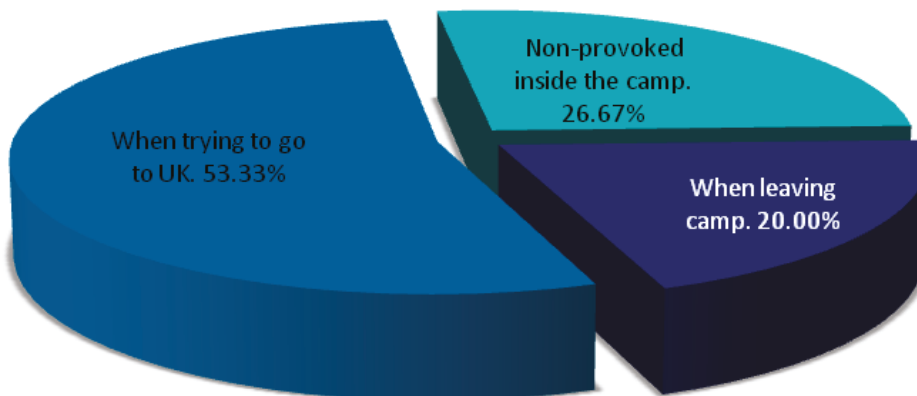


WHAT TYPE OF POLICE VIOLENCE?

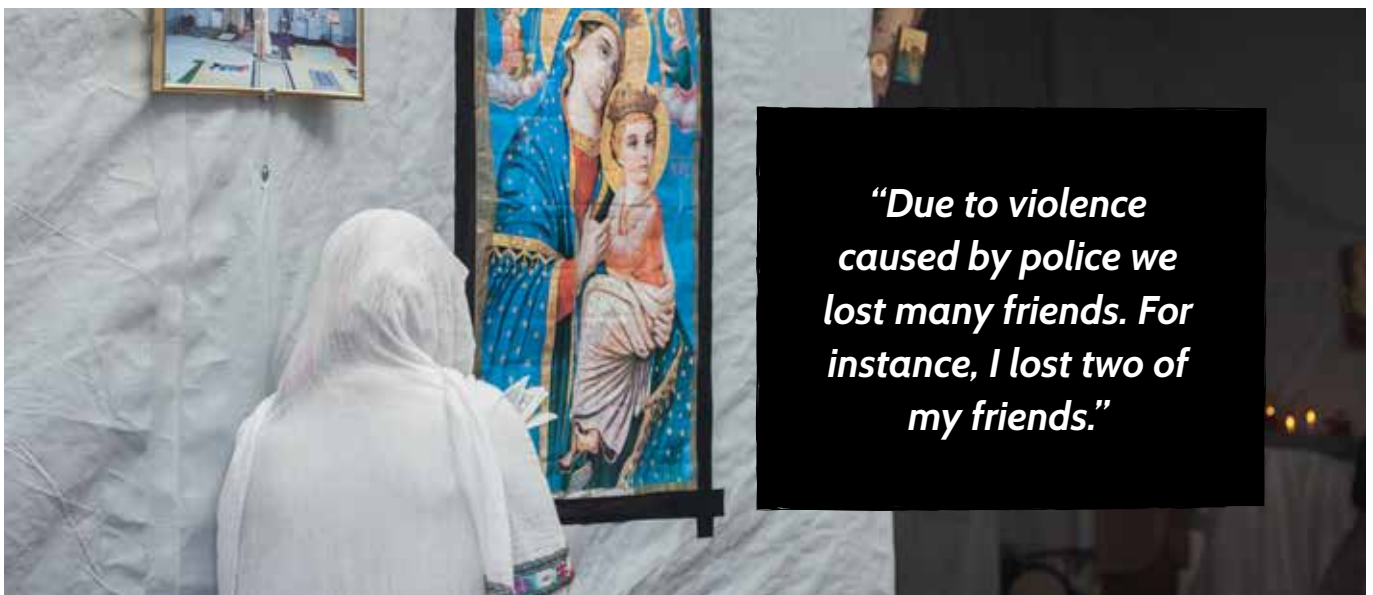


The women also witnessed violence inflicted on other refugees and displaced people in Calais. When asked to describe this violence, one respondent told us she had seen the police break her friend's neck.

WHEN DID YOU EXPERIENCE POLICE VIOLENCE?



Another woman witnessed the police break a man's ribs. Yet another said she feels scared after seeing her brother being badly beaten badly with an iron bar by police, across his arms and back.



“Due to violence caused by police we lost many friends. For instance, I lost two of my friends.”

TEAR GAS

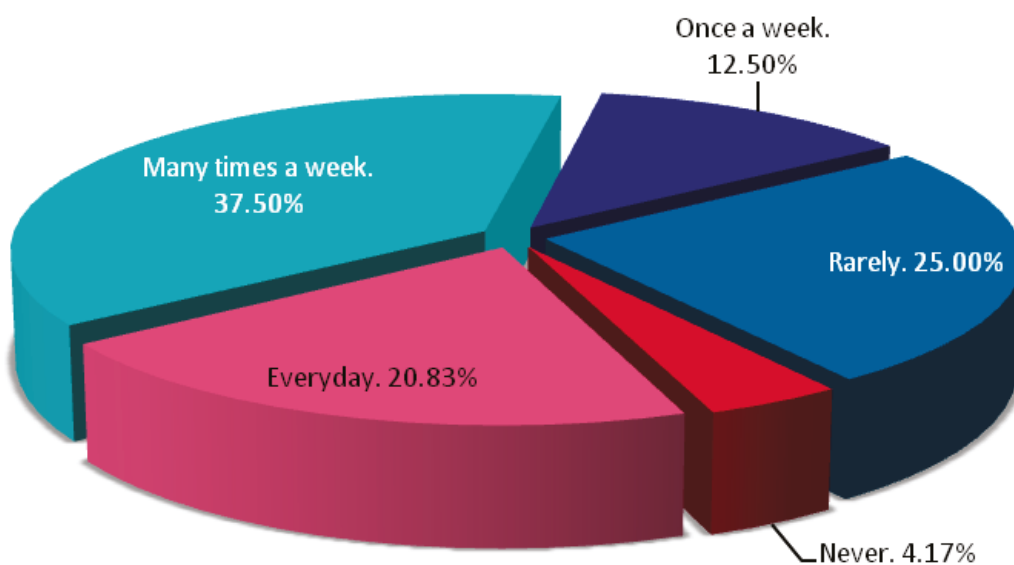
In total, 58.3% of female respondents had been exposed to tear gas “every day” or “several times a week”. If misused, tear gas can be life threatening - causing severe illness and even death. Tear gas is misused in the following contexts: in a confined space; in excessive amounts; when not necessary or proportionate; against those with

compromised health; and in any use which any use which could constitute ill-treatment.⁵

The manner and systematic use of tear gas in Calais raises serious concerns, and has numerous health implications. One woman explained that she had suffered a miscarriage due to the effects

of tear gas. Another reported that she had been “singled out” by police, before having tear gas was sprayed directly into her face.

HAVE YOU BEEN EXPOSED TO TEAR GAS? IF SO, HOW OFTEN?



⁵ http://www.civicmedia.io/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/USE-OF-TEAR-GAS-ON-PEACEFUL-PROTESTERS-BY-COUNCIL-OF-EUROPE-MEMBER-STATES_final.pdf

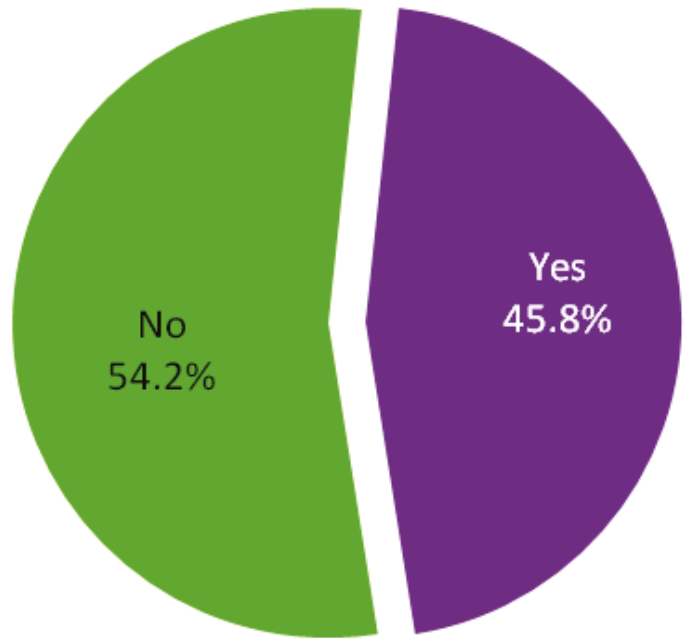
CITIZEN VIOLENCE

While police violence is very common, women are also subjected to various other types of abuse in Calais.

In total, 45.8% of women reported experiencing violence by non-police citizens. For some (22.2%), this took the form of physical violence. As one respondent told us, "they throw glass bottles and other stuff at us."

However, verbal abuse from citizens is also a widespread problem, suffered by 40.7% of women respondents. Some reported receiving "racist" abuse, while one resident told us she had been verbally abused and told to get off a bus in town because she was a refugee. Others said they had experienced sexual harassment by citizens. According to one respondent, "Every man here looks at a woman very hard especially alone woman. Me, I'm alone, and it's natural for them."

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE BY CITIZENS?



"They have shouted at me that they hate black people."



VIOLENCE INSIDE THE CAMP

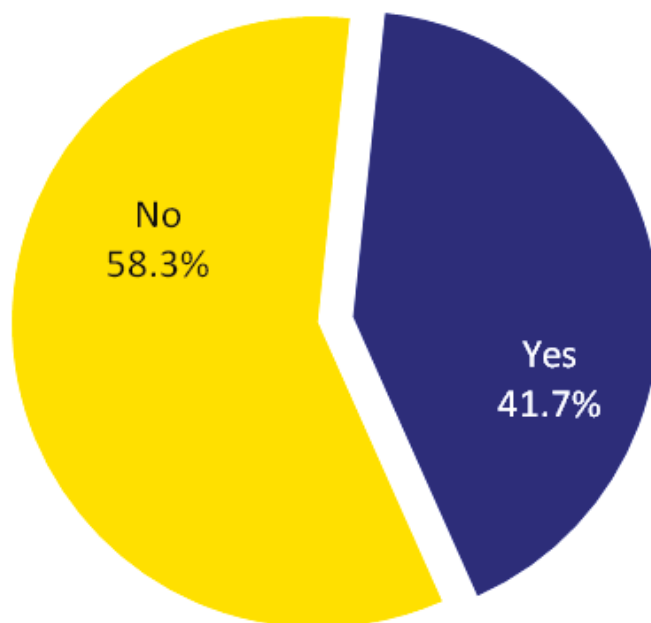
A significant number of women, 41.7% of respondents, had experienced gender-based violence inside the camp – this includes some reported instances of sexual violence and harassment.

One woman recalled that she was grabbed by a group of men who pulled her by the hair, as one told her “*you will come with me.*”

The presence of people smugglers drew particular safety concerns from female respondents. Across Europe, smugglers are known to target women who travel alone, and typically try to coerce women who lack financial resources into having sex⁶ (sometimes referred to as ‘transactional sex’⁷). By the same token, in Calais, a number of women cited incidents of violence, including sexual violence, perpetrated by traffickers. Worryingly, one woman surveyed disclosed that she had been forced to enter into sexual relations with a smuggler on more than one occasion.

These problems have serious consequences for the living conditions of women living in the camp, many of whom are afraid to leave their homes. One woman reported that she never leaves her caravan due to fears of violence.

HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE INSIDE THE CAMP?



“I have been verbally abused when we form the queue to get assistance or stuff that I need.”

⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/female-refugees-face-physical-assault-exploitation-and-sexual-harassment-on-their-journey-through-europe>

⁷ <http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/asylum-migration-borders/overviews/focus-gender-based-violence>

INADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS AND SANITATION FACILITIES

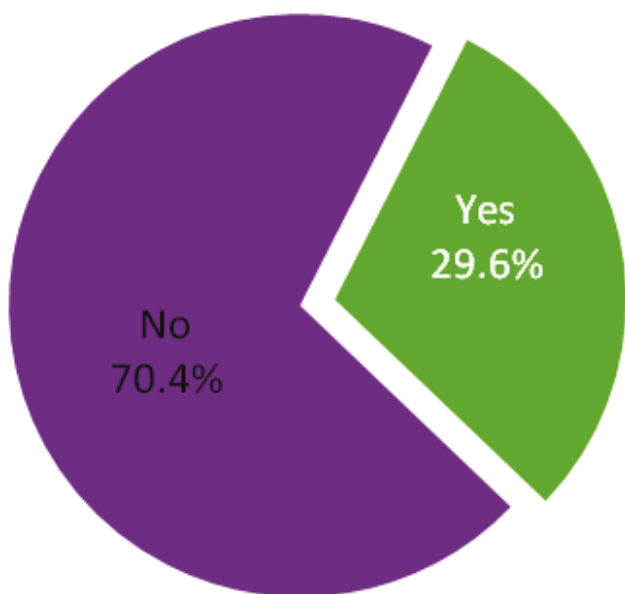
Efforts to prevent gender-based violence in the context of displacement generally include housing measures such as separate and secure accommodation for single women, separate sanitary facilities, and security measures such as the presence of specially-trained⁸ staff.

In the Calais camp, none of these measures are present, and the inadequate living conditions cause particular problems for its female inhabitants.

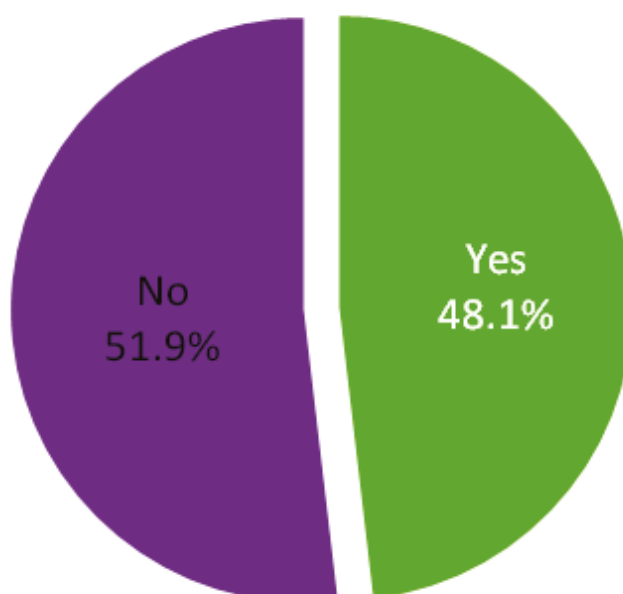
Importantly, accommodation in the Calais camp fails to fulfil basic needs. Almost two thirds of women surveyed in the camp, 69.2%, said their shelter leaks water when it rains, and only 29.6% had their own bed to sleep in. Worryingly, more than half of the women surveyed, 51.9%, revealed they did not have a secure lock on their shelter – a major factor contributing to them feeling unsafe inside the camp⁹.



DO YOU HAVE YOUR OWN BED?



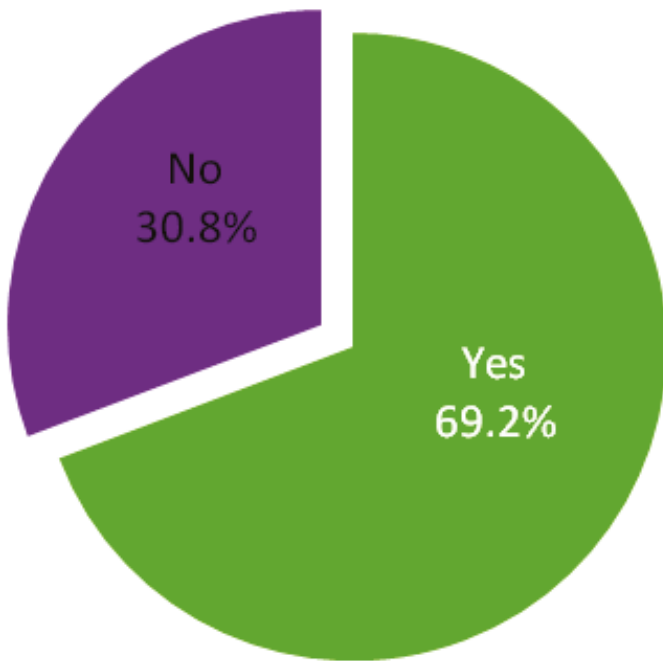
DO YOU HAVE A SECURE LOCK ON YOUR SHELTER?



⁸ <http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/asylum-migration-borders/overviews/focus-gender-based-violence>

⁹ However, following the research study, we have been made aware of the provision of reinforced huts with solid walls for some women, which ought to help increase the sense of security in the shelter.

DOES YOUR SHELTER LET IN WATER WHEN IT RAINS?

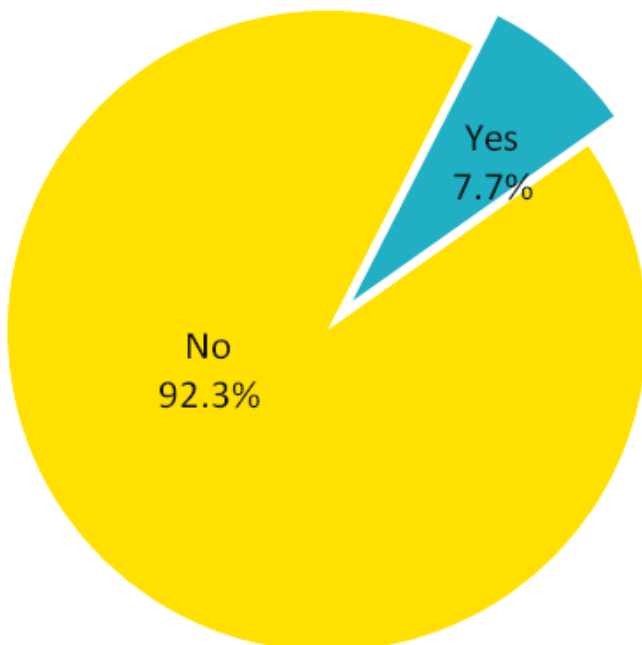


Inability to access private and safe sanitation facilities increases women's risk of sexual abuse within refugee camps and settlements worldwide. This absence also contributes to the spread of health problems and disease¹⁰. It is common for refugee camps to have too few bathrooms, which are often not secure and used by both men and women. As a result, bathroom facilities risk becoming dangerous spaces, where women and girls may be at risk of sexual violence or harassment. As a result, women residing in refugee

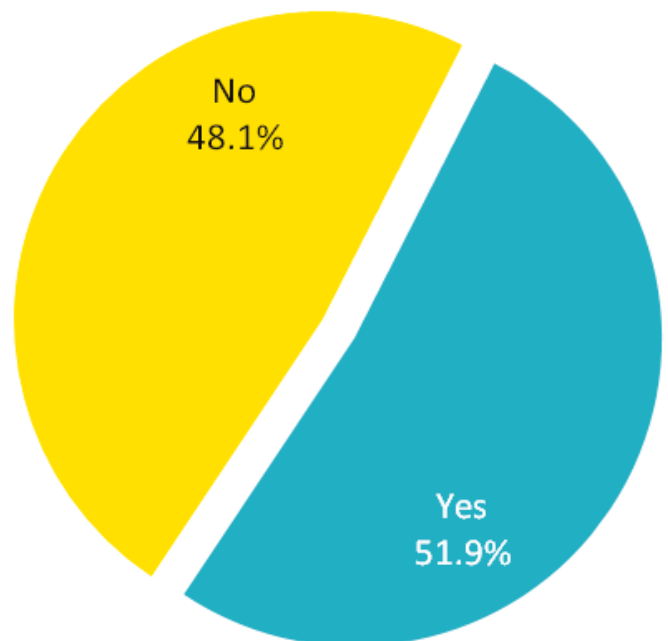
camps may avoid food or drink so that they don't have to use bathrooms at night, when they would be most at risk of such violations¹¹.

This is the case also in the Calais camp, where several respondents raised concerns about the sanitation facilities. The vast majority of women respondents described the toilets as "very dirty", and 92.3% reported that they were not able to shower anytime they wanted – mainly due to overcrowding and security concerns.

CAN YOU HAVE A SHOWER ANY TIME YOU WANT?



DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH WATER TO SHOWER AND WASH YOURSELF?

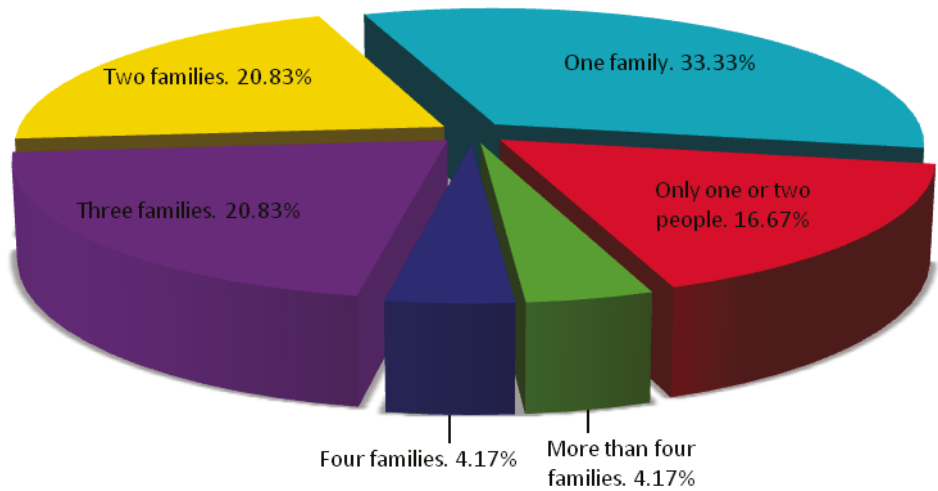


¹⁰ <http://qz.com/692711/the-radically-simple-way-to-make-female-refugees-safer-from-sexual-assault-decent-bathrooms>

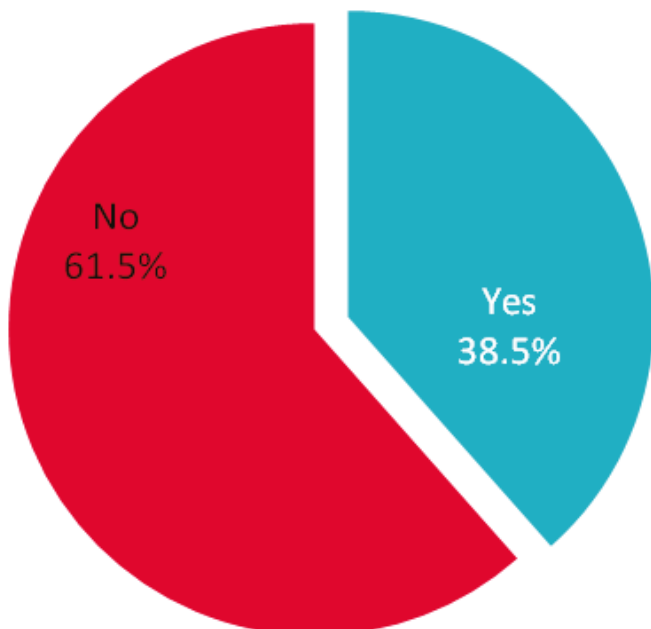
¹¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/female-refugees-face-physical-assault-exploitation-and-sexual-harassment-on-their-journey-through-europe>

HOW MANY FAMILIES LIVE TOGETHER IN YOUR SHELTER?

As regards the right to family life, many women reported that they do not have a private space for their family to reside in. Some 20.8% of respondents said there are two families living in their shelter. Another 20.8% reported living with three families, while 4.2% share with four families, and another 4.2% reside with more than four family groups.



DO YOU THINK THERE IS ENOUGH FOOD?



Three quarters of women surveyed, 74.1%, said they have access to food every day. However, 61.5% felt that they do not have enough to eat. Some women told us that experiences of harassment in distribution queues deterred them from returning to claim food in future.

LACK OF ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Access to reproductive healthcare is among the fundamental rights of women and girls.

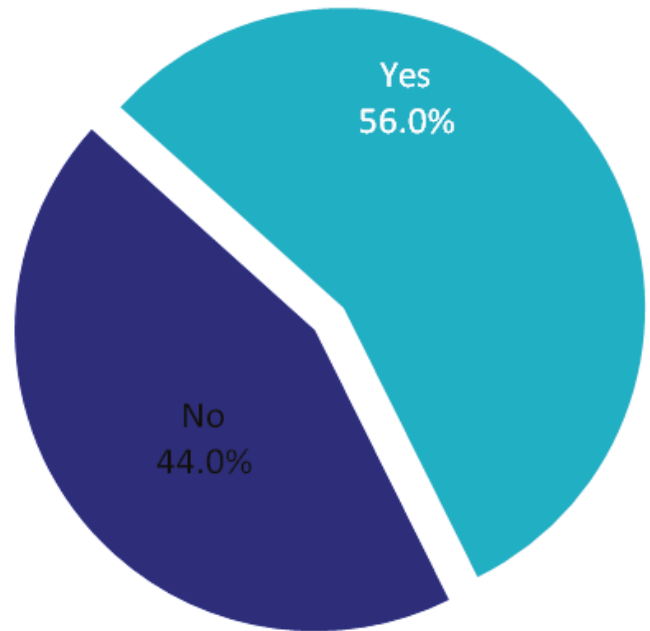
However, in crisis situations and during times of displacement, this is often not prioritised or made available. A lack of adequate reproductive healthcare may have detrimental effects on women and girls including disease, disability, complications during childbirth, or even death.

In Calais, some 56% of women had experienced health problems since arriving in the camp, including sexual or reproductive health concerns. Others cited suffering from eczema, stress-related health issues, and tooth infections. On average, each of our respondents had experienced health problems 3.9 times since arriving in Calais - some of which were long-term issues ongoing at the time of the interview.

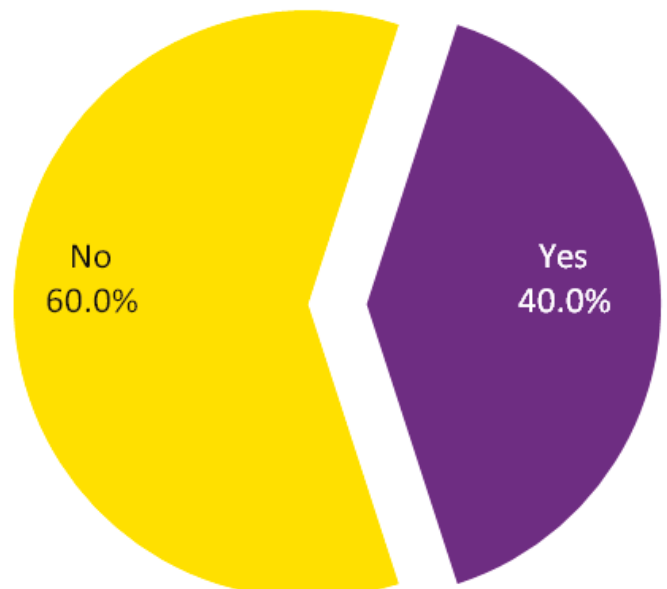
"I lost my unborn child and this is the reason I feel bad."

It is worrying that 60% of women in the Calais camp did not know where they could go for medical advice should they become pregnant. Meanwhile, the situation for pregnant women is particularly precarious. One respondent reported that she lost her unborn child due to the detrimental effects of tear gas exposure. Another told us that a woman in the camp had "given birth in the back of a truck". These findings suggest that the maternal health of women in the camp is being seriously undermined.

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THE CAMP?



DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU WOULD GO FOR HEALTHCARE AND ADVICE IF PREGNANT?



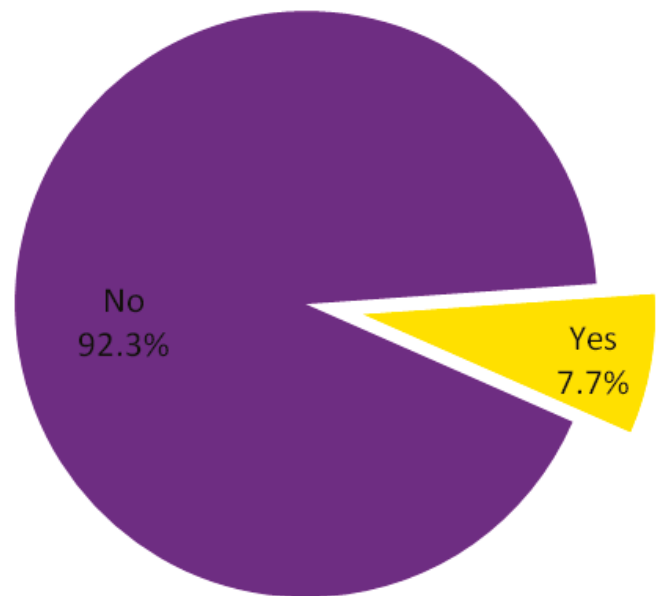
LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

While many women in the Calais camp have some schooling or a university degree, a lack of education opportunities is a major issue for women in the settlement.

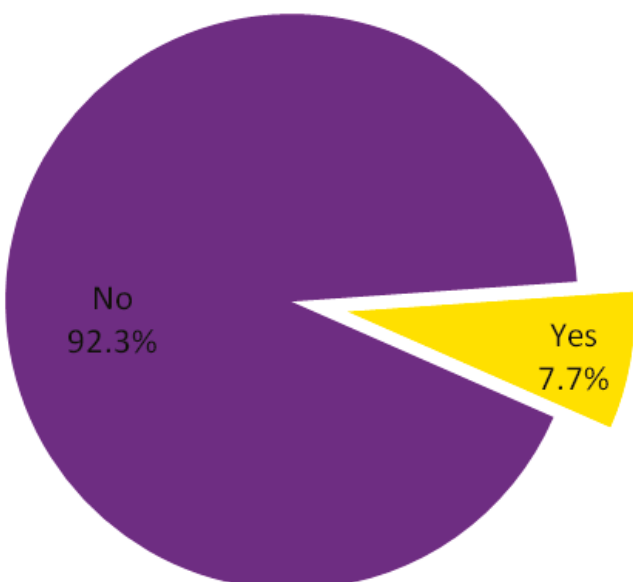
An alarming 92.3% said they did not have the chance to access any form of education - significantly higher than the figure of 77.3% for the camp's total population.

The same is also true of access to information. Some 92.3% of women claimed they did not have access to advice about their rights and opportunities to change their situation. This compares to 79.3% for everyone living in the camp. Meanwhile, just 88% had any information about European immigration rules, compared to 74.3% of the camp's total population.

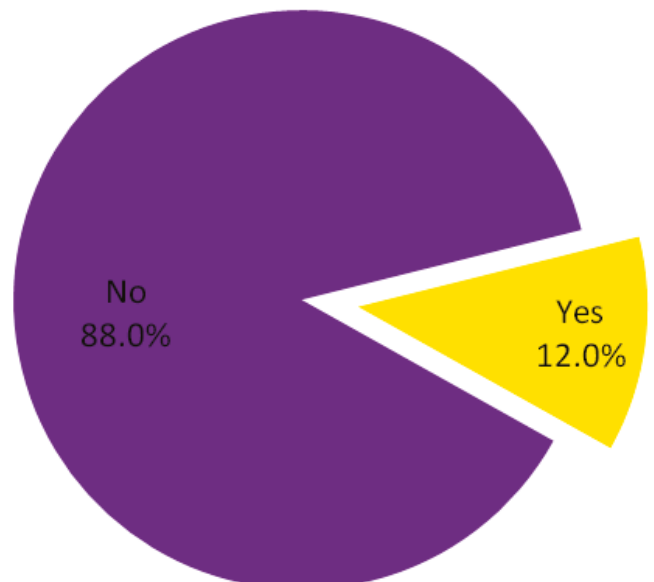
DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO ANY FORM OF EDUCATION?



DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO CHANGE YOUR SITUATION?



DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT EUROPEAN ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION RULES?

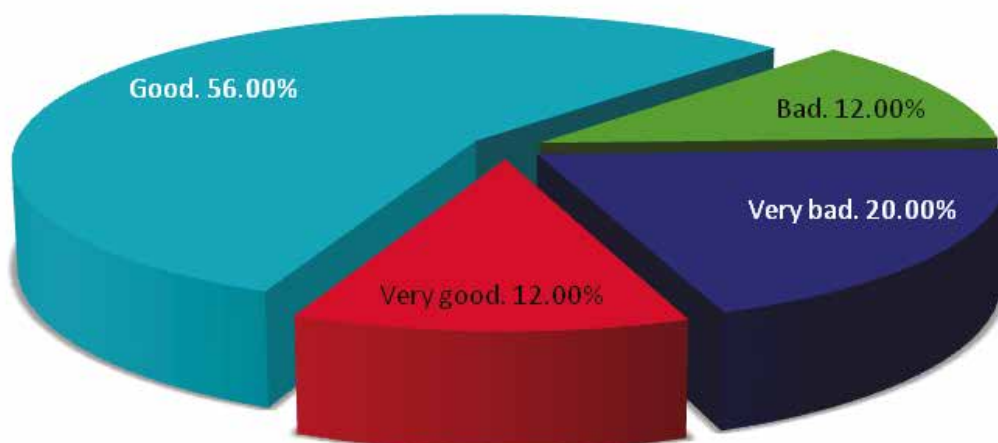


ASPIRATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS



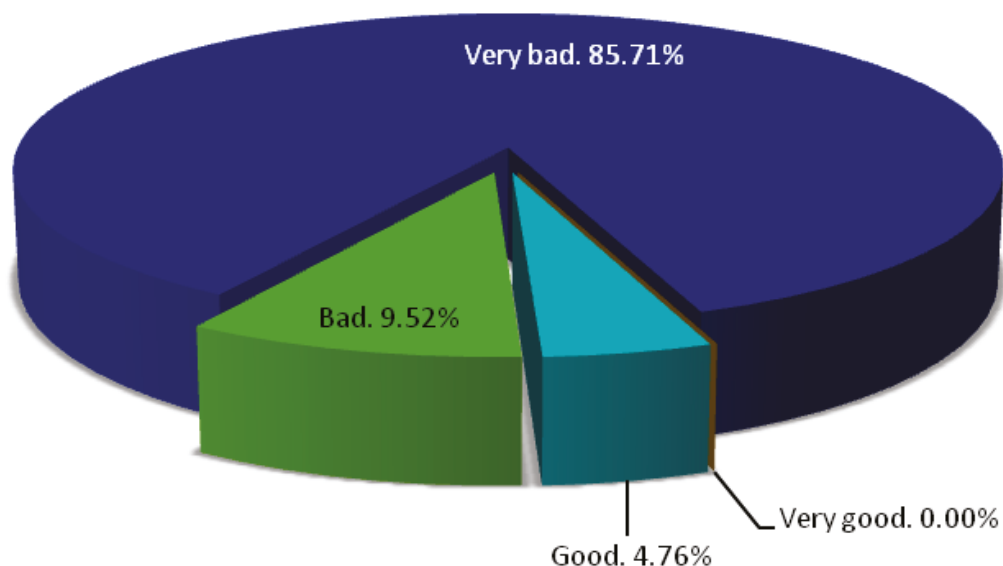
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SPOKEN ENGLISH?

When asked about their aspirations and future plans, all of the women surveyed said they were hoping to reach the UK.



HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SPOKEN FRENCH?

More than a quarter, 26%, wish to live in the UK because of their language skills. Some 68% claimed they speak "very good" or "good" English, compared to just 4.7% who have the same level of proficiency in French.





Meanwhile, 21% of women said they wish to seek asylum in the UK because they have family members there, while 15% said they have friends in the UK. In total, 3% think they have a better chance at being granted asylum in the UK than any other European country.

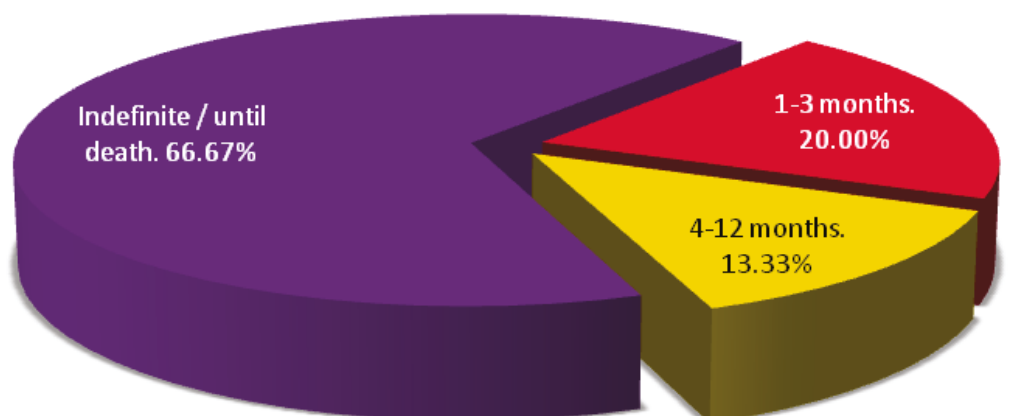
Others told us they wanted to reach the UK because they would find *“safety”, “democracy”, “women’s rights”* and *“freedom”*. One respondent said there is *“more humanity”* in the UK than

elsewhere. In contrast, 57% of the women said they would not consider applying for asylum in France because the country, or their treatment by French people, is not good.

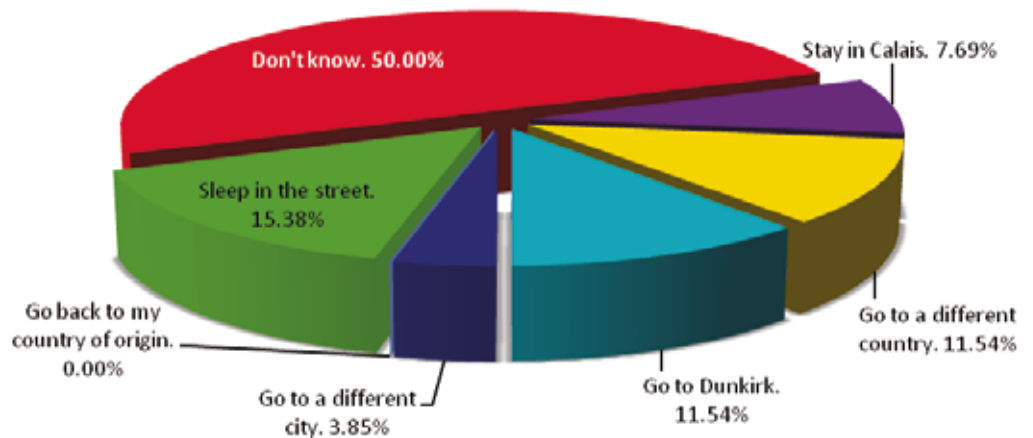
Perhaps surprisingly, 95.83% of women respondents said they think they have *“little chance”* or *“no chance”* of reaching the UK. Nonetheless, 67% said that they would wait in Calais either *“forever”, “until death”* or *“as long as it takes”* for them to reach this goal.

HOW LONG ARE YOU PREPARED TO WAIT TO REACH THE UK?

Half of the women asked said that they *“don’t know”* what they will do if the Calais camp disappears. A further 23.07% said they will sleep in the street or stay in Calais, while 11.54% said they would relocate to the camp in Dunkirk. Only 15.37% said they would move to a different city or country.

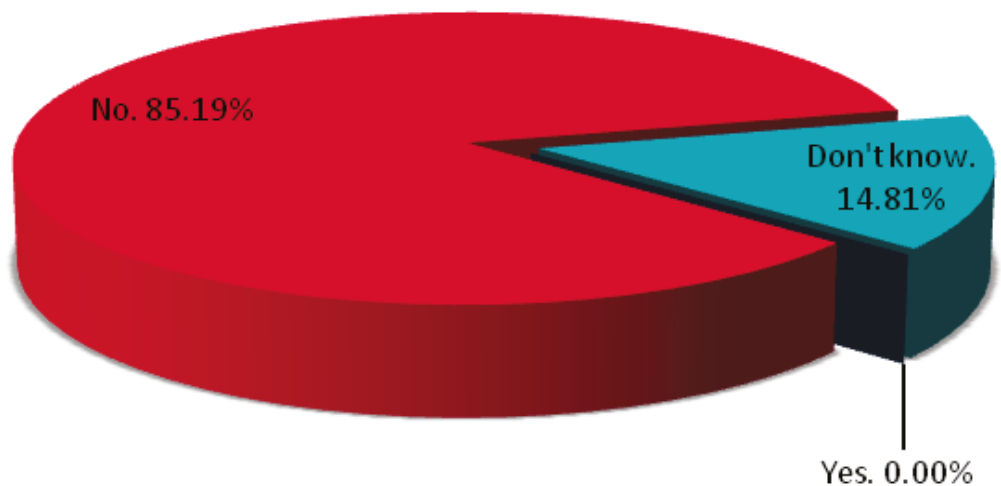


IF THIS CAMP DISAPPEARS ONE DAY, WHAT WILL YOU DO?



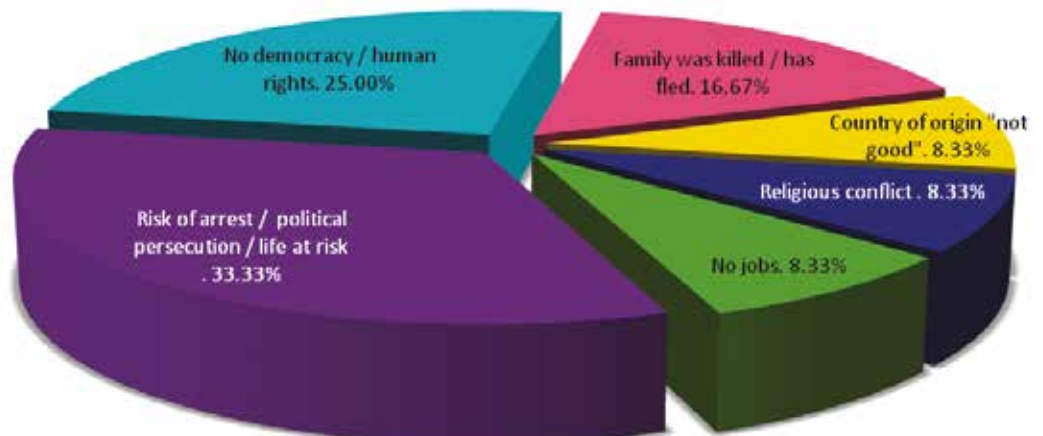
CAN YOU GO BACK TO YOUR COUNTRY?

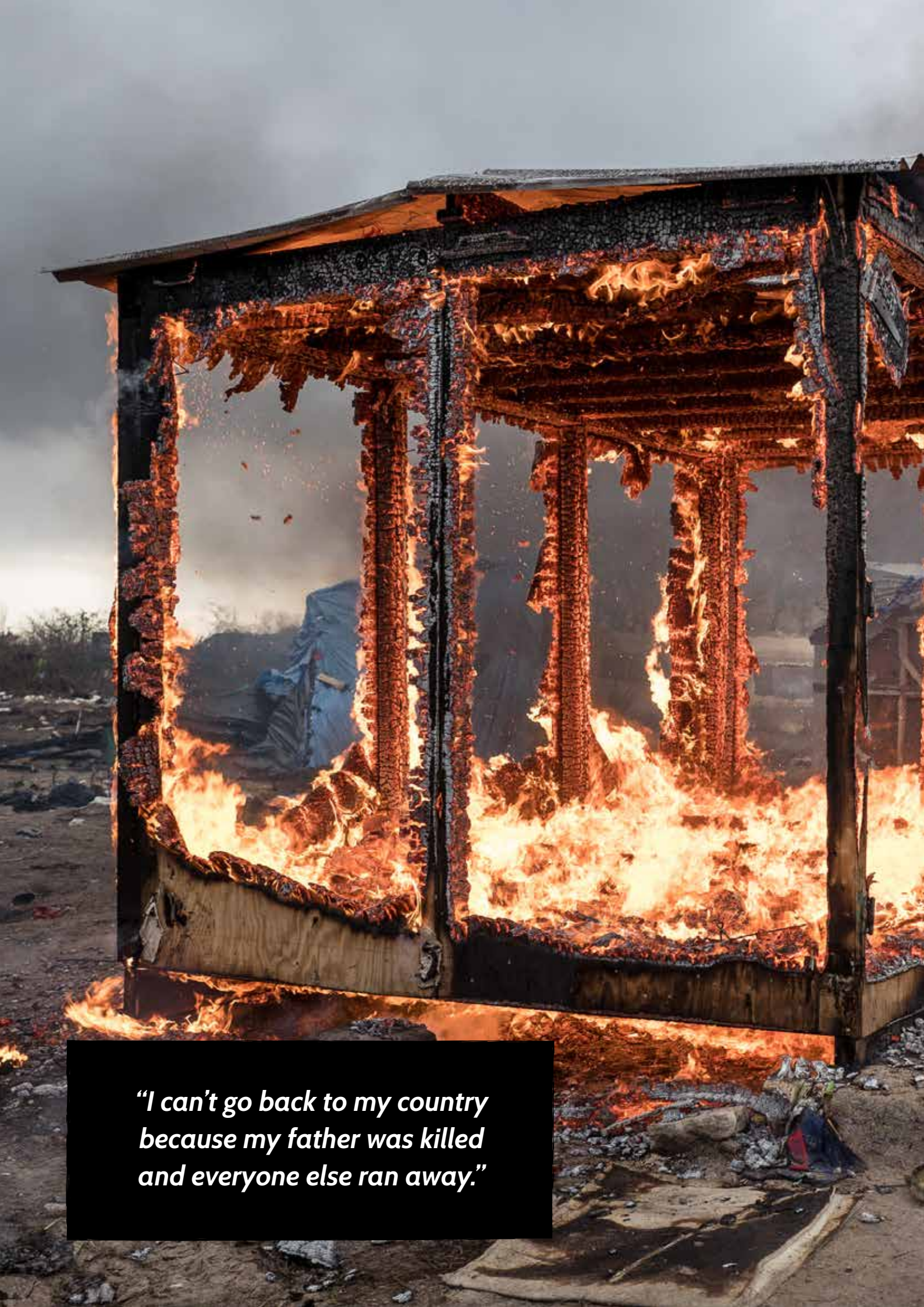
When asked if they could return back to their country of origin, 85.2% said that they cannot go back.



WHY CAN YOU NOT GO BACK TO YOUR COUNTRY?

They cited a variety of reasons – predominately because they were at risk of political persecution, or because their country has no democracy or human rights. 14.8% said they didn't know if they could return home.





***“I can’t go back to my country
because my father was killed
and everyone else ran away.”***

CONCLUSION

This first-hand data collection carried out in Calais sheds light on the specific adversities faced by the hundreds of women living in the camp.

These include gender-based violence, a lack of access to adequate healthcare, and an absence of safety and security.

When we conducted our research in February 2016, fewer than 4% of the camp's residents were women and girls (according to a recent census conducted by Help Refugees). The relatively small numbers mean that these females remain largely unheard and invisible, and therefore particularly vulnerable.

Some 73% of women said they felt unsafe in the Calais camp, reporting instances of harassment, threats and violence with alarming frequency. The research found that women are deeply concerned about facing sexual exploitation, particularly at the hands of people smugglers. Given these risks, it is worrying that the majority of women were not able to lock their shelter securely at night.

Women in Calais face violence both inside and outside the camp's boundaries. Some 81.5% of those surveyed said they had been exposed to police violence, 45.8% to citizen violence, and 41.7% to various forms of violence within the camp.

Access to reproductive healthcare is another fundamental right of all women and girls.

However, during times of displacement and in crisis situations it can be extremely difficult to tend to these needs. In total, 60% of the women we spoke to in Calais said they did not know where they could turn to for medical advice should they become pregnant. Meanwhile, 56% experienced health problems in the camp.

While safety, security and wellbeing are severely lacking for women in Calais, it is equally concerning that the majority of them lack education and guidance on how to break out of this detrimental situation. Only a very small minority of women in the camp have access to information about European asylum rules, and even fewer to information about their rights.

These figures are alarming, and need to be addressed. Women in Calais are subject to an absence of adequate services, advice and information, and risk becoming trapped in a harmful cycle of violence and poverty. This data highlights the urgent need for firm, efficient and gender-sensitive policy action which will protect women and girls from psychological and physical harm.



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