



Refugee Women's Centre

# ANNUAL REPORT

2024



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# INTRODUCTION

*In 2024, we witnessed an intensification of the migration crisis at the Franco-British border. The context in Northern France has become increasingly dangerous and extremely precarious. Despite this, the number of women and children arriving on the coast drastically rose this year. All hoped to reach the United Kingdom via the sea. Additionally, 2024 was a particularly deadly year. At least 89 people died at sea, including many women and children.*

*The living conditions in the informal settlements remain persistently unbearable. Most people on the move live in tents, without stable access to water, food, baby milk, bathrooms, or hygiene. There is insufficient access to healthcare services and basic hygiene. This has led to an alarming public health situation. Individuals face higher risks of illnesses and infections. The childrens most fundamental rights are denied, notably their right to education, stability, and safety.*

*Immigration policies were also tightened in 2024, leading to an increase in police presence on the beaches and an intensified militarisation of the border.*

*This added pressure causes more panic and stress during departures, potential jostling, and rushed boardings into overloaded and poorly inflated boats, thus increasing the risks of shipwrecks, drowning, and hypothermia. These risks are direct consequences of the lack of legal and safe routes to the United Kingdom.*

*The forced expulsions of the women and children surviving in informal settlements on the Northern French coast are continuing at a frantic pace. According to the Human Rights Observers, 782 expulsions occurred in Calais and 36 in Loon-Plage in 2024. Dismantling these camps means families lose their private belongings as well as the material they need to survive, and are constantly facing instability.*

*It is in this context that the Refugee Women's Centre has maintained its commitment to the women and families on the move, here, in Northern France. We have intensified our humanitarian aid, our social and medical support, and our advocacy actions. Our team has tried its best to respond to the specific needs of the women and families, whilst also denouncing the current migration policies, and defending a view of immigration based on dignity, security, and human rights.*



# OUR ORGANISATION

Refugee Women's Centre (RWC) is founded and based in France in 2015. We are committed to supporting women and children on the move, living in informal settlements across the Franco-British border, specifically in Calais and the Dunkerque region (Grande-Synthe, Mardyck, and Loon-Plage).

We believe that every woman has the right to live in safety, to be heard, and to make her own choices. By supporting the women on the move and their families, we defend a more just, humane, and solidarity-based society. Our action is based on a holistic and global approach, centred on the specific needs of women and their children, that takes into account their unique paths, identities, and aspirations.

## OUR STORY: A FEMINIST RESPONSE TO A HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY

Refugee Women's Centre (RWC) was started in Grande-Synthe in 2015: an organisation by women and for women. It operates within a decade-long humanitarian crisis, with people on the move surviving extremely precarious conditions on the Northern French coast. Initially, RWC emerged in the Basroch camp, and then the La Linière camp. Back then our actions focused on supporting women and children by offering a space to be heard, protected, and supported.

Following the fire in April 2017, which completely and permanently destroyed the camp of La Linière, the RWC officially became an organisation, as per the French law of 1901. This shift allowed us to structure and reinforce our presence in the field and adapt our interventions to the constantly evolving migration-related needs and realities.

Since then, our approach has been to become entirely mobile. But our objective remains: offering global support, restoring dignity, and fostering the empowerment and autonomy of women on the move.

## OUR VALUES

**Non-oppressive practices:** taking action without imposing, by prioritising women's decision-making when providing social and medical support.

**Respect:** supporting each woman, with respect to her story, her needs, and her autonomy.

**Collaboration:** working with other organisations to share resources and reinforce our impact.

**Solidarity:** supporting women through their trials (such as grief, violence, and expulsion) with a constant, humane presence.

**Intersectional feminism:** taking into account the intersections of oppressions (gender, race, migration, and class) in all our actions.



# OUR ACTIONS



## URGENT HUMANITARIAN AID

Distributing tents, blankets, clothes, hygiene products, baby material, etc.



## SOCIAL AND MEDICAL SUPPORT

Enabling pregnancy follow-ups, access to contraception, gynaecological services, and support in cases of gender based violence.



## PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Providing creative workshops to strengthen ties and autonomy, in women-only spaces, where women can be heard and supported.



## ADVOCACY AND RAISING AWARENESS

Participating in inter-associational action and social media campaigns, and collecting testimonies to make the realities of women on the move visible.

# 2024 FOR THE WOMEN AT THE BORDER

“THE WOMEN WE MEET IN CALAIS AND GRANDE-SYNTHÉ ARE NOT DEFINED BY THEIR VULNERABILITIES, BUT RATHER BY THEIR STRENGTH, RESILIENCE, AND KNOWLEDGE.”

In 2024, the main objective of the women we met in Grande-Synthe and Calais was to reach the United Kingdom. A little more than half of these women were travelling with their husbands, the other half were either alone or with their children. Each of their paths was unique, but their arrival at the Franco-British border has four possible explanations: a choice made in their home country, a choice based on the comparison of different European countries, a choice by default imposed by immigration policies, or a consequence of the different dynamics of exploitation before or following the departure from their home country.

Most women escaped contexts of war or oppression, fleeing countries such as Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Vietnam, Turkey, Yemen, Kuwait, Ethiopia, or Eritrea. Some – like Mona, an Afghan architect – had university degrees but were unable to exercise their profession freely. Others were escaping from violent husbands or seeking a better future for their children, particularly those with disabilities.

Some women had relatives in the United Kingdom or hoped to get a job there, but most were forced to make this choice by the non-welcome immigration policies in Europe. The Dublin III agreement and an Obligation to Leave French Territory (“Obligation de quitter le territoire français” (OQTF)) prevent them from asking for asylum in another country, pushing them towards the informal settlements in Northern France to risk their lives to cross the Channel.

We met women such as Leila, who travelled with her husband and her deaf and mute 7-year-old daughter; or Sara, who travelled alone with her autistic son. After being dismissed by Germany, they both ventured to the United Kingdom in hopes of providing a safe future for their children. Or even Roula, whose family was dismissed both in Greece and Germany, and only wished for her children to live in safety and go to school. Her daughter died during the family’s crossing to the United Kingdom. Like so many others, their story highlights the tragic impact of the non-welcome immigration policies in Europe.

**AT REFUGEE WOMEN’S CENTRE, WE ARE COMMITTED TO CREATING SPACES WHERE EVERY WOMAN IS RECOGNISED IN HER INDIVIDUALITY, DIGNITY, AND POWER TO ACT. OUR VOLUNTEERS ARE TRAINED TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS WITH RESPECT, WITHOUT JUDGEMENT, AND WITH CONSTANT ATTENTION TO THE IDENTITY, VALUES AND ASPIRATIONS OF EACH WOMAN. EVERY WOMAN DESERVES TO BE SEEN, HEARD, AND SUPPORTED - NOT DESPITE HER EXILE, BUT RATHER BECAUSE OF THE RICHNESS OF HER JOURNEY.**



## SURVIVAL ON THE COAST

The living conditions in the informal settlements on the Northern French coast are particularly hard for women. They face gender specific challenges such as:

- Lack of access to safe and private spaces, particularly exclusively female spaces. These are essential to ensure women's intimacy and security.
- Lack of access to basic infrastructure: lighting, showers, toilets, drinking water, and nutritious food are often non-existent.
- Increased safety risks, particularly for women travelling alone, who faced daily harassment, intimidation, and violence.
- Difficulties related to maternity and parenthood due to conditions that make pregnancy and child-rearing extremely precarious.
- Lack of personal space and dignity, especially for mothers living in tents with their children.
- Negative impact on children, deprived of school, games, stability and the fundamental benchmarks for their development.

These conditions have grave consequences on the physical and mental health of women and children. It is urgent to recognise their specific needs and to respond to them with appropriate, dignified and respectful solutions.

**The women encountered in Calais and Grande-Synthe are not defined by their vulnerability, but by their strength, resilience, and knowledge.** They have rich backgrounds, multiple skills, and strong aspirations. The approach of the Refugee Women's Centre aims to recognise this plurality without ever reducing them to their current situation of exile. We accompany each woman in her entirety, respecting her history, her choices and her autonomy.

In the camps, women are often made invisible by gender specific dynamics: They often experience that men take more public space, speak up, decide on their behalf, etc. This domination is reflected in mansplaining, manspreading, and a marginalisation of women in daily interactions. They are also more exposed to harassment, as well as physical and sexual violence, which affect their integrity and emotional well-being. Some women experience direct violence, others exercise their autonomy in constrained contexts. Many make their way to England without immediate violence but in extreme precariousness. Others who are more economically vulnerable, are exposed to exploitation, trafficking, or forced into prostitution to finance their journey. The lack of legal and safe routes pushes women towards risky passage networks. These could be avoided by establishing more humane migration policies.

# OUR ACTIVITIES



Preparing our mobile distribution of material using individually packed bags.

# CALAIS



*In Calais, the people we meet mostly come from Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Afghanistan. However, in 2024, we noticed a change in nationalities, with the arrival of Yemeni, Kuwaiti, Kurdish, Ethiopian, and Vietnamese women and families. This diversity not only reflects the geopolitical crisis in the world and in these countries, but also the lack of dignified and welcoming routes in Europe. Even though men remain the majority in the camps, the number of families rises each year, with more women attempting to cross the Channel.*

*The number of people surviving in the camps varies between 600 and 2000 depending on the month. The average stay in the camps is about one month. This fast-paced turnover complicates setting up personalised support. Because of this constant instability, our organisation has had to adapt its practices and focus its efforts on providing prevention and information, particularly regarding the risks associated with maritime crossings. We have developed specific messages for women and families to strengthen their autonomy and security: how to call for help when in danger, keep the children close to avoid traumatic separations, among many other things.*

*The living conditions on the camps are appalling. The lack of frequent waste collection leads to dirt, diseases, rats, and constitutes a direct attack to people's dignity. As a feminist organisation, we refuse to normalise this daily violence. That is why, alongside other collectives, we have repeatedly reached out to the local authorities, organised citizen waste collecting, and publicly denounced this situation.*

*The "zero fixation point" policy, implemented by the authorities, leads to camp evictions every two days. These evictions indiscriminately affect women, children, and families. This strategy has grave psychological consequences, particularly on children (for more information, see research conducted by Project Play). Evictions prevent any sense of stability, destroys points of reference, and condemn inhabitants to a state of perpetual wandering. The emergence of new camps is no coincidence: it is the symptom of a system which refuses to welcome, and prefers to invisibilise people rather than protect them.*

*At the Refugee Women's Centre, we believe that women on the move are not passive victims, but rather actors of their own journey. We support them in their singularity, recognising their strength, skills, and aspirations. We denounce the policies of non-welcome and systemic violence, and we continue to foster spaces of resistance, care, and dignity.*

# MATERIAL SUPPORT



263

TENTS



218

SLEEPING BAGS



824

BLANKETS



76

BABY MILK BOXES



1968

UNDERWEAR

In Calais, our team is **on the field 5 days a week** to distribute clothes and hygiene products to the women and families on the move. We go to several living sites, the camps, showers, and Secours Catholique day centre to offer personalised support, adapted to each woman's needs.

We have established a **mobile "freeshop"** at the back of our vehicles that we at the Secours Catholique day centre, camps, and showers. The freeshop has underwear, t-shirts, pull-overs, trousers, dresses, shoes, socks, hijabs, hats, and scarves as well as hygiene products such as deoderants, pads, tampons, soap, shampoo, tooth paste and toothbrushes. At the freeshop, each woman gets time to choose their own clothes and products that suit them.

**Choice is central to our approach. Through choice, we hope that all the women can feel comfortable in their body and preserve their identity.**



A mobile freeshop distribution.

During the winter, we also distribute specific gear to reduce the risks of hypothermia: emergency blankets, hand warmers, and flashlights. Additionally, we also distribute SIM cards and phone chargers, which are essential for women to communicate with their loved ones and the various organisations in Calais.

Our material support take several forms:

- A **mobile "freeshop"** to give women a free and respectful choice.
- **Custom orders**, which are prepared in advance, depending on the specific needs of women and their children.

Furthermore, we distribute **maternity products**: nappies, babymilk, pregnancy tests, and baby carriers. Depending on stock we also provide beauty products such as face creams, masks, makeup etc.

**Our approach promotes autonomy and dignity, and rejects the generalisations and dehumanisations imposed by migration policies.**



## ACCES TO SHELTER

As was the case at the end of 2023, access to shelter in 2024 widely fluctuated depending on the number of people present in Calais.

To **make up for the French state's shortcomings**, the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) opened some shelter spots in a hotel. The rooms, made available between January and April 2024, were first reserved to unaccompanied minors and then to families.

Women and families also benefitted from a single night of emergency shelter at 115 if there were spaces available and if they had not been before (it is a one-time offer). However, still, many families, often already traumatised by various experiences or particularly harsh weather conditions, were denied access to this emergency service. We also experienced that even with exceptional conditions such as returning from a failed crossing attempt and/or the presence of young children and babies, the one night limit was enforced.

The remaining available shelter options are the three CAES (Reception and Situation Evaluation Centres). These centres are located between 30 and 100 km from Calais. **The existence of these CAES is vital** and enables many people to access a temporary shelter. **This is why it is necessary that shelter conditions and options correspond as much as possible to the needs of those present at the Northern French border.**

Sadly, we have noticed several obstacles and criticisms of these options: cleanliness and hygiene, dignity and respect of the hosted people, and access to information. Moreover, the state-run buses that bring them to these centres every working day around 9 am leave from a remote industrial area, 5 km away from the Calais city centre. Therefore, it is up to our team or the other organisations to bring the families to these buses.

This situation has complicated our activities given the ever-increasing number of people seeking accommodation for longer than one night. One morning in April 2024, we had to bring more than 60 people to the bus stop. Moreover, people must return by their own means to Calais if they wish to leave or when they are asked to leave without explanation, which is sometimes the case.

## ACCES TO SHELTER (CONTINUED)

We therefore continue to count on citizen housing hosts. This option allows temporary respite from the street/camp situations. This is also the case of our main partner, the Maria Skobtsova house, the only long-term shelter for women and children in Calais.

Among the specific situations which require accommodation, we can give the example of two transgender women who were denied access to I15; or a European woman victim of domestic violence who was denied access to permanent accommodation in Calais and who did not fit into the conditions of the CAES either.

The situation of homeless European women in Calais is an issue with which we are confronted - however we do not have a sustainable response yet. As in the case of non-European women, the situation of homeless European women in Calais is not addressed by the state and local authorities either.



Example of an activity that fosters connection.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

In 2024, due to the significant increase of women and families on the coast, we reorganised our priorities and re-established activities directly in the living areas in Calais. Since we were no longer able to redirect all families towards accommodation centres, we strengthened our presence on the field by mobilising 3 to 4 volunteers per day, compared to 2 previously.

We have refocused our action on "**maraudes**" (to be understood as roaming, doing rounds, going towards people who may need help), which constitutes a foundation of the Refugee Women's Centre. Every Wednesday morning, we set up our gazebo directly at the living sites to offer psychosocial activities, such as writing or painting workshops, in a women-only space. These moments not only constitute spaces for **relaxing and connection**, but also are a way to establish a **link of trust**. This trust then enables us to address other needs, often invisible, beyond sleeping equipment, clothing or access to hygiene.

# ADVOCACY



We carried out various advocacy actions this year, some specifically regarding the case of women, families, and children at the border, and others in support of all exiled people.

In Calais, we continued participating in the “Calais ploubelle” action. This initiative, launched in 2023 by the Support to Migrants Platform (PSM), aims to raise awareness within Calais and advocates for waste disposal and dustbins in the informal settlements. A civil litigation has been opened with the hopes to reach this goal.

We also conducted interviews to collect testimonies on the situation in the CAES (Reception and Situation Evaluation Centers) in Calais. This occurred due to a the high amount of criticisms made by the people living there (ex: cleanliness, degrading treatment by the staff, lack of clear information on the real rights of exiled people), as mentionned previously. We regularly call out the authorities regarding these centres’ access issues and call for the establishment of similar accommodation on the coast.

On March 8 2024, on the **International Day for the Rights of Women and Gender Minorities**, we organised a fundraising garage sale and a gathering with the feminist collective of Calais, to raise awareness about women’s rights and conditions at the border.

An initiative called the “**common front**” was born this year to unite under a single banner, collectively reflect on advocacy at the border, and ensure a strong and audible voice at the Franco-British border. We thus participated in a demonstration in Lille in June 2024, to make the situation at the border more visible. This initiative also lead to an important demonstration in Calais in January 2025.

Finally, we take part in the “**humanitarian base**” meetings, organised by the prefecture twice a year. Despite a somewhat blocked situation due to the current political choices at the national and local levels, we believe it is important be present at these meetings. There, we carry the voices and stories of the women we support and advocate for their rights against those who have a racist and distorted view of the situation in Calais.

# DUNKIRK



*The camps in the Dunkirk area embody a silent yet constant institutional violence. In 2024, exiled women and families survived appalling conditions, living in tents without reliable access to water, to health and hygiene services, food, or safe accommodation. These are places of transit, not of life. Women only stay a few days, just long enough to attempt the perilous crossing to England. They are fleeing wars, oppressive regimes, and domestic violence, only seeking to offer their children a future. Yet they are rendered invisible, ignored, and abandoned.*

*There is a great diversity in terms of nationalities: Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Vietnam, Turkey, Kurdistan, among many others. This variety not only reflects global and local crises, but also the failure of European migration policies to provide safe and dignified routes to Europe. The arrival of unaccompanied minors, particularly girls, highlights the urgent need for a feminist and protective response. These young women who travel alone, are exposed to increased risks of gender-based violence, trafficking, and exploitation. Despite this hostile context, no state mechanisms guarantee their safety or their access to legal information, healthcare, or accommodation.*

*The living conditions in the camps are appalling. The lack of frequent waste collection leads to unsanitary conditions, diseases, the presence of rats, and constitutes a direct attack to people's dignity. As a feminist organisation, we refuse to normalise this daily violence. That is why, alongside other collectives, we have repeatedly reached out to the local authorities, organised citizen waste collecting, and publicly denounced this situation.*

*The "zero fixation point" policy implemented by the authorities, leads to evictions every two days. These evictions indiscriminately affect women, children, and families. This strategy has grave psychological consequences, particularly on children, as highlighted by Project Play's latest report. Evictions prevent any sense of stability, destroys points of reference, and condemn inhabitants to a state perpetual wandering. The emergence of new camps is no coincidence: it is a symptom of a system which refuses to provide shelter and prefers to invisibilise people rather than protect them.*

*At the Refugee Women's Centre, we believe that women on the move are not passive victims, but rather agents of their own journey. We support them in their singularity, recognising their strength, skills, and aspirations. We denounce the policies of non-welcome and systemic violence, and continue to foster spaces of resistance, care, and dignity.*

## MATERIAL SUPPORT



781

TENTS



1082

SLEEPING BAGS



2418

BLANKETS



103

BABY MILK BOXES



4182

UNDERWEAR

In Grande-Synthe, our team is **on the field six days a week**, in a remote industrial location where women are living in tents, without stable access to water, hygiene facilities, or food. We intervene in the car park at the entrance to the camps, as well as at the showers, to distribute clothing, hygiene products, and essential supplies.

Like in Calais, we have set up a **mobile “freeshop”** at the back of our vehicles. This allows women to choose for themselves the clothes and accessories that suit them. We set the shop up at the main distribution point and at the showers. There, women can pick what they need, including new underwear, t-shirts, pull-overs, trousers, dresses, shoes, socks, hijabs, hats, and scarves.

During the winter, we also distribute specific gear to reduce the risks of hypothermia: emergency blankets, hand warmers, and flashlights. Additionally, we also distribute SIM cards and phone chargers, which are essential for women to communicate with their loved ones and the various organisations in Calais.

Our material support takes several forms:

- A **mobile “freeshop”** to give women a free and respectful choice.
- **Custom orders**, which are prepared in advance, depending on the specific needs of women and their children.

Furthermore, we distribute **hygiene and maternity products**: soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, nappies, babymilk, pregnancy tests, and baby carriers. Depending on stock, we can also provide beauty products such as face creams, masks, makeup etc. In this extremely precarious context, our approach aims to restore a minimum level of dignity and independence, whilst recognising the specific needs of each woman.

Throughout 2024, the RWC team has **faced significant difficulties in setting up its activities in the camps**. The available locations are rarely suitable: they are often isolated from the camp and other organisations, and always chosen based on the accessibility of our vehicles in case of an emergency evacuation. Women sometimes have to walk several kilometres to reach the distribution points, which exacerbates their isolation. The freeshop, which has become highly mobile, fast-paced due to time pressure, and transactional out of necessity, no longer allows for the creation of lasting bonds. Instead, connections between our team and the women are fostered around the showers, the only somewhat secure and frequent space.

**Despite our constant efforts, the distribution of essential supplies remains highly unstable, particularly regarding tents. The tents are still in short supply and subject to restrictive criteria. Day-to-day life in the field remains a delicate balance between adaptation and frustration.**



## PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO HYGIENE

In 2024, the Refugee Women's Centre continued providing **access to showers three times a week**, alongside **psychosocial activities** designed to create spaces for care, trust and respite. These workshops are either focused on creative expression, listening, or sharing and connection. They were held directly in the car park at the entrance of the camps and at the showers, the only somewhat secure space for women. In the complete absence of women-only spaces in Grande-Synthe, these improvised areas have become crucial safe havens for women on the move, whose numbers in the camp have risen sharply this year.

Despite complex logistical and security constraints, our team has maintained its commitment in the field. We accompanied 936 women and 419 children to the showers in 2024. However, our limited capacity (21 people per session) forced us to deny access to many people: of the 3,238 women and 5,476 children we encountered this year, a large proportion were unable to benefit from this essential service. A waiting list of over a week has become the norm.

We have repeatedly sought logistical support to respond to the growing demand, particularly regarding vehicles or transportation solutions to facilitate access to the showers. None of our requests have been conclusive. The lack of institutional support exacerbates inequalities in access and limits the scope of our work, even though needs continue to grow.



Example of an activity that fosters connection

## ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER

In 2024, access to tap water in the camps remained **limited to a single water access point**. The organisation, Roots, ensured the frequent maintenance of the water point, thereby guaranteeing continuous access. However, since the installation of water tanks was halted, no improvements have been made, leaving displaced people in a highly precarious situation when it comes to this basic need.



The organisation, Roots, with their water tanks.

## ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND SUPPORT IN THE FACE OF VIOLENCE

In 2024, the Refugee Women's Centre continued its work providing medical and social support to women on the move, in a context where access to healthcare remains deeply unequal.

Thanks to our efforts, a midwife from the PMI (Infant and Maternal Protection) now pays request-based visits to the camps, providing pregnancy care and advice on contraception. This collaboration, built over time, enables us to meet urgent needs where conventional services fail to reach.

Our relationship with the Dunkirk Hospital Centre (CHD) has also strengthened, which has facilitated referrals and care. Despite the Family Planning service being one of our committed partners, it remains difficult to contact and has limited availability, which restricts access to rights that are nonetheless fundamental.

Beyond medical issues, our team is confronted with situations of control and domestic violence, which are often invisible and always complex. This violence is part of a daily life marked by instability, fear, and a lack of safe spaces. These situations require a strong, coordinated and, above all, accessible inter-institutional response. All too often, women do not know where to turn or are simply unable to do so.

**We want institutions to recognise the unique nature of the violence experienced by women in exile, to strengthen protection measures on the ground, and to ensure genuine access to healthcare and safety for all women, regardless of their administrative status. This is an urgent and daily matter, and it can no longer be ignored.**

# ADVOCACY



Manifestation à Calais pour le respect des droits des femmes

In Dunkirk, several initiatives were launched in 2024. Firstly, the **"Justice at the Borders"** initiative, which aims to highlight deaths at the borders and demand justice for those affected by organising events in Dunkirk.

There is a certain disconnect between the Loon Plage/Mardyck camps and the detached perspective of Dunkirk residents. We have therefore begun working with local artists in Dunkirk to address this gap.

We have also helped to organise a **comprehensive legal campaign in Dunkirk** to demand respect for the fundamental rights of people on the move (access to water, food, decent accommodation, etc.). As a significant example, a single woman and a couple were granted one night's emergency accommodation through the 115 service, amidst the numerous calls made.

More broadly, we also explored **legal strategies through the use of emergency procedures**. Unfortunately, as case law has ruled against so-called 'undocumented' and 'homeless' women, we have resigned ourselves to not pursue these procedures.

Finally, we have continued our efforts to engage with news outlets in order to **highlight the realities of women at the border**, which are all too often overlooked in media coverage.

# THE COAST



The year 2024 saw an escalation in police violence on coastal beaches, particularly during the attempts to cross to England. Eyewitnesses describe the interventions as brutal. They often occur at night, and have contributed to creating a climate of fear and tension amongst those seeking refuge.

Due to growing repression, departure points have gradually moved away from the original areas. Those seeking to cross are forced to migrate to more discreet and less monitored beaches, sometimes as far as Dieppe or Le Havre. This geographical dispersion complicates humanitarian support and exacerbates the isolation of women and families. They travel long distances in precarious conditions, often without access to basic services or community support. The RWC denounces the consequences of this situation: increased risks, a loss of connection with support networks, and the growing invisibility of people on the move.

## MEDICAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

In 2024, the Refugee Women's Centre expanded its team by creating a **new paid role dedicated to providing social and legal support**. This role was created in response to an urgent need: the majority of the women we support require in-depth support, particularly in relation to health and rights. Nearly 90% of the support provided this year involved pregnancy and women's healthcare. This year, we met **90 pregnant women** in the camps in Calais and Dunkirk.

Being pregnant whilst living in a tent, in extremely precarious conditions, poses a major risk to women's physical and mental health. That is why we have organised an **enhanced support**, with regular check-ups, and paying attention paid to every stage of pregnancy. We are therefore also able to inform women about their options for their status in France. This knowledge is often rendered inaccessible by the current migration policies.

The vast majority of the support provided by the social and legal coordinator focused on legal matters, due to the acute lack of information and legal support in the camps. She mostly supported women subject to the Dublin Regulation, who were thus often forced to attempt the crossing to England. Some, scarred by trauma from previous attempts, expressed a desire to give up, yet remained trapped by the Dublin Regulation. The coordinator **created links with lawyers** to lodge appeals, particularly for those in especially vulnerable situations, such as single mothers or pregnant women.

## WAREHOUSE AT “THE AUBERGE DES MIGRANTS”



Our team tirelessly and meticulously works to collect, sort, and organise donations of supplies for women and families on the move. **Over 90% of the supplies we distribute come from donations, mainly second-hand\***. This approach, which is both cost-effective and environmentally friendly, requires a significant commitment: appeals for donations, collection, sorting, packing, and storing. In other words, each stage involves many hours of work. A remote volunteer coordinates the donations logistics. She is constantly in contact with the team on the field so that she can adapt donation requests to match the seasons and the needs expressed by the women on the move. Accordingly, she communicates with donors and organises transport to Calais, ensuring that we can respond appropriately to the ever changing situations on the ground.

On site, our team spends **three days a week on distributions and activities with the women, and two days sorting items at the warehouse**. This work is crucial: it enables us to make sure that the clothes we distribute are in good condition, suitable for life in the camps, and in line with each woman's tastes and needs. It is also a time for sharing and camaraderie, away from the stress of the field, a place where strong bonds are forged between team members. Sorting takes place at the Refugee Women's Centre's area, located in a **shared warehouse** managed by the Auberge des Migrants. **Sharing a space with other organisations** allows us to reduce costs, exchange best practices, and strengthen the coordination between the organisations on the field. We also share our offices and meals there, fostering a spirit of collective solidarity. The warehouse stores the stocks and teams of several organisations working with people on the move: *Project Play* and *Kaléidoscope* for children and young people, *Care For Calais* and *Refugee Community Kitchen* for food distributions, *Utopia 56* for support along the coast, as well as the *Auberge des Migrants'* projects, *Channel Info Project* and *Woodyard*.

**This logistical work is essential to ensure that our activities are well organised and that we can accurately meet the needs of the women and families we support.**

\*Some items we distribute, such as underwear, are never second-hand. We only collect new underwear, out of respect for the privacy and dignity of the women.

## SUPPORTING BEREAVED FAMILIES



A gathering to remember the people who died at the border

In 2024, a painful yet vital part of the Refugee Women's Centre's work focused on supporting bereaved families, especially mothers who had lost a child whilst attempting to cross to England.

**This year, at least eight families supported by RWC experienced this tragedy.**

To respond to this unbearable reality, we set up a **comprehensive support programme**, working closely with other organisations along the coast, to provide **emotional, logistical, legal, and medical support** to the families.

In March 2024, we supported Rula's family, a 7-year-old girl who died during a crossing attempt. The day after her death, we met the girl's mother, Nour, who was eight months pregnant, in the hospital where she was staying with her other children. We referred them to Maison Sésame for emergency accommodation. We also accompanied the family to the mortuary to say goodbye to Rula, then to appointments with the psychologist. We subsequently helped organise the funeral (cemetery, ceremony at the mosque), provided legal support, and witnessed the birth of Rayan, Rula's little brother, a month later.

Without going into detail about the unique and painful journeys of the seven bereaved families, Rula's story serves as a concrete illustration of the kind of support we were able to provide: acknowledging the pain, supporting the women in their grief, and enabling them to navigate these events with dignity.

**This account alone cannot fully capture the reality experienced by all the babies, children, and women who died at the border in 2024, whose stories remain at the heart of our commitment.**

# DATA: MAIN FINDINGS



Example of an activity that foster connection

3208 | 2969 | 3027

**WOMEN  
SUPPORTED**

**CHILDREN  
SUPPORTED**

**FAMILIES  
SUPPORTED**

In 2024, the Refugee Women's Centre supported 7850 people including 3027 families, 3208 women, 2969 children, and 1604 men. These numbers highlight the increase of families and single women in the camps on the Northern French coast.

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**3208 women supported:**

- 1235 single women
- 301 single mothers
- 1672 women with husbands

**Amongst these women, 214 were particularly vulnerable:**

- 150 pregnant women
- 61 elderly women (over the age of 55)
- 3 disabled women

**2969 children supported:**

- 438 infants and toddlers aged 0 to 2
- 626 children aged 3 to 5
- 1182 children aged 6 to 12
- 723 teenagers aged 13 to 17, including 45 unaccompanied minors (UMG)

**1604 men supported:**

- 45 single fathers
- 1559 men accompanying women (husbands, brothers, family members etc.)

The support we provide to these men differs from the support we provide to women and children. We facilitate the access to material support for their children and do our best to provide emergency mixed accommodation for the entire family. However, regarding material and medical support, we refer these men to our partners.

**This data reflects a harsh reality: thousands of women and children we have meet, hundreds we have supported, and just as many without support due to a lack of resources. Each piece of data represents a story, an urgent need, and a dignity to be defended. In the face of institutional inaction, our presence remains vital. But our presence is not enough. It is time for these figures to be taken seriously, for policy makers to commit to action, and for fundamental human rights to no longer be treated as an adjustment variable.**

# COMPARING 2024 TO 2023

## TOTAL OF PEOPLE SUPPORTED

LOCATION	2023	2024	EVOLUTION
DUNKIRK	4079	5426	<b>+1347 people (+33%)</b>
CALAIS	1513	2424	<b>+1911 people (+60%)</b>
TOTAL	5592	7850	<b>+2258 people (+40%)</b>

## TOTAL OF WOMEN SUPPORTED

LOCATION	2023	2024	EVOLUTION
DUNKIRK	1564	2196	<b>+631 women (+40%)</b>
CALAIS	605	1012	<b>+407 women (+67%)</b>
TOTAL	2169	3208	<b>+1039 women (+47%)</b>

## TOTAL OF CHILDREN SUPPORTED

LOCATION	2023	2024	EVOLUTION
DUNKIRK	1662	2062	<b>+400 children (+24%)</b>
CALAIS	581	907	<b>+326 children (+56%)</b>
TOTAL	2243	2969	<b>+ 726 children (+32%)</b>

Between 2023 and 2024, the Refugee Women's Centre observed a significant rise in the number of people supported along the coast. In the space of a year, the number of people we supported rose from 5,592 to 7,850, which depicts a 40% increase. This increase is particularly present amongst women, whose numbers rose by 47%, from 2,169 in 2023 to 3,208 in 2024. But it is above all the increased presence of children that is striking: their numbers saw a 32% surge, from 2,243 to 2,969 children.

**In this context, our team had to adapt its practices to meet ever-increasing and urgent needs. We have stepped up our distribution of essential supplies, intensified support for finding shelter, and increased our efforts to ensure access to hygiene facilities, particularly through the provision of showers.**



# FINANCIAL REPORT

# INCOME FOR 2024



View of the warehouse where we stock our material, most of which consists of donations.

The organisation is **99.6% funded by private grants**. We therefore primarily rely on financial support from private foundations and organisations, as well as from individuals. The Dunkirk Urban Community contributes 0,4% of RWC's overall funding, thus providing valuable support on the field. Mardyck Town Hall enables our access to a free hygiene and shower facility, contributing to the organisation's public health monitoring efforts.

Our sources of income for 2024 fall into the three following categories:

## **Donations and grants from foundations and endowment funds**

In 2024, twelve foundations and endowment funds provided financial support to RWC, through targeted proposals or unrestricted funding. Among our main partners, we warmly thank the Fondation de France, the RAJA Danièle Marcovici Foundation, the Fondation pour le Logement des Défavorisés and the Haëlla Foundation for their commitment to our mission.

This support amounts to 72.3% of the organisation's total resources and is essential in ensuring the implementation and continuity of our work.

## **Donations from the public**

Donations from the public mainly come from online fundraising campaigns, as well as one-time or frequent donations by cheque or bank transfer. These contributions, combined to added membership fees and proceeds from merchandise and charity sales, amount to 27.3% of RWC's total budget and are an essential part of our financial stability and independence.

Beyond the financial impact, these resources reflect the public support towards RWC and the role of our work within civil society.

## **Donations from groups and partners**

Some groups and organisations support RWC on a frequent or one-time basis in various ways: financial donations and physical donations. Their support is invaluable to us.

# EXPENSES IN 2024

**200 060€ of expenses in 2024, a decrease of 9,1% compared to RWC's expenses in 2023 (220 184 €)**

The three main expenses of RWC are:

## **Human resources (56%)**

To carry out our activities on the field and with partners, a team of around fourteen volunteers works in continuous shifts, supported by around ten people working remotely. One part-time staff member is responsible for recruiting, supporting and monitoring the volunteers.

Volunteer coordination, which is at the heart of the RWC's work, is handled by two full-time staff members. A social and legal support officer, also working full-time, has been recruited to strengthen the team and support the staff.

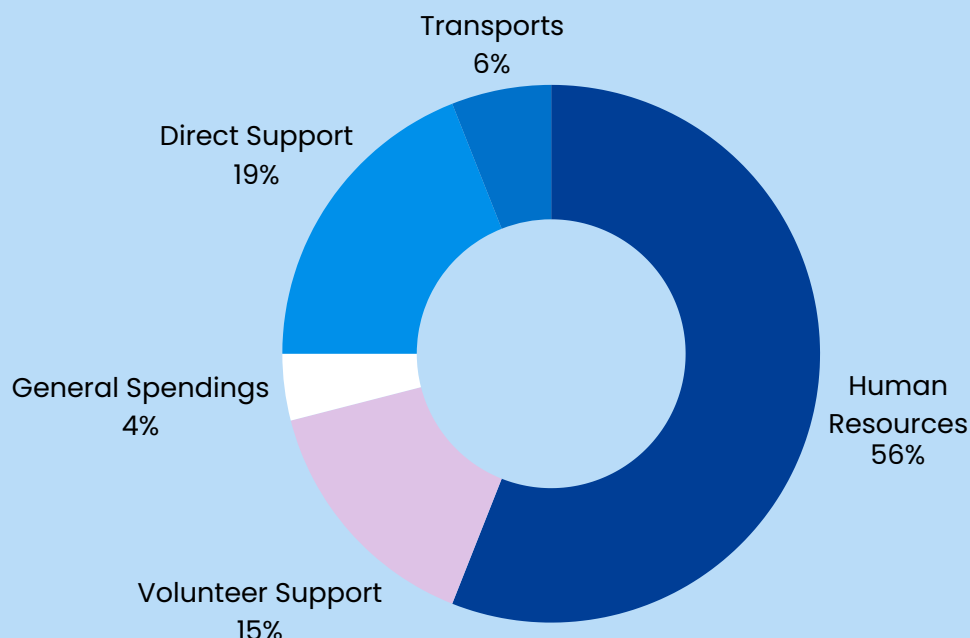
Total staff costs, which are essential to guaranteeing a professional welcome and support for people on the move, account for 56% of RWC's annual budget.

## **Field operations (25%)**

**Direct support (19%)** provided to women and families includes the distribution of essential items (underwear, baby formula, hygiene products, tents, blankets, tarps), the psychosocial support activities, emergency accommodation and the purchase of food. This also includes **transport (6%)**, meaning fuel and vehicle maintenance to enable teams to travel, meet with women, and provide the necessary support. All of these operations amount to approximately 25% of the organisation's annual budget.

## **Voluneteer support (15%)**

The organisation covers the costs of the two houses where volunteers live during their stay. Having these houses facilitates their work on the field and encourages teamwork and mutual support. The expenses represent around 15% of RWC's budget.



# RWC'S FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Several factors are heavily increasing the organisation's expenses and weaken RWC's financial stability: the rising cost of housing, the frequent repairs needed for our decrepit vehicles, as well as unforeseen expenses.

## Adjustments made to ensure our work is sustainable

Although recent investments have enabled us to organise and sustain our activities, the management team must now adjust the budget to ensure the RWC's financial stability. Expenses related to volunteer support have therefore been reduced, particularly costs related to accommodation. From 2025 onwards, volunteers will be asked to financially contribute to housing costs

## A challenging period for the associations' sector in France

Budget cuts and shifting public policy priorities are affecting the entire associations' sector in France. This national context is already having an impact on our resource forecasts.

Since we only receive very limited public funding, RWC faces particularly complex financial management, characterised by a double unpredictability: perpetually changing needs on the field and limited funding.

## Our inability to predict the increasing needs and expenses

The needs we respond to can significantly change from one year to another: 5,592 people were supported in 2023, compared to 7,850 in 2024. This evolution directly impacts our expenses. Even though some costs are fixed, most fluctuate depending on the situations we encounter: shelter needs, hygiene products, clothing, food, fuel, or vehicle maintenance. These costs are difficult to predict and can change rapidly during the course of the year.

## Our reliance on private funding as a source of uncertainty

The organisation's heavy reliance on private funding and individual donations is another source of instability. Due to the lack of multi-year funding, the budget is highly sensitive to changes in the political and media landscape, which influence both donation patterns and donors' priorities..



Makeshift shelter in a camp, Grande Synthe

# THE TEAM



The RWC team and our support vehicle allowing us to provide mobile support.

## EXPANDING THE TEAM

In 2024, the Refugee Women's Centre continued to grow vigorously and consistently. Since establishing the first paid positions in 2022 and the recognition of our work through several awards, the organisation consolidated its expansion in 2023 and 2024. A dedicated social and legal support role was created to strengthen our ability to meet the specific needs of women on the move, particularly regarding regulation, healthcare, and administrative procedures.

Thanks to new partnerships, we have been able to expand our team:

- 15 volunteers working in the field each month
- 3 full-time staff members (1 coordinator per field (Calais/Dunkirk), 1 social and legal coordinator)
- 1 part-time staff member (volunteer recruitment officer)
- A shared office within the shared warehouse

Our team (staff, volunteers and volunteers) exclusively comprises women and non-binary people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This multicultural and multilingual diversity enables us to grasp the realities faced by the women we support better, and to tailor our support to their specific needs. Every day, we strive to create spaces of trust, dignity and autonomy, whilst remaining true to our feminist and solidarity-based values.

## VOLUNTEERS

In 2024, 82 volunteers joined the Refugee Women's Centre, committing to work at the border between 2 and 8 months. Thanks to the two volunteer houses, we were able to maintain a constant presence in the field, with 12 to 14 beds occupied throughout the year. These communal living spaces allowed the team to rest, come together, and create strong bonds amidst an often challenging daily routine.

This year also saw the end of our long-standing partner in volunteer recruitment, Indigo. This change required a swift and collective adaptation. We worked hand in hand with other organisations to rethink our recruitment channels and continue to welcome motivated and supportive individuals.

Some of the steps we took:

- Applying for the European Solidarity Corps quality label,
- Establishment of new partnerships with Volver.org, SCI CAT, and Via E.V. (Germany), which enabled us to welcome volunteers under the International Youth Volunteer Service (IFJD) programme, for up to one year long placements.

At the same time, we were able to rely on volunteers through the Civil Service and internships, who provided essential support:

- With stock and warehouse logistics: Gabriela, Alicia, Chiara, Julia and Sonja,
- With social media communications: Roxane and Ciara.

## CARING FOR THOSE WHO CARE FOR OTHERS

Working at the border can be extremely demanding physically, mentally, and emotionally. We have continued to pay attention to our team members' well-being. As well as maintaining our existing protocols (check-ins, rest periods, etc.), we have continued to strengthen our capacity to support our team's mental health. As such, the organisation remains active within the Calais Appeal's inter-organisational safeguarding network. This includes regular meetings to develop protocols and improve the handling of reports, as well as partaking in training sessions and support groups, particularly during serious incidents or for people preparing to leave the border.

To enhance team's well-being, RWC has also been paying monthly psychological support sessions for the coordinators since spring 2024.



### **Volunteers, interns, staff, and members of the organisation's team as a whole in 2024:**

Roxanne, Gabriela, Mathilde, Margaux, Josie, Clarisse, Alícia, Caro, Jo, Asumi, Charlotte, Nolwenn, Lou, Eve, Elena, Pei-Yun Su, Merete, Mia, Zeina, Anne, Elena, Amanjot, Marie L., Téa, Emma, Marina, Lucy, Chiara V., Rosalie, Flore, Lee, Bethan, Lucie, Dania, Elisabeth, Julia G., Nora, Paulina, Caterina, Amelia alias Mia, Arianna, Chiara P., Carla, Paula, Julia C., Sonja, Margarida, Charline, Amandine, Madita, Louise, Alba, Myriam, Marie C., Isha, Leila, Katharina, Julieth, Kayanait, Valentina, Mahboobeh alias Sara, Alejandra, Katja, Jennifer, Iríde, Reham, Flavie, Tamar, Lillian alias Lilli, Isabella, Aurelie, Johanna, Moya, Minke, Nathalie, Reem, Eya, Carmen, Didi, Jennifer, Iríde, Sandrine alias Sand, Alexia, Louise, Marie, Frances, Lou, Shanice, Caroline, Cherley, Nina, Camille, Flore, Merete.

***A huge thank you to all the members of the RWC - those who sort, distribute, listen, support, speak out, and help restore a little dignity every day.***



# Thank you!

Thank you to our financial partners who choose to support a feminist and profoundly humane cause.

## Our financiers



## Our partners on the field



*Your commitment is our strength!*



## CONTACT US

To volunteer  
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