

Hello dear people following the situation at the french italian border.

This is a short weekly update which again includes :

- Quite accurate counts of people being illegally pushed back from France to Italy, without being able to use their legal right to claim asylum in France as soon as they have entered the country. For this, the PAF (french border police) would have to contact the office of Asylum instead of taking over responsibility to decide for everyone without an european passport that they can not enter France.

- The current situation at our working place on the italian side, the "breakfast" (9 a.m. to 8 p.m. everyday), welcoming everyone who was illegally held by police in the french police station. They naturally have to pass by our spot when returned to Italy in direction Ventimiglia, as it is the only main road. In the police station, people are held for several hours during the day but mostly from the evening / the night until some time in the morning or afternoon, without anything else than them being in a closed area we call "container". By this, their right to not being held longer than 4 hours is ignored. By this, their right to have food, water, medical aid, legal support by a lawyer, support in communication by a translator if they don't speak french and some more is ignored. Moreover, they are humiliated, not listened to and physically violated when being controlled by french forces in the mountains between France in Italy, in the trains to France and in the streets in the cities after the border (Menton, Monaco, Nice):

- Collected reports about police violence that people decided to share with us

- Collected reports about illegal pushbacks of minors, whose dates of birth on the paper denying entry to France (refus d'entree) have been changed in all the cases. They are turned several years older to take away their status of being under 18. Like this, we can not use these documents to prove that the minor's right for protection is being ignored.

In these last 7 days, we met:

- 620 people at the "breakfast" spot.
510 of those were people being pushed back by the french border police, who had to go through the french and italian police stations.
110 of those were people not being pushed back, coming from Ventimiglia or the area, partially trying to cross the border through the mountains the same day or planning to cross the border in the future.
Of those, 20 women
19 accompanied children
(at least) 14 unaccompanied minors (the ones we talked to actively as they looked young)
2 persons with their asylum process running in France.

As most people have to try more than 2, usually even more than 3-5 times to cross, the actual number of those who try to cross is lower. We see people several days in a row.

We know that we attract attention from the neighbourhood and the area, as we create a place where a group of people can stay. Comments by neighbours have increased since the region has experienced a new lockdown with regulations. We have a big stock of masks and hand sanitizers with us and emphasize on taking care of Corona. Almost everybody coming to us is very happy to get a new, clean mask, and people are spreading in small groups in the spot, though it is small. Nobody in the region feels responsible for the health care of the people staying, eating, chatting with us, there is no place to go and to stay to have a safe lockdown. This is also the case for the police station, where usually more than 20 to 30 people are put together in a small space each night, without the slightest possibility to keep distance and keep the safety guidelines that everybody is talking about. On the 9 km way from the border to Ventimiglia, which people have to take when being pushed back, there are no toilets or sanitary facilities that would be open to the people coming from the border. In the containers, there is just one water tap with "bad water" (as most people describe it).

Everybody is emphasizing that it is hard to go to France, most people haven't slept in some days. In the police station, nobody is really sleeping as there is outside temperature during the night, and often not enough space to lay down when there are more than 30 people held inside. A video of one of the containers is attached to our last report. The stone walls around the breakfast spot and the more closed space in the grass next to the breakfast spot are often used to catch up on sleep in the warm sunny hours of the day.

The climate here allows all of us to heat up as long as there is sun, with temperatures ranging between 10 and 20 degrees. But as soon as the sun is gone in the afternoon, people start to freeze and later ask for sleeping bags, blankets and find places to make a fire. We are very glad that there is at least a hosting possibility for women and families since last month, a house run by Caritas. It contains 15 sleeping places, kitchen and bathroom, which is needed almost every night. Nevertheless, we see the tiredness and vulnerability of men also, some of them actively asking for mental health support. The organisation network in Ventimiglia is able to support them in a limited way through appointments with a psychologist. But for this, they have to wait for several days, which is not attracting for people on the go, who have no place to stay and would rather need a place to rest.

A lot of long term problems people face when confronted with the laws in Europe, we can not solve. But the "breakfast" stays a place to talk together and find energy again, a place where an immediate decision what to do and where to go next is not necessary. We are grateful for every thought, memory and event that somebody is sharing with us, trusting us to listen when it comes to difficult topics also. This includes police

violence and illegal treatment, every day - these are the concrete incidents we heard about during the last 7 days:

19th of november: Police breaks the toilets in a train and is using tear gas against everybody inside.

21th of november: A man with valid french documents goes from France to Italy to visit friends. He is controlled by the italian police, who doesn't approve with his documents and takes him to the french border police, where he stays in the container like everybody else. Eventually they let him go and allow him to pass to Italy. This is a very uncommon report but just another case of judging and racial profiling in the area. Racial profiling is the reason for french citizens taken in the past by french police, who didn't have all their documents with them, looked foreign, and were taken to the police station and sent into Italy without any further possibility to act against that or be listened to.

22th of november: A man is walking in the mountains on the french side. He is stopped by police, who check all of his belongings. They take his new phone, 500 Euro and destroy his official document, which he needs to continue his travel. Then he is taken to the police station. When he tries to explain what happened with his document when he is checked again, the police officers are not listening to him, instead checking his bags again and takings his cigarettes away from him. Eventually he is pushed back to Italy.

In the evening train from Ventimiglia to France, a woman in her 4th month of pregnancy is hiding in the toilet. Three french police officers enter the train to control - they open the toilet door with a crowbar and use tear gas immediately. The pregnant woman is trying to get outside and falls down in front of the police, as she can not see and breath. She is breathing heavily on the floor. The female police officer commands "Get up, Get up, you're making that up, stop to put up a theater!" ("Leves-toi, Leves-toi, tu fait du cinema"). Eventually the woman is taken to the police station, kept over night and pushed back to Italy like everyone else. This incident was reported to us by an eye witness, and we were welcoming the woman at the breakfast spot.

25th of november: One man is being hit on his side by police. For us, it is very visible that his hand and arm are swollen.

Besides working at the border, we continued to prepare our appartement. We arranged a clean up day at the breakfast space and in the surrounding area, as over the past year toilet paper / garbage has been left back by people on the go. This was one of the reasons why neighbours were complaining (no toilets and few trash bins on the way). It was nice to be at the spot together and create a welcoming atmosphere again! People who had been eating and resting at the sport were supporting us.

We are also able again to have regular meetings, as local groups support us by taking over a day at "breakfast".

We had a "women talk" again. While male volunteers have been working at

the border, all female volunteers could come together for one afternoon to talk about our working and being mainly surrounded by men, as they form the main part of people leaving their country and going through the long travel. A lot of us found it helpful and healing to share with each other how being in this male dominated environment makes us feel and think together about ways to manage it.

Thanks to everyone continuously following our reports and interested in the people that we meet. Though you are far away, it makes everyone visible again who's been left alone by the italian and french government and mistreated and often violated by the french border police.

As always, we are happy about support of any kind, may it be donations or your time working with us. For questions, you are welcome to use our Facebook messenger or the following email, for financial donations the following information:

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Ciao and until soon - the Kesha Niya Team