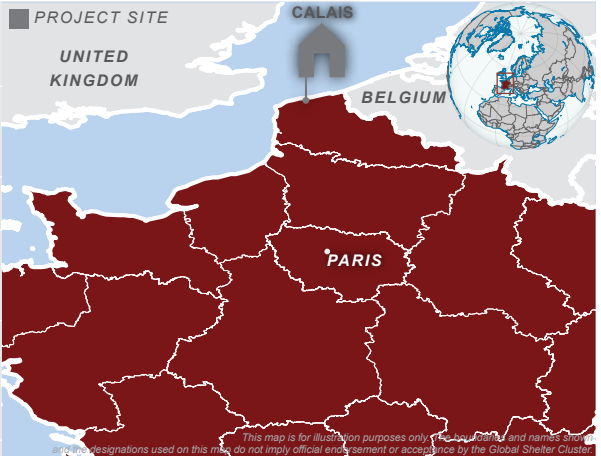
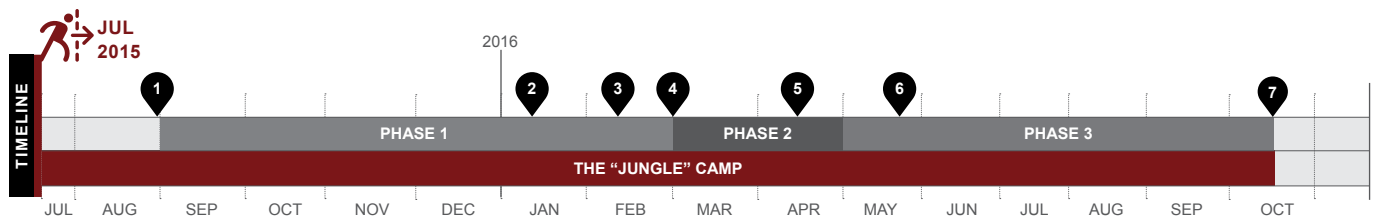


CASE STUDY

FRANCE 2015–2016 / REFUGEE CRISIS

KEYWORDS: Emergency shelter, Unplanned site, Volunteers

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|--|---|--|
| CRISIS | Europe Refugee and Migrant Crisis, 2015–2016 |  <p>PROJECT SITE</p> <p>UNITED KINGDOM</p> <p>BELGIUM</p> <p>PARIS</p> <p><small>This map is for illustration purposes only. It is not official and names shown are not designations used on this map. It does not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the Global Shelter Cluster.</small></p> |
| TOTAL CAMP RESIDENTS | Believed to fluctuate between 6–10,000 for the period the project was active in Calais* | |
| PROJECT LOCATION | Calais, northern France | |
| BENEFICIARIES | 10,000 individuals in total (approx. 75% male aged 18–50. This varied over time) | |
| PROJECT OUTPUTS | 1,500 shelters built and constantly maintained 500 self-build shelter kits plus training | |
| SHELTER SIZE | 7m² (varied with materials available and donations) | |
| SHELTER DENSITY | 1.5m² per person | |
| PROJECT COST | USD 277 per household | |
| | | |
| PROJECT SUMMARY | | |
| <p>This project provided shelter assistance to 10,000 refugees and migrants living in the unplanned “Jungle” camp in Calais. It was implemented by a volunteer-run network with limited capacities in a very fluid environment (the camp was partially destroyed twice). Self-build shelter kits and technical support were provided to those able to build, while volunteers built prefabricated shelters for the most vulnerable. After the second reduction, further shelter construction was prevented by the authorities, and volunteer groups mainly provided tents solutions the final closure and dismantlement of the camp.</p> | | |



- 1 Sep 2015: Introduction of self-build shelters and a repairs team to support all building projects.
- 2 Jan 2016: Destruction of 100m “buffer zone” around the perimeter of camp and movement of shelters. Density in the site increases.
- 3 Feb 2016: Nearly all tents replaced with shelters.
- 4 Feb–Mar 2016: Destruction of southern half of the camp, with very short notice. Many shelters are destroyed.
- 5 Apr 2016: Police at camp entrances begins to restrict the access of building materials into the site. Most people are living in various types of tents.
- 6 26 May 2016: A fire destroys 300 shelters. 1,000 people are left without shelter and volunteers are unable to rebuild. Limited tents continue to be distributed.
- 7 Oct 2016: Complete destruction of the camp.

STRENGTHS

- + Community engagement was successful.
- + Scale, timeliness and coverage of needs.
- + Timely procurement of materials.
- + The repairs team was efficient and reliable.
- + Agility of a grassroots group in a complex political environment.

WEAKNESSES

- Fire safety procedures were not adhered to.
- Lack of guaranteed and consistent workforce.
- The organization did not have sufficient training or experience.
- Limited site planning.
- Small size of the allocation team, which led to oversights.



The organization started using a shelter design at the end of September 2015. Frames were prefabricated off site and built by volunteers only for the most vulnerable.

CONTEXT

Calais has been a “hotspot” for migration to the United Kingdom (UK) since the Channel Tunnel was opened in 1994. Due to the UK border being on French soil, the French side attracts many of those wishing to claim asylum in the UK. Since the 2000s, the numbers reaching the area steadily increased, and refugees and migrants were living in squats, under bridges and in fields, often camped in groups according to their areas and countries of origin, or to whom they had travelled with.

Although the “Jungle” camp became the main focal point of media attention in 2015, other camps existed across the region, notably the Grande Synthe camp in Dunkirk. Smaller camps existed close to truck stops, often run by smugglers and consisting of people of only one or two nationalities waiting to try to cross the border.

THE “JUNGLE” CAMP

During the spring and summer of 2015, the number of refugees and migrants in northern France grew exponentially compared to previous years. The authorities of Calais designated a former asbestos dump in an industrial zone of the city to be opened to these people, with limited sanitation facilities and one meal per day (for up to 400 people only). The camp was supported by volunteers and in-kind donations. Volunteers initially worked with a variety of French charities. The organization implementing this project was born during these months and partnered with a local NGO.

As it became clear in the autumn of 2015 that the camp would not vanish before the winter, and rather was likely to continue grow, the organization started a building project with the aim of ensuring everyone had a better form of shelter than a tent throughout the winter. At that point, there was still hope that by the end of 2015 the government would have moved everyone from the camp into official accommodation.

People of very different backgrounds, cultures and ages were able to live side by side. Volunteers were generally welcome, if they were seen to be actively helping and respectful of camp residents. The coexistence of religions was also peaceful: mosques and churches were built, often by the residents themselves. When violence did break out, it was usually due to personal grievances between groups of different nationalities.



The camp was established in the summer of 2015 and had to major roads with public lighting and small shops.

GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

The government did not support shelter projects in Calais. However, it did fund a local charity to run a centre at the back of the camp, with limited sleeping spaces for women and children only. Many women chose not to stay here, though, because they wanted to remain with husbands or other male family members, and disliked that there were no cooking facilities or communal areas.

Towards the end of 2015, the government contracted a French NGO for WASH facilities, and the new water points and portable chemical toilets were received with great enthusiasm after a high court ruling that they must be provided by the government. However, these were not enough – with around one latrine per 100 people when the population was at its highest – and were not properly maintained. Although the issue was constantly raised with local authorities, these claimed that there was not enough funding and hoped that, if conditions remained poor, people would be discouraged from staying in the camp.

The camp was reduced in size twice by the authorities in January and March 2016, with the use of bulldozers. Only on the first occasion were volunteers from the organization notified and managed to assist with the moving of shelters. By April 2016, the authorities prevented any building materials being brought into the site, leading to the end of the project. Finally, in October 2016, the government demolished the camp.



Camp evolution. Left: the authorities of Calais designated a former asbestos dump to be opened after the large influx of displaced populations into the north of France. Center: after the creation of the “buffer zone” around the perimeter and the destruction of the southern half. Right: after the camp was dismantled.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Shelter building started on an ad-hoc basis in the camp in August 2015, with volunteers and residents creating shelters from any available material. The organization started using a shelter design at the end of September 2015. Shelters were initially prefabricated in a warehouse off site and built on site by volunteers. To increase the pace of the process, self-build kits were then distributed to residents who were able to build for themselves, while construction was done for the most vulnerable.

The project team comprised three allocation coordinators – down to one by the end of February 2016 – as well as two building coordinators. The allocation team would get to know camp residents, record those in need of shelter to prioritize construction, as well as choosing the location according to residents' preferences. The building team supervised volunteers during the distribution of kits or direct construction, and provided technical support and repairs when necessary.

Coverage could not be achieved for all by the end of 2015, but only for the most vulnerable. This was due to limited material resources and volunteers, an increase in camp population and poor weather conditions.

SHELTER TYPES AND SITE LAYOUT

The supply of building items depended on inconsistent funding and donations. This affected the shelter design, which changed slightly over time. The walls were mostly made of plastic sheeting and insulated with carpet underlay, while wooden cladding was used for particularly vulnerable people.

Cladded shelters were harder to break into and offered more protection from noise and the elements. These were a safer option particularly for women – many of whom had had their tents slashed by men attempting to enter during the night. The different shelter types were accepted as necessary and often encouraged where there were men living in the same community group as women. On the other hand, where a nationality group was entirely male – and none of these men were given a cladded shelter – the difference was seen as unfair. Over time, a “black market” of shelters developed and gangs would force people out of their cladded shelters at knife or gun point, in order to take over the shelter and sell it. Sometimes they would be allowed to stay in their shelter if they paid money to those in control. This led to an increase in gang activity and control in the camp, and a very hostile atmosphere in several parts of the site.

There was little planning on the placement of shelters in the camp. Upon arrival, residents organized their tents into groups – mainly by nationality or age – and when it was their turn for a shelter, the tent would be replaced in the same place. When the southern half of the camp was bulldozed, as many shelters as possible were moved into the northern part. Here some planning was carried out, for example to secure empty areas for a specific group ahead of time. However, in the end much of this was undone as there was not enough space to accommodate all the people that had to move. Countless shelters were destroyed and those that remained were squashed together, further increasing fire and health risks. Generally, throughout the site there was not enough space to create any firebreaks, nor willingness from the residents to abide by fire risk mitigation measures, either.



The camp population fluctuated as people kept trying to cross the border and new arrivals settled. At its peak, there were around 10,000 residents across the two parts of the site. The southern half (in the foreground in the picture above) was destroyed in early 2016.

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SHELTER ALLOCATION

Defining vulnerability was challenging, as the allocation team had no prior training or experience in the refugee camp context and no understanding of how to identify the “most” vulnerable among thousands of individuals with many different problematic backgrounds and health issues.

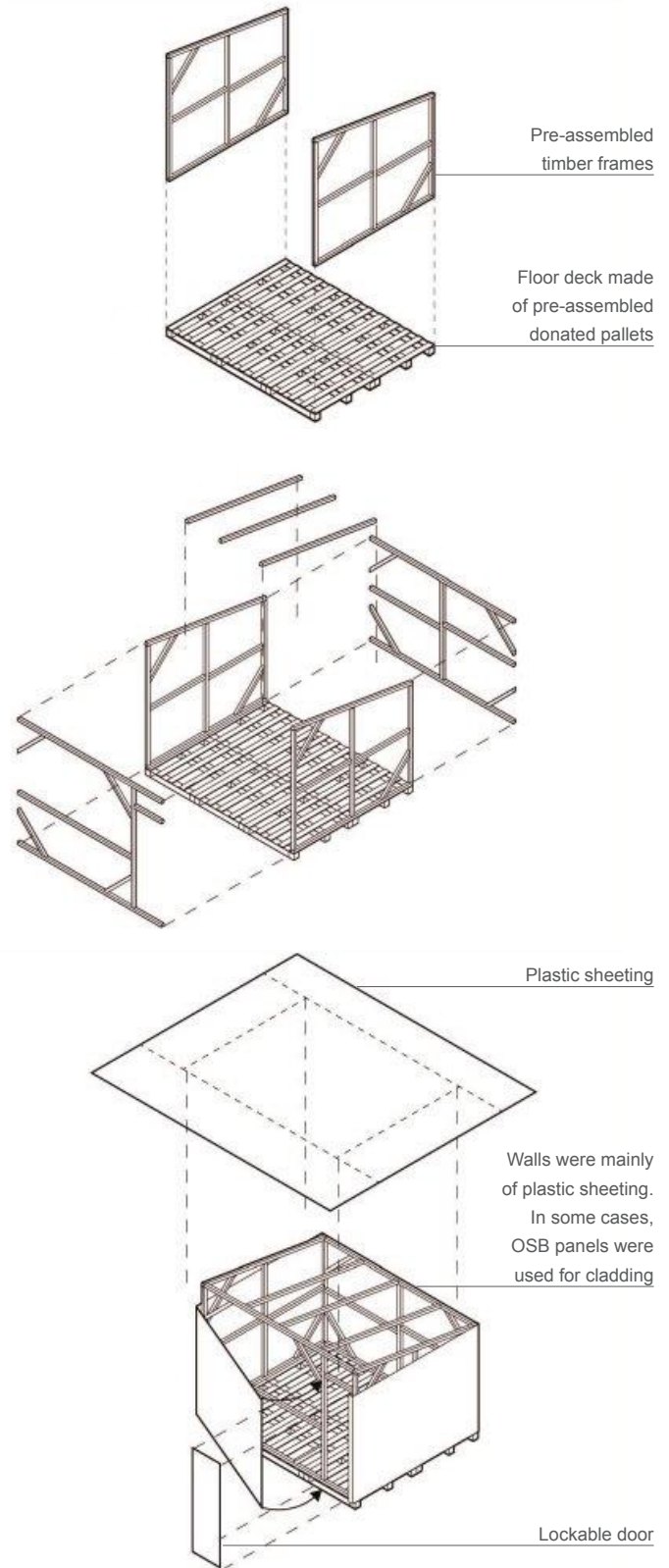
After several days of deliberation, failed attempts to contact larger INGOs for advice and discussions with some of those living in the camp, a vulnerability list was created to prioritize beneficiaries. Those identified as the most vulnerable were single women (the camp was at the beginning approximately 98% male), unaccompanied children, the elderly, the physically or mentally unwell or disabled and young families.

Allocating based on vulnerability was perceived by many to be racist, when it led to different numbers of shelters being allocated to each nationality. As it became apparent that the single women were mostly from the same country of origin, members of other national groups – who were mostly males – felt shelter was being unfairly allocated.

This prompted the design of self-build shelter kits, which were then allocated to a different demographic – mainly men aged between 25 and 40, who also seemed to be from a couple of national groups specifically – who were willing and able to build shelters for themselves.

Along with the criteria above, the length of time a person had been living in the camp was also taken into consideration, as well as referrals of particular individuals from onsite medical teams. When the number of teenagers in the camp increased dramatically in the summer of 2016, younger teens had to take priority over older teens, prompting further adjustments to the allocation “rules” and, consequently, upset among residents.

The team often had to make judgements on whether people were telling the truth about their needs. The allocation team soon learnt to identify a lie, but one could never be completely certain. This was difficult to overcome due to lack of an early registration system, a small team unable to keep track of everyone, as well as a lack of training. On several occasions, the team also faced threats and violence from camp residents desperate for a place to sleep.



The organization started using a shelter design at the end of September 2015. Frames were prefabricated off site and, for the most vulnerables, shelters were set up by volunteers.

The shelter had a self-build design, with wooden structure and plastic walls. The construction changed over time, depending on the materials available (image source: Help Refugees).



Refugees set up shops along main roads and at intersections, patching together pieces of different donated plastic sheeting.



There were different kinds of shelters in the camp. New arrivals mainly slept in flimsy tents. By the end of 2015, the most vulnerable had received a timber-frame shelter.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The camp's community was a mixed one. There were residents of many different ages, nationalities and social backgrounds living in the Jungle, so project coordinators engaged in different ways with the community depending on the individuals and the groups involved. The organization ran sensitization programmes via flyers and word of mouth in the relevant languages. Community meetings were also held to discuss new builds or changes to existing areas.

In order to gauge women's opinions, it was often necessary to close off a "safe space", as many felt uncomfortable speaking in a group of men, or were unable to enter an all-male environment for specific social, cultural, personal or religious reasons.

It was often also necessary to call upon an informally elected "community representative" to resolve disputes. These representatives occasionally assisted with allocation by recommending people who were most in need of shelter. They also disseminated information from the project teams about any issues which would cause delays, such as with procurement of materials or access to the site (e.g. as a result of police restrictions). Issues surrounding the use of these community representatives did arise, though, as not everyone from a particular community felt that their representative was trustworthy or the most appropriate person for the role.

SITUATION AFTER THE CAMP WAS DISMANTLED

After the Jungle was officially destroyed, camp residents were dispersed to collective centres across France and given a set period within which to apply for asylum. Some of the children were brought to the UK, while many others, tired of waiting and unsure of their chances in France, walked or travelled back to Calais to keep trying to "make it" to the UK. As of September 2018, there were around 1,000 refugees and migrants living in and around Calais, with an estimated 1,500 in northern France in total. The small camps were evicted on an almost daily basis, with property destroyed or confiscated by the national police.

WIDER IMPACTS

Following its activities in Calais, the organization continued to support grassroots humanitarian initiatives across Europe and the Middle East with funding, volunteers and coordination assistance. In 2018, it supported 75 projects globally and advocated regularly for the rights of those who have been displaced. Work also continued within and in relation to Calais, including by holding the UK government to account for its inaction on unaccompanied minors in Europe.



The camp was reduced in size twice in January and February/March 2016 and finally demolished in October 2016. During the first occasion volunteers managed to assist with the moving of shelters. The second time several belongings, including legal documents, were lost, as shelter were demolished.



STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED



Little to no site planning was done in the camp. Refugees and migrants gathered based on nationalities. Overcrowding was a serious issue, as well as fire hazards.

STRENGTHS

- + **Community engagement** – use of community representatives, involvement of residents in the construction and dissemination of information relevant to the project.
- + **Scale and coverage** – although the entire camp was never completely “housed”, vulnerable cases were given shelter quickly and, by February 2016, almost everyone had a shelter.
- + **Material procurement** – funding providing, materials were sourced quickly when needed, including through donations from different groups.
- + **The repairs team** – reliable, efficient and developed good relationships with camp residents.
- + **Speed and agility of grassroots groups** to act where traditional humanitarian actors cannot.

WEAKNESSES

- **Lack of adherence to fire safety procedures**, due to limited initial understanding and awareness of their importance, as well as a lack of space in the camp. Fire concerns were not prioritized by the residents either, given the extremely dire conditions they were already facing.
- **Lack of guaranteed and consistent work force**, due to an uneven flow of volunteers.
- **Lack of training and experience of almost everyone involved** in the building and allocation teams.
- **Limited site planning**. There was some organization in the way that people of the same nationality were generally allocated shelters near to each other (at the request of the residents themselves), but for the most part shelters were simply built where there was space, and this often led to disagreements.
- **Small size of the allocation team**. The size of the team was reduced to two people from January 2016, and to just one person from the end of February 2016. This meant that allocation was not as efficient or coordinated as it could have been, and led to oversights when shelters had to be moved from the southern to the northern half of the camp.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Understanding the dynamics between different national groups**. Given that none of the team had any previous experience in similar contexts, many lessons were learnt around the ways in which various cultures differ from and relate to each other, and the ways in which systems had to be adapted to allow for these differences and similarities.
- **Create a project plan** before commencing any work, and **conduct regular reviews of project procedures**, to ensure it remains as effective as possible. Given the nature of the situation, there was little time to work on a strategy before building began. However, in hindsight, perhaps even a few days spent planning and researching would have significantly increased the efficiency of the shelter project as a whole.
- **Outline vulnerability criteria before the allocation process**. Attempts were made by the allocation team to create a “vulnerability scale” at the beginning of the project, however, with no experience in the sector, it was difficult to know who should be deemed most vulnerable. The team felt underprepared and lacking in the authority to make such decisions.
- **Necessity of having a positive, proactive relationship with the local authorities**. It really helped when, on occasion, the team was able to reason with the national police, to make allowances for the bringing in of particular materials or for the continuation of building in a certain part of the camp. If the police had been consulted and allowed to feel as if building was happening on their terms, they might have been less obstructive to the process. This would have significantly sped up the project and improved relations with the volunteers. In turn, if the camp residents had seen the police to be accommodating of the project, this may have also improved the incredibly difficult relationship between them.
- **Contact could have been made with the local and national authorities earlier on**, to allow for liaising and better information gathering and dissemination further down the line. However, at the start of the project, it was the general hope that the government would have accommodated camp residents by winter, so little long-term planning was carried out.