



HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER AND SANITATION

# **WATER ACCESS FOR EXILED PEOPLE IN THE NORTHERN FRENCH COAST**

**ANALYSIS & CAPITALIZATION FOR THE YEAR 2021**

18/07/2022

**Country:** France

**Locations:** Calais, Dunkirk/Grande-Synthe area

**Reviewers:**

**Calais Appeal (Calais Food Collective, Project Play, Refugee's Women Centre, Refugee Info Bus,  
Collective Aid, Human Rights Observers, Woodyard Collective)**

**Médecins du Monde**

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**Utopia 56 Grande-Synthe**

# SUMMARY

- INTRODUCTION** **3**
  
- 1. NEEDS IDENTIFIED** **5**
  
- 1. INFRASTRUCTURES AVAILABLE** **6**
  - 1.1. CALAIS AREA ..... 6
  - 1.2. DUNKIRK/GRANDE-SYNTHÉ AREA ..... 6
  
- 2. NON-CONTINUOUS ACCESS** **7**
  
- 3. LACK OF AVAILABILITY** **7**
  
- 4. LACK OF PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY** **9**
  
- 5. LACK OF SAFETY** **10**
  
- CONCLUSION** **11**

**Note:** *This document has been developed by the Coalition Eau<sup>1</sup> and Solidarités International<sup>2</sup> on the basis of the work conducted by several independent field associations, which we thank greatly for their participation and investment. This report aims to provide in-depth information on the access to water for exiled people. This document is a first version and will be completed with updated data on access to water, hygiene and sanitation.*

## INTRODUCTION

For several years now, the Northern French coast has been the theater for numerous human rights violations, including the right to water and sanitation. Throughout the year 2021, several independent associations working on the field have been gathering both quantitative and qualitative data about the access to water in the Calais and Dunkirk areas.

In both areas, the same type of population is present, with a majority of single men but also women, families, children and unaccompanied minors, most of the people being in transit. The typology of the living places is similar regarding the type of housing: living areas consist mostly in tents, sometimes in makeshift shelters.

The main difference between the two areas is the repartition of the living sites on the territory:

- The Calais area is characterized by several living points spread over a large part of the municipality territory;
- In the Dunkirk urban community (which includes the municipality of Grande-Synthe), people are mostly grouped in one large site outside the city.

In both territories, exiled people are victims of frequent evictions by the police: on average, evictions happen every couple of days in Calais<sup>3</sup> and every couple of weeks in the Dunkirk/Grande-Synthe area<sup>4</sup>.

- The number of living sites in Calais varies depending on the period, but independent associations on the field identified at least 8 different living areas on the municipality territory in 2021. Between 966 and 1653 people were living each month in the area in 2021, including an average of 123 unaccompanied minors<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A collective of French NGOs engaged in the water and sanitation sector: [www.coalition-eau.org](http://www.coalition-eau.org)

<sup>2</sup> SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONALE - Association, ONG humanitaire - Eau potable pour tous ([solidarites.org](http://solidarites.org))

<sup>3</sup> In 2021, at least 1226 evictions of informal settlements were observed in Calais. Source: [HRO Monthly Report 2021-12-30-1640878828963 \(laubergedesmigrants.fr\)](https://www.hro.org/fr/publications/rapports/HRO-Monthly-Report-2021-12-30-1640878828963)

<sup>4</sup> In 2021, at least 61 evictions of informal settlements were observed in Grande-Synthe. Source: [HRO Monthly Report 2021-12-30-1640878828963 \(laubergedesmigrants.fr\)](https://www.hro.org/fr/publications/rapports/HRO-Monthly-Report-2021-12-30-1640878828963)

<sup>5</sup> [HRO : Human Rights Observers - Rapports](https://www.hro.org/fr/publications/rapports)

- In the Dunkirk/Grande-Synthe area, between 200 and 1200 persons were present in 2021<sup>6</sup>, including around 50 children<sup>7</sup>. People are mainly living on one main site, which is regularly moved during evictions by the police.

The data collected is available in the database attached to this document. Numbers come from two main sources: official documents produced by local authorities (Prefecture) and observations/estimations from independent field associations. The data used in this report was collected for the year 2021 by the following independent associations: CFC, Roots, Médecins du Monde, Project Play and Utopia 56 Grande-Synthe.

In view of the data collected, this report focuses on access to water. However, we hope that a future version can address the issue of access to sanitation.

Regarding the level of access to water, we base our analysis on the 5 criteria defined and adopted by the former UN Special Rapporteur on water and sanitation:

- Availability
- Physical accessibility
- Economic accessibility
- Quality and safety
- Acceptability, dignity and intimacy of the access to water

Moreover, although not internationally recognized, the Sphere WASH standards provide an estimate of the volume of water needed during emergency situations or humanitarian disasters<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the minimum volume of water needed is 15 liters per person and per day. The water point must be localized at less than 500 meters from the living place and the waiting time must not exceed 30 minutes.

**In the case of France, which is classified as a country with a “very high human development” and ranked as the 26th out of 189 countries and territories by the UNDP, a more ambitious frame of reference must be used to analyze the access to water.**

Yet, we note that both in Calais and the Dunkirk area, the level of access is far from meeting the needs of the populations. Indeed, data show that both the volume of water and the accessibility necessary are underestimated by the public authorities, which lead to a precarious and extremely limited access to water.

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<sup>6</sup> Source : Utopia 56 Grande-Synthe

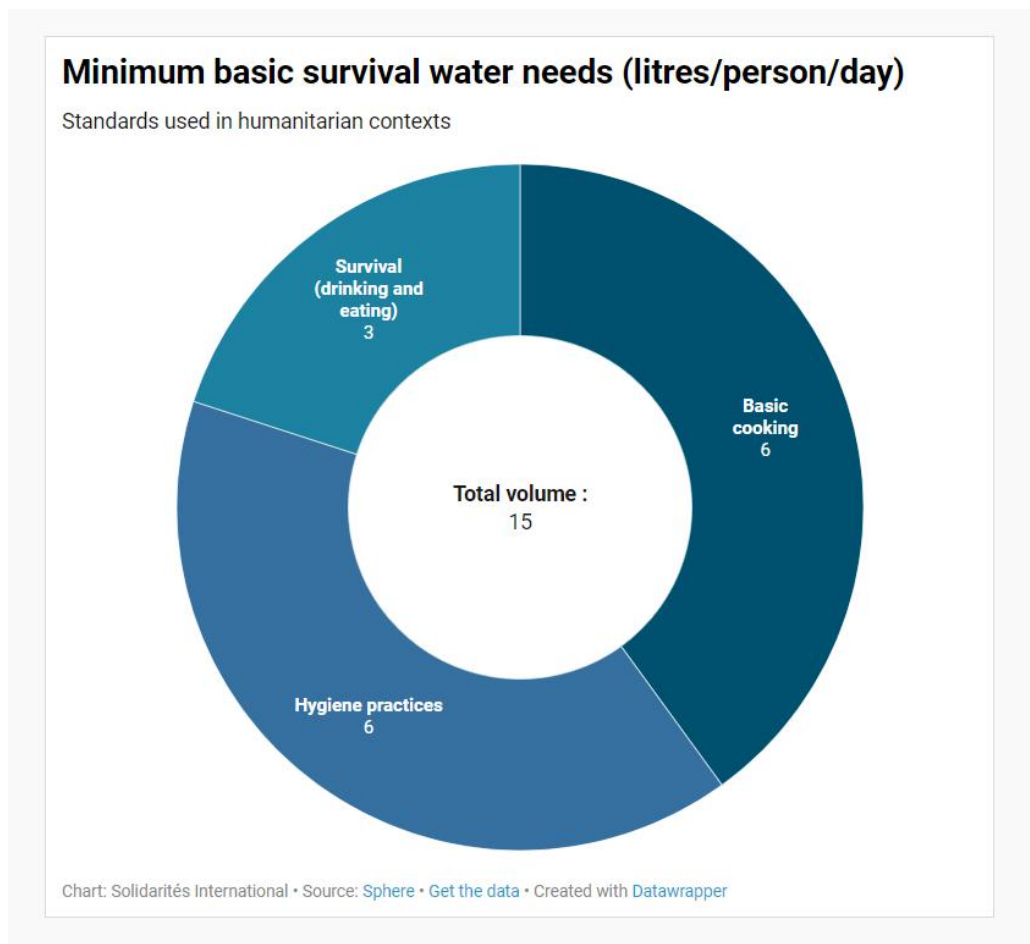
<sup>7</sup> [Past infographics | Project Play Website \(project-play.org\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> Sphere, The Sphere Handbook – Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, 2018

# 1. NEEDS IDENTIFIED

- **Drinking and eating**
- **Basic cooking:** despite the implementation of food distributions by several at-test that a certain volume of water is affected for cooking and washing dishes.
- **Hygiene practices:** due to the inadequacy or the total absence of infrastructures (showers, toilets, taps, laundry) some of the water is affected to hygiene by the populations.

These needs only imply the volume of water required for survival. The needs can vary depending on many indicators such as individual characteristics (age, etc.), seasons (with temperature increases) and cultural habits, that are all aspects to be imperatively considered.



## 2. INFRASTRUCTURES AVAILABLE

### 2.1. CALAIS AREA

Due to a 2017 condemnation of the Prefecture by the French Council of State following a litigation initiated by independent associations, mobile water distributions have been implemented in 2018 in the municipality territory. These distributions are made by La Vie Active, an association mandated by the Prefecture (state operator), but is largely insufficient.

The infrastructure available regarding water access in Calais is the following:

- Mobile water distributions by La Vie Active that served only 4 living sites in 2021
- On-site water distributions by independent associations (Calais Food Collective, Salam)
  - Associative water distributions are hampered by prefectural decrees renewed each month since September 2020 (prohibition of food and water distributions in more than 30 sites of the city, except for the state operator)

### 2.2. DUNKIRK/GRANDE-SYNTHE AREA

- **Absence of access to water on-site since November 2021.**
- **No distributions are implemented by the State or the public authorities.**

The only access to water by distribution is guaranteed by independent associations on the field, through the filling of on-site water tanks (by the association Roots) or the punctual supply of water (bottles, jerrycans, water tanks) by other independent associations.

The associative capacity is necessarily limited since independent associations rely solely on volunteers (extremely reduced teams) and does not benefit from any public financial aid.

Frequent evictions by the police often lead to the destruction/confiscation of the tanks provided by the association Roots, which are the only continuously accessible water source for all the inhabitants.

### 3. NON-CONTINUOUS ACCESS

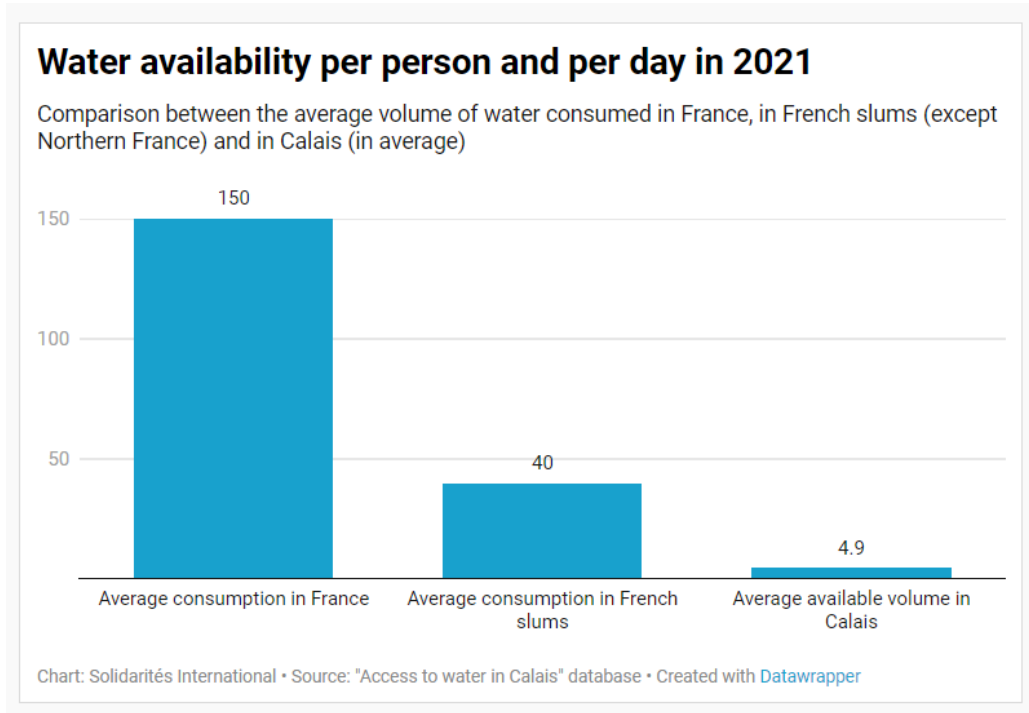
- **Almost no fixed water points available in the areas of Calais & Dunkirk** (we count only one in Calais and one in Grande-Synthe, both located at several kilometers from the living areas)
- **Irregularity and unreliability of mobile water distributions by La Vie Active** in terms of location and timing
  - Some distribution points are sometimes not served for weeks without any justification or communication



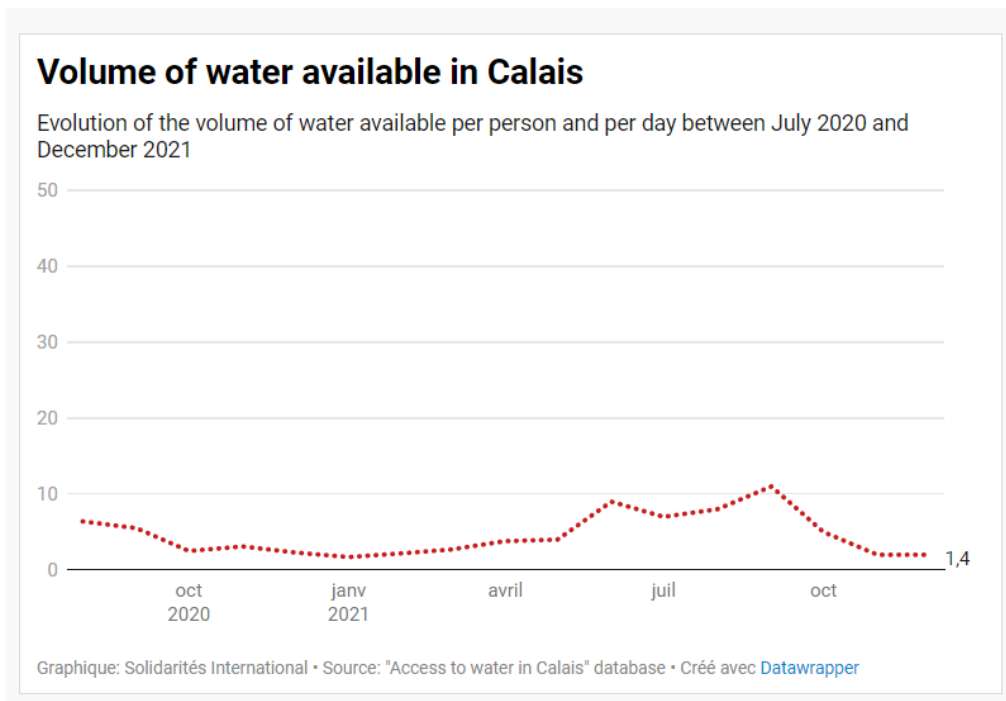
Source: CFC/Utopia 56 - Water distribution points of the State operator in Calais (2021)

### 4. LACK OF AVAILABILITY

- **In Dunkirk, no water distributions are implemented by the State or the public authorities.**
  - Water tanks installed by independent associations are regularly destroyed, damaged or confiscated by the police/citizens
- **In Calais, water distributions are characterized by an inadequate volume available per person and per day.**



People living in Calais have access to around **8 times less water** than the rest of French slums, and **30 times less** than the average French person<sup>9</sup>.

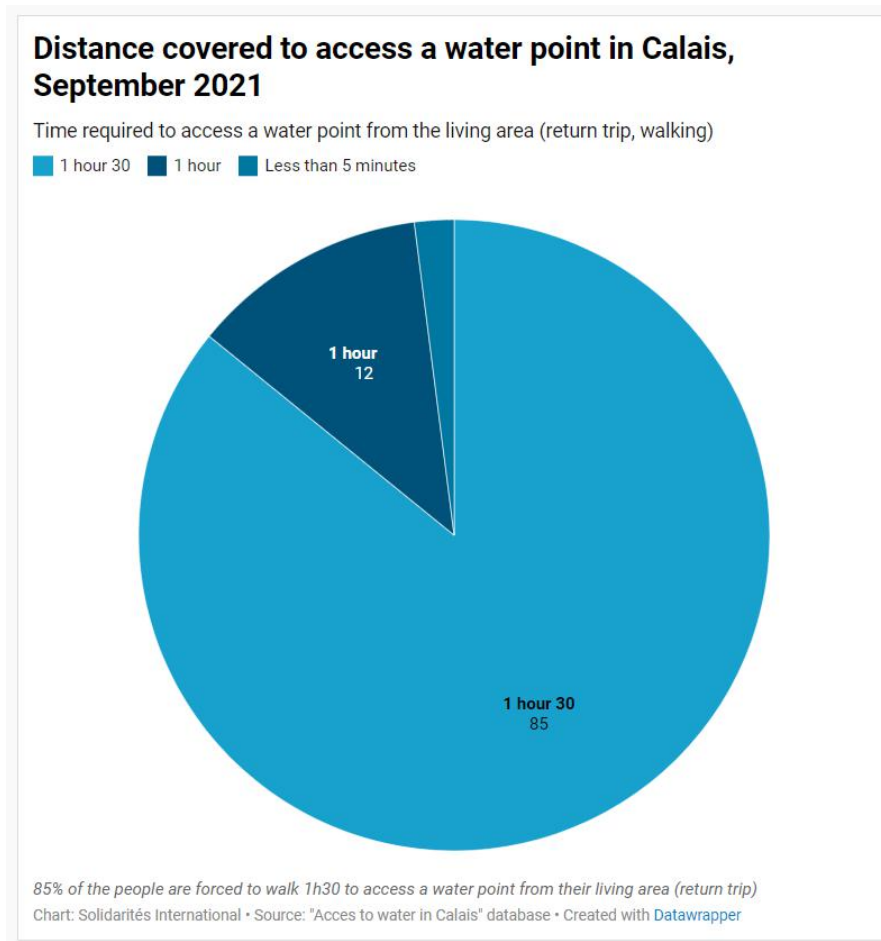


<sup>9</sup> The average water consumption observed in precarious settlement sites in which Solidarités International has implemented an access to water is 40 litres/person/day, or one-third of the average consumption in France (around 150 litres/person/day) [Volume d'eau potable consommé par habitant par jour en 2016 | EauFrance](#)

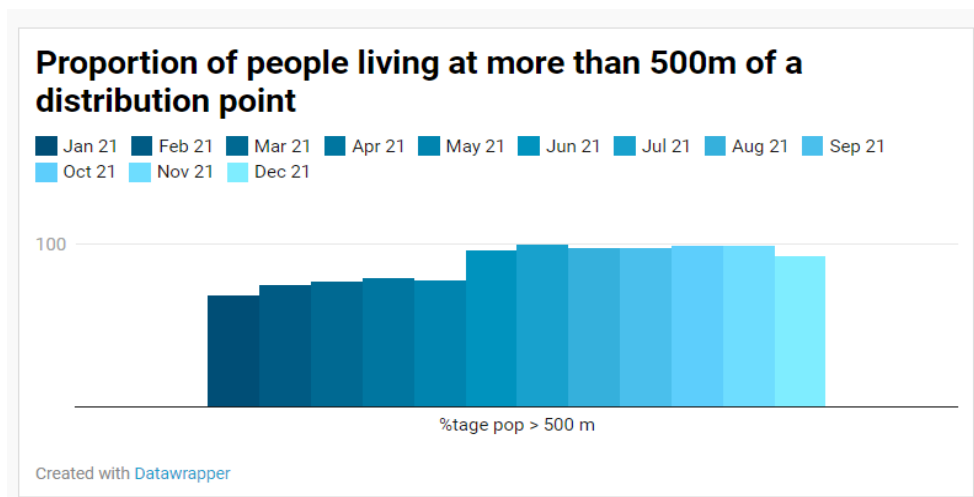


Since July 2020 the volume of water available per person and per day is stable and has never exceeded **13 liters**.

## 5. LACK OF PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY



In September 2021, **more than 8 out of 10 people** were forced to walk 1 hour and 30 minutes to access a water point.



The excessive distance of distribution points from the living sites is constant during the whole year 2021, which demonstrates the inaction of public authorities.

## 6. LACK OF SAFETY

- Water distributions by La Vie Active (state operator) in Calais are **systematically made in presence of police forces**, which represents a considerable risk for exiled people who are often undocumented and are regularly victims of intimidation, physical and psychological violence.
- The **lack of water** available coupled with **the use of unprotected containers to carry and use water** (dirty jerrycans, sharing bottles between people due to the lack of bottle and cups...) have **direct consequences on health**
  - In 2021, Médecins du Monde estimates that **94% of care intake is directly related to the conditions of survival** and harassment experienced by exiled people in the Northern French coast.
  - Dermatological pathologies were the first reason for consultation for the Médecins du Monde medical team in Calais (19%) and Grande-Synthe (27%). Among them, scabies was the main pathology (18% in Calais and 20% in Grande-Synthe)
  - Many **infected or over-infected wounds** are linked to restricted access to care and limited or non-existent access to hygiene. The trend is confirmed over the first 6 months of 2022 with an increase in May and June of urinary and renal disorders in Loon-Plage (12% of consultations).
  - Spread and transmission of epidemics such as Covid-19.

- The access to distribution points implies long walks along the road without a sidewalk and dangerous road crossings (without any pedestrian passage or signal light)
- **Hold phenomenon/domination** are frequent and can imply limitations in the access to water for all in a free and equitable way.
- **Impact on the most vulnerable groups:** the irregular and limited access to water has a direct impact on children's health and hygiene.
  - For instance, a large part of the dozens of children living in the Dunkirk area have been observed with dirty faces and teeth. This is directly impacted by the lack of sanitation facilities due to irregular and limited access to water<sup>10</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered and analyzed in this report confirm that most criteria established by the former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation are not met in Calais and Dunkirk/Grande-Synthe. Despite the differences between the two areas, it is relevant to analyze these situations jointly, since the objectives and the requests remain the same. Numbers and testimonies show the inadequacy between the level of water needs and the state of access to water.

The data collected show a very low amount of water available per person and per day, which is worsened by the lack of physical accessibility.

These two data aggregated show the intrinsic inadequacy of the access to water. Thus, in Calais for example, in the rare cases where the distributions by the state operator are situated at a reasonable distance (most of the time, this happens only when distributions are directly on-living site), the quantity of water distributed is not sufficient to guarantee an adequate access to water.

Furthermore, it must be stressed that these data remain statistics, and suppose that the totality of the persons present in Calais has an access to water at some point, which is not the case.

These data lead to a presumption of violation of several rights recognized in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights such as human dignity (article 1), freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (article 5), the right to respect for private and family private life (article 12) and the right to a standard of living adequate for the health (article 25), and a violation of the Convention on the Right of the Child.

Data about the access to water, hygiene and sanitation are currently collected for 2022. We will then provide updates and new data regarding the access to water, hygiene and

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<sup>10</sup> [Advocacy Infographics | Project Play Website \(project-play.org\)](#)

sanitation for exiled people in the Northern French coast. However, in view of the data collected since January 2022 until now, we can affirm that **there is no significant change in the area at the present time.**

The elements highlighted in this document will be included in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on France for 2022.

For now, 2021 data confirm the requests and the need of action expressed by the associative actors since 2017, namely **the provision of drinking water and sanitation facilities to guarantee an adequate access to water, sanitation and hygiene.**

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