

SAINT DENIS : WE WHO SLEEP UNDER YOUR BRIDGES

We are more than 1,500 people living in unspeakable conditions under the bridges and overpasses in Saint-Denis. On October 17th, many of us joined the National March of undocumented immigrants demanding residency permits and housing for everyone. Today, we are writing to raise awareness of our plight. We are appealing to the French authorities to stop trampling on our rights, to finally treat us as human beings. We are also appealing to the people of France, and especially those of Ile-de-France :

We need you to join us in our struggle if we are to be heard !



WE WANT UNCONDITIONAL SHELTERING, NOW !

The police have chased us out of Paris. We are forced to live under roads and highways in Saint-Denis, where we are hidden from view. It is impossible to describe to you how inhumane our living conditions are. In the camp, there's no food there are no showers. Toilets were finally installed just a few days ago. We had been asking for them for months. There are only 10 for more than 1,500 people. We are cold and most of us do not have warm clothes. Many of us don't have the welfare benefits OFII (French Office for Immigration and Integration) should pay to asylum seekers. So, to survive, some of us have to work illegally. Without income and without work permits, we have no other choice. We would like the legal right to work. During the day, we build your roads, we construct your homes, in restaurants we wash your dishes, we distribute the publicity you find in your mailboxes... and at night, we sleep under your bridges and overpasses.

People are very ill

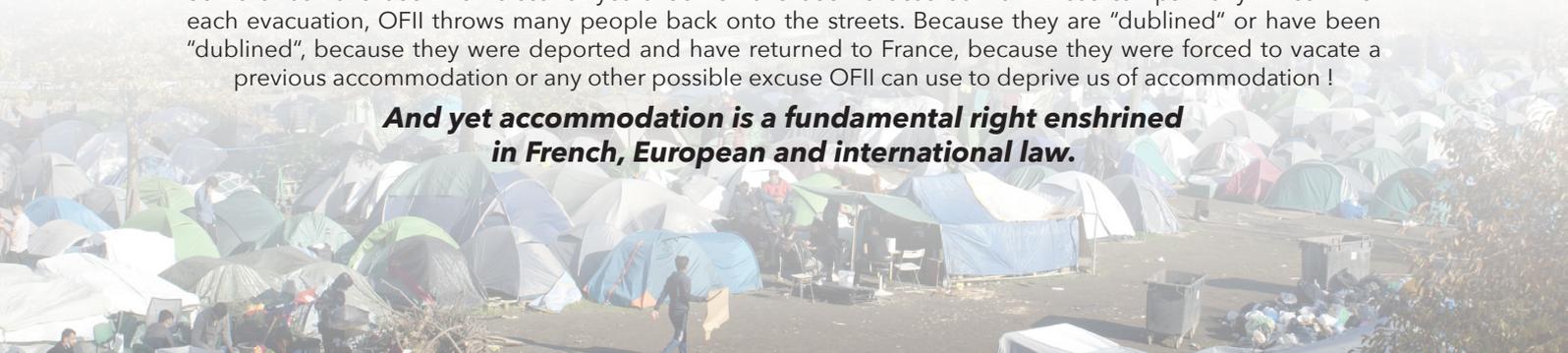
A fortnight ago, electricity to the camp was cut off. There is no longer lighting at night and no way to recharge our phones. Yet we have to try to call OFII every day (although they never answer) in an attempt to apply for asylum and try to call the 115 (although they never answer) in the hope of finding accommodation. Due to the pandemic, all administrative procedures are over the telephone or by internet.

By cutting off the electricity, we have been denied access to some of our most basic rights.

We are desperately waiting for the camp to be evacuated and for those who live there to be housed. The last evacuation was more than seven months ago and we don't know how much longer we are going to have to wait for the next one. Living on the streets destroys people. Here, many are losing hope and sinking into depression. Some people are very ill with serious medical conditions. As the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic hits France hard, it is criminal not to protect us. Denying us housing is tantamount to refusing assistance to a person in danger.

Some of us have been homeless for years. Some have been evacuated from these camps many times. After each evacuation, OFII throws many people back onto the streets. Because they are "dublined" or have been "dublined", because they were deported and have returned to France, because they were forced to vacate a previous accommodation or any other possible excuse OFII can use to deprive us of accommodation !

And yet accommodation is a fundamental right enshrined in French, European and international law.



***We are not animals, we have the right to humane decent living conditions!
We are demanding that the Prefecture and OFII provide immediate unconditional
housing for all the people living in this squatter camp.***

Violation of the right to asylum

Many of us here are victims of the Dublin Regulation. Because of this totally absurd European regulation, we do not have the right to apply for asylum in France. Under the guise of Dublin, OFII withdraws our allowance and our right to accommodation as asylum seekers. How can people be deprived of fundamental rights such as resources and housing ? Thanks to the Dublin regulation, we can be arrested, imprisoned and deported.

***How can you imprison us when our only crime is to want to apply for asylum in France ?
How can you deport us without even considering our asylum application ?***



The Dublin regulation is a violation of the right to asylum. It is a ridiculous system that condemns us to endless misery and destroys our lives. The individual European governments as well as the European Union want it repealed.

We are demanding that the French government stop implementing the Dublin regulation.

We have fled our country because our lives were in danger. We have escaped war, terrorism or persecution for political opinions, sexual orientation or other reasons. We are going now to have to wait years to be granted asylum. OFPRA and the CNDA are refusing more and more asylum applications while the situation in our home countries continues to deteriorate.

We simply want a chance to live in peace. We want the right to live in France.

We understand this government is trying to discourage us, to destroy our will to stay in France. However, we have nowhere else to go and nothing left to lose. So we are staying here. Staying and fighting for our rights !

Refugees from the Saint-Denis camp

with the support of the Gisti, Paris d'Exil and Solidarité Migrants Wilson

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