

France: Migrant Crisis Spirals Out of Control

by **Soeren Kern**

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Translations of this item:

- Arabic
- Portuguese
- Danish
- Spanish
- German
- Swedish
- Italian

- French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb described the level of violence in Calais as "unprecedented." He attributed the fighting to an escalating turf war between Afghan and Kurdish gangs seeking to gain control over human trafficking between Calais and Britain, which many migrants view as "El Dorado" because of its massive underground economy.
- During his visit to Calais, Macron outlined his government's new immigration policy: food and shelter for those entitled to remain in France, and deportation of those in the country illegally.
- "Emmanuel Macron did it. Never before has a president of the Republic fallen into unpopularity so fast and then become popular again." — *Paris Match*.

Hundreds of Africans and Asians armed with knives and iron rods fought running street battles in the northern port city of Calais on February 1, less than two weeks after French President Emmanuel Macron visited the area and pledged to crack down on illegal immigration.

The clashes plunged Calais — emblematic of Europe's failure to control mass migration — into a war zone and reinforced the perception that French authorities have lost control of the country's security situation.

The mass brawls, **fought** in at least three different parts of Calais, erupted after a 37-year-old Afghan migrant running a human trafficking operation fired gunshots at a

group of Africans who did not have money to pay for his services. Five Africans suffered life-threatening injuries.

Within an hour, hundreds of Eritreans, Ethiopians and Sudanese took to the streets of Calais and attacked any Afghans they could find. More than a thousand police officers using batons and tear gas were deployed to restore order. Two dozen migrants were hospitalized.

French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb **described** the level of violence in Calais as "unprecedented." He attributed the fighting to an escalating turf war between Afghan and Kurdish gangs seeking to gain control over human trafficking between Calais and Britain, which many migrants view as "El Dorado" **because** of its massive underground economy. Each day around 40 ferries depart Calais for Britain.

Vincent de Coninck, director of the charity Secours Catholique du Pas-de-Calais, **said** that rival gangs were trying to secure control over access to the port of Calais in order to induce payments of €2,500 (\$3,100) from migrants seeking to stow away on trucks crossing the English Channel.

De Coninck **added** that the situation in Calais had deteriorated since January 18, when Macron and British Prime Minister Theresa May signed the so-called **Sandhurst Treaty**, in which May pledged to speed-up the processing of migrants hoping to travel to Britain from Calais.

According to de Coninck, Macron and May failed adequately to explain the contents of the new treaty. This failure, he said, had created false hopes among migrants from Africa and elsewhere that the treaty would improve their chances of reaching Britain. De Coninck further **said** that hundreds of new migrants had arrived in Calais during the two weeks since the treaty was signed. The surge of new arrivals, he said, had created an "imbalance" between Africans and Asians — thereby increasing inter-ethnic tensions.

François Guennoc, vice-president of the Calais charity L'Auberge des Migrants, **echoed** the view that the new treaty had created false expectations. "It gave people hope to reach England," he said.

"People arrived suddenly, about 200, mainly underage people and women who arrived in Calais because they thought that the Home Office said they

could go directly to England. Then they thought the Home Office was lying. People were upset. It was crazy."

Europe's migration crisis has emerged as the first major test facing President Macron, who appears to be seeking out a middle-ground compromise position on the issue: he has promised to pursue "humanitarianism" by speeding up the processing of asylum requests while also pledging to pursue "firmness" by deporting those who do not qualify.

During the presidential campaign, Macron, who ran as a centrist, repudiated the anti-immigration positions of his opponent, Marine Le Pen. He campaigned on a platform of open borders and **promised** to establish France as "the new center for the humanist project." Since assuming office on May 14, 2017, however, Macron appears to have incorporated many of Le Pen's ideas.

In an essay published by *Le Monde* on January 2, 2017, Macron **wrote** that German Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to allow in more than a million migrants from Africa, Asia and the Middle East had "saved the collective dignity" of the European people. He added that he would not tolerate the "rebuilding of walls in Europe" and criticized the "abject simplifications" made by those who say that "by opening the borders to migrants, the chancellor exposed Europe to severe dangers."

On July 27, 2017, however, after less than three months in office, Macron **warned** that 800,000 migrants in Libya were on their way to Europe. He announced a plan to establish immigration centers in Libya to vet asylum seekers there. He said his plan would stem the flow of migrants to Europe by discouraging economic migrants from embarking on the Mediterranean crossing to Europe. "The idea is to create hotspots to avoid people taking crazy risks when they're not all eligible for asylum," Macron said. "We'll go to them."

In that same speech, though, Macron appeared to encourage migrants to make their way to France. He **pledged** housing for all newcomers "everywhere in France" and "from the first minute." He added: "By the end of this year, I do not want to have any men and women living on the streets, in the woods. I want emergency accommodations everywhere."

On August 8, 2017, the French Interior Ministry **reported** that more than 17,000 migrants attempted to board UK-bound trucks and trains at the port and Eurotunnel in Calais during the first seven months of 2017. The figures showed that the closure of "The Jungle" in October 2016 had failed to deter migrants in Calais from reaching Britain.



Pictured: Migrants at "The Jungle" migrant camp in Calais, France on October 28, 2016, shortly before the camp was closed by French authorities. (Photo by Christopher Furlong/Getty Images)

In September 2017, the French government asked the European Union for permission to maintain border controls within the passport-free Schengen zone for as long as four years due to the continuing threat of Islamic terrorism, **according** to a classified document leaked to *The Guardian*. On October 3, France extended border controls for another six-month period, to April 30, 2018.

On October 15, two weeks after a Tunisian migrant stabbed to death two women in Marseille, Macron **pledged** to deport any migrant who commits a crime. "We will take the most severe measures, we will do what we must do," Macron said. "We are not taking all the steps that should be taken. Well, that is going to change." Analysts **said** that nuances in French law would make the pledge impossible to implement.

On November 20, in a circular leaked to the press, Interior Minister Gerard Collomb **ordered** prefects, representatives of the state in each of the 96 departments in mainland France, to deport all failed asylum seekers. He also ordered them to submit a report, by the end of February 2018, that would provide

"details about the fight against irregular immigration in your department in 2017, and your plan for the implementation of these instructions in the coming months. (...) The fight against irregular immigration is the responsibility of each prefect of each department. It is necessary to act quickly."

The leak of the so-called Collomb Circular **marked** the beginning of an organized resistance movement among French political and media elites to Macron's migration policies. In an open letter published by *Le Monde*, for instance, a group of intellectuals and trade unionists, many of whom had supported Macron during the presidential campaign, **criticized** his migration policy: "Mr. Macron, your policy contradicts the humanism you advocate!"

On December 4, in an interview with RTL, Interior Minister Collomb **said** the government was working on a reform of migration policy. "There are 95,000 asylum applications a year, that is, a big city every year. If we welcomed everyone, we could not do it in good conditions. We have decided to welcome those who are refugees from theaters of war, who are political prisoners, but at the same time to try to pursue a policy that allows economic migration to be carried out in other ways."

On December 12, Interior Minister Collomb **ordered** regional authorities to establish "mobile teams" to force undocumented migrants out of emergency shelters. The measure **produced** a strong backlash from charities, which said the shelters are sacrosanct.

On January 9, 2018, the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons **reported** that in 2017, more than 100,000 people had requested asylum in France, a "historic" number and an increase of 17% compared to 2016.

On January 14, Interior Minister Collomb **announced** a plan to establish 400 detention centers to deport economic migrants in the country illegally. "Refugees are welcome, economic migrants are not," he said.

On January 16, during his visit to Calais, Macron **outlined** his government's new immigration policy: food and shelter for those entitled to remain in France, and deportation of those in the country illegally.

On January 18, Macron traveled to Britain, where **signed** the Sandhurst Treaty, which reduces the processing time for migrants hoping to travel to Britain from Calais from six months to one month for adults, and 25 days for children. The new treaty, far from solving the migrant crisis, appears to be exacerbating it.

In an analysis published by *Paris Match*, pollsters Chloé Morin and Marie Gariazzo **said** that conflicting voter reactions to the "Macron method" of compromise on migration policy "reflects the contradictions of his electorate":

"Quantitative studies indicate, a priori, that a clear majority of French voters support a more restrictive migration policy.... The heart of the government's policy...guarantees the inviolability of the right to asylum while challenging the country's ability to welcome all the world's misery....

"It is not certain that the Macronian gamble — finding a balance between firmness and humanity — is a long-term winner. Emmanuel Macron appears at this stage to be supported by his base. But we find among them an expectation of firmness ('we must not be overwhelmed,' 'laxity would have negative consequences for our country') as well as one of humanity ('we must help those fleeing wars and persecutions,' 'It is morally indisputable to welcome foreigners in emergency, distress')

"This discourse is thus systematically caught between those on the one hand who — often on the right, but sometimes even in the heart of the Macronian base — judge his policy as too 'lax,' and on the other hand, those who are indignant over its firmness

"It is very likely that a large part of those at the center of the political spectrum, particularly in the center-left, will accept the government's narrative and subscribe little-by-little to the logic of 'selective immigration.' Thus, the official discourse could contribute in the long term to a shift of the 'moderate' population on the subject of migration from one of humanity towards one of firmness."

Macron's popularity ratings have experienced an "unprecedented" rebound since he pursued a harder line on immigration, **according** to the French pollsters Ifop. His job approval rating jumped by 10 percentage points since October to 52%. Previously, Macron's popularity rating registered the biggest decline for a new president since 1995.

"Emmanuel Macron did it," *Paris Match* **reported**. "Never before has a president of the Republic fallen into unpopularity so fast and then become popular again."

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Appendix: A Brief History of the Migrant Crisis in Calais

Migrants from across the developing world view Britain as "El Dorado" because of its massive underground economy, which totaled approximately £223 billion (€250 billion; \$311 billion) in 2016, or 11.5% of GDP, **according** to the International Monetary Fund.

In addition, the **Identity Documents Act 2010**, which entered into effect January 2011, abolished national identity cards. The change, driven by civil liberties concerns over unnecessary data collection and intrusion by the state, allows illegal migrants in Britain to remain inconspicuous.

Moreover, unlike France, migrants from war-torn countries who reach Britain can easily apply for refugee status, which **provides** them with permission to reside in the United Kingdom for an initial period of five years — with the right to work and access welfare benefits. Lawful residence in the UK for a continuous period of five years qualifies an individual to apply for British citizenship.

This combination of factors has turned Britain into a magnet for migrants. More than 865,000 non-EU migrants were granted permission to live in Britain in 2016 — a rate of one every 36 seconds, **according** to Eurostat.

Migrants have been gathering in Calais, France's closest point to Britain, in large numbers ever since the Channel Tunnel linking France and Britain **opened** in May 1994, and the Schengen Agreement, which abolished border controls between France and most of its EU neighbors (but not the UK), **entered** into force in March 1995.

In 1999, the French government asked the Red Cross to build a migrant "reception center" in Sangatte, situated around ten kilometers west of Calais, to accommodate a growing number of migrants on the streets of Calais and surrounding areas. The Sangatte camp, which was housed in a giant warehouse near the entrance to the Channel Tunnel, had a capacity for 600 people.

Far from resolving the migrant problem in Calais, the Sangatte facility served as a magnet, quickly drawing thousands more people to the area. Within months, some 2,000 migrants were living in the camp in increasingly cramped conditions. Many of those staying at Sangatte tried to jump onto slow-moving trains at the entrance to the Channel Tunnel, or hide inside trucks crossing to Britain on ferries.

At the time, French authorities **reported** a massive increase in the number of arrests in or around the Channel Tunnel. In 1999, 8,000 people were arrested in Calais for immigration offenses. By 2001, that number had jumped ten-fold to 80,000 arrests. Eurotunnel, the company that manages and operates the Channel Tunnel, said that in 2001 alone, 54,000 people had "attacked" the terminal in Calais and 5,000 had gotten through. Many of those were living in Sangatte.

The Sangatte camp was closed in late 2002, after a series of riots between Afghan and Kurdish migrants. In all, some 67,000 migrants **stayed** at the facility during its three years in operation.

In February 2003, France and Britain signed the **Treaty of Le Touquet**, which allows for so-called juxtaposed controls, meaning that travelers between the two countries now clear immigration in the country of departure rather than upon arrival. In effect, the treaty pushed parts of the British border to France. By doing so, it exacerbated the migration bottleneck in Calais.

As part of the agreement to close Sangatte, Britain **took** in 1,200 migrants. Those who remained in France were sheltered in at least a dozen different squats both inside Calais and on its outskirts. These camps — Africa House, Fort Galloo, Leader Price/Sudanese Jungle or Tioxide Jungle — have been repeatedly raided or bulldozed by French police, only for other squats to crop up elsewhere.

Many of the migrants housed at Sangatte moved a few kilometers east to a disused industrial zone called "The Dunes." Situated just steps from the Port of Calais, the area

would eventually become known as "The Jungle."

On September 22, 2009, French police **bulldozed** "The Jungle" and rounded up hundreds of migrants hoping to stow away on trucks headed for Britain. A day later, Calais Mayor Natacha Bouchart **said** she had "spotted between fifteen and twenty new squats" nearby. She also reported that Afghan migrants were **establishing** makeshift camps at the Hoverport, an unused collection of buildings which closed in 2005 after the last hovercraft sailed from Dover to Calais.

September 12, 2014. Police in Calais **warned** that migrants were becoming increasingly violent in their quest to reach Britain. Gilles Debove, the Calais area delegate for the French police union, said tear gas was being used to stop "mass onslaughts" on vehicles about to cross the Channel:

"The other day, two to three hundred migrants tried to get into a lorry park and we fired tear gas to scatter them because there are too few of us to control situations like this any other way. We're also facing an increase in crimes by migrants who mug people, steal mobile phones and carry out sexual assaults."

November 11, 2015. More than 250 French riot police were **deployed** to "The Jungle" after weeks of unrest. Local government official Fabienne Buccio said the rise in violence was due to the frustration of migrants at being prevented from reaching Britain.

December 17, 2015. Around 1,000 migrants **stormed** the Channel Tunnel in a bid to reach Britain. Police, who used tear gas to disperse them, said the number seeking to cross the Channel in a single day was "unprecedented." Many of the migrants who were turned away moved back to "The Jungle" to try again.

January 19, 2016. French authorities **leveled** one-third of "The Jungle" to create a 100-meter "buffer zone" between the camp and an adjacent highway that leads to the ferry port.

February 7, 2016. The migrant crisis **spread** to other parts of France due to an increased police presence in Calais. Migrant camps sprouted up in the nearby ports of Dunkirk, Le Havre, Dieppe and Belgium's Zeebrugge, as migrants sought new ways to cross the English Channel to Britain.

February 29, 2016. After a court in Lille **approved** a plan by the French government to evict 1,000 migrants from "The Jungle," demolition teams began **dismantling** the southern part of the camp. The government tried to relocate the migrants to official accommodations inside converted shipping containers in the northern part of the camp. But most refused the offer, fearing they would be forced to claim asylum in France. "Going to Britain is what people here want," Afghan migrant Hayat Sirat **said**. "Destroying part of the jungle is not the solution."

March 7, 2016. Migrants evicted from "The Jungle" **moved** to a new camp in Grande-Synthe near the northern port of Dunkirk, just the coast from Calais. Critics said that the new camp risks becoming a "new Sangatte," referring to the Red Cross center in Calais that was closed in 2002.

May 31, 2016. Migrants evicted from Calais **moved** to Paris and established a massive squatter camp at the Jardins d'Eole, a public park near the Gare du Nord station, from where high-speed Eurostar trains travel to and arrive from London. The area, which became so dangerous that the government **classified** it as a no-go zone (*Zone de sécurité prioritaires, ZSP*), has become a magnet for human traffickers who charge migrants thousands of euros for fake travel documents, supposedly for passage to London.

August 11, 2016. In an interview with *Le Figaro*, a French counter-terrorism officer **warned** that Islamic State jihadis were hiding in "The Jungle" camp. "What is happening in 'The Jungle' is truly mind boggling," he said. "Our officers are rarely able to penetrate the heart of the camp. It is impossible to know if a jihadi from Belgium, for example, is hiding in the camp. This camp is a blind spot for national security."

September 5, 2016. Hundreds of French truck drivers, businessmen and farmers **blocked** off the main route in and out of Calais, in an attempt to pressure the French government to close "The Jungle." The blockage brought to a standstill the route used by trucks from all over Europe to reach Calais and Britain.

September 12, 2016. A document leaked to *Le Figaro* **revealed** the government's plan, dated September 1, to relocate 12,000 migrants from Calais to other parts of France. The migrants would be relocated to around 60 so-called Reception and Orientation

Centers (*centres d'accueil et d'orientation, CAO*), each with a capacity for between 100 and 300 migrants.

September 13, 2016. The President of the Alpes-Maritimes region, Eric Ciotti, **criticized** the government's "irresponsible" plan to relocate migrants in Calais to other parts of France. He said the plan would "proliferate a multitude of small Calais, genuine areas of lawlessness that exacerbate lasting tensions throughout the country." He added:

"This plan reflects the resignation of the government in the face of massive illegal immigration. It weakens national cohesion under a false pretext of humanity which hides a dangerous ideology that denies any distinction between foreigners who seek asylum, who France should decently receive, and those who are economic migrants, whom we can no longer tolerate, and who should be returned to their countries of origin.

"The only solution is to deport, without delay, all illegal immigrants who do not intend to remain on our territory, and to place asylum seekers in centers dedicated to the study of their cases."

September 14, 2016. The President of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, Laurent Wauquiez, **expressed** anger at the government's "diktat" to relocate 1,800 migrants from Calais to his region. He said: "This is madness and it is not a matter of solidarity. The problem of Calais is not solved by multiplying Calais throughout France. We expect the government to solve the problem of Calais, not move it to other parts of the country."

September 16, 2016. Steeve Briois, the Mayor of Hénin-Beaumont and Vice President of the National Front, **criticized** the government's plan to relocate migrants from "The Jungle" to the rest of the country. He said:

"This crazy policy would consequently multiply mini-Calais on the entire national territory, without consulting the people and local elected officials. This forced policy of the Socialist government is simply unacceptable; it seriously threatens public order and the safety of our citizens."

September 20, 2016. Construction work **began** on a wall to prevent migrants at the camp from stowing away on cars, trucks, ferries and trains bound for Britain. Dubbed

"The Great Wall of Calais," the concrete barrier — one kilometer (half a mile) long and four meters (13 feet) high on both sides of the two-lane highway approaching the harbor — will pass within a few hundred meters of "The Jungle."

September 21, 2016. A whistleblower **reported** that volunteer aid workers at "The Jungle" were forging sexual relationships with migrants, including children. "I have heard of volunteers having sex with multiple partners in one day, only to carry on in the same vein the following day," he wrote. "And I know also, that I'm only hearing a small part of a wider scale of abuse." He added that the majority of cases in question involved female volunteers and male migrants. "Female volunteers having sex enforces the view (which many have) that volunteers are here for sex," he wrote.

October 25, 2016. French authorities began **dismantling** "The Jungle." The government said that 4,014 migrants had been relocated or re-sheltered from the camp.

March 3, 2017. Calais Mayor Natacha Bouchart **banned** local aid groups from distributing free food near the former "Jungle" camp. "I took this decision to make sure that no permanent base or squat is created around Calais," she said.

April 28, 2017. Emmanuel Macron **pledged** that, if elected president, he would seek to renegotiate the Le Touquet treaty, which allows British border police to operate in Calais.

June 19, 2017. A Polish truck driver was **killed** when his truck crashed into another truck that had been stopped on the A16 motorway about 15 kilometers from Calais by migrants seeking to stow away to Britain. Nine Eritrean migrants found in one of the trucks were arrested and were expected to be charged with involuntary homicide, disrupting traffic and endangering people's lives.

July 7, 2017. French police **forcibly removed** 2,500 African migrants from Porte de la Chapelle in northern Paris, which has become a gathering point for migrants since the closure of "The Jungle" in Calais.

July 26, 2017. Human Rights Watch **accused** French police of systematically abusing asylum seekers and migrants, disrupting humanitarian assistance, and harassing aid workers, "behavior that appears to be at least partly driven by a desire to keep down migrant numbers."

August 8, 2017. The French Interior Ministry **reported** that more than 17,000 migrants attempted to board UK-bound trucks and trains at the port and Eurotunnel in Calais during the first seven months of 2017. The figures showed that the closure of "The Jungle" in October 2016 had failed to deter migrants in Calais.

August 18, 2017. French police **forcibly removed** 2,000 African migrants living on sidewalks at Porte de la Chapelle in northern Paris. Interior Minister Gerard Collomb said the police action proved that the system for handling migrants is "dysfunctional."

September 17, 2017. French police **forcibly removed** hundreds of migrants from a forest on the northern coast near Calais over fears it could become a magnet for others hoping to head to Britain. Some 350 men, women and children, most of them Iraqi Kurds, had been living for weeks in squalid conditions on the edge of Grande-Synthe.

October 25, 2017. A year after "The Jungle" camp in Calais was razed, the charity Help Refugees **reported** that between 800 and 2,000 migrants were still gathered there.

November 8, 2017. French police **arrested** three Iraqis accused of smuggling up to 40 migrants a day to Calais and into Britain in refrigerated trucks.

December 10, 2017. Paris residents furious that hundreds of migrants are sleeping on the streets of their neighborhood **threatened** to launch a hunger strike unless French authorities remove the squalid makeshift camps. Pierre Vuarin, a spokesman for a neighborhood association, said: "The pavement is sometimes soaked in urine and the streets aren't cleaned every day. Some people have sold their flats at knockdown prices and others have suffered mental breakdowns."

December 22, 2017. Abdullah Dilsouz, a 15-year-old Afghan migrant, was **crushed to death** after he was run over by a truck near the port of Calais.

January 9, 2018. More than 100,000 people requested asylum in France in 2017, a "historic" number and an increase of 17% on the year before, **according** to the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA). The principal country of origin for asylum seekers in France in 2017 was Albania, followed by Afghanistan, with 5,987 requests. Of that number, 83% were granted refugee status.

January 16, 2018. On an official visit to Calais, President Emmanuel Macron **said** he would not tolerate building another "Jungle" camp in Calais: "In no way will we allow

illegal routes to be developed here. In no way will we let a 'Jungle' spring up, or an illegal occupation of the territory."

January 18, 2018. President Macron and British Prime Minister Theresa May signed the so-called **Sandhurst Treaty**, which "complements" the Le Touquet treaty. The treaty requires Britain to reduce the processing time for migrants hoping to travel to Britain from Calais from six months to one month for adults, and 25 days for children. It also requires Britain to pay £44.5 million (€50 million; \$62 million) for extra security measures in France to prevent another "Jungle" camp from forming in Calais and other ports. The extra cash will go towards fencing, CCTV and other detection technology.

February 1, 2018. Hundreds of African and Asian migrants armed with knives and iron rods **fought** running street battles in Calais. Two dozen migrants were injured in what the French government dubbed "unprecedented" scenes of violence among those seeking to reach Britain.

February 3, 2018. *The Guardian* **reported** a 25% increase in the number of migrants in Calais. It attributed the surge on the Sandhurst Treaty, which raised "false hopes" that it would be easier to reach Britain.

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