Notes from The Jungle:
Part 1. Sunset and Alfa

As the sun sets on the Jungle, it brings in its wake a sense of exhaustion.

Not just for you. You have been on your feet for close to 16 hours, but realise that unlike the 6,000 people here, you can soon be in a bar, then on a train back to the UK, miles from this surreal holding-pattern of grim determination and hopelessness; a kind of perverse theme-park of poverty 'trapped between' the world's fifth- and sixth-richest nations.

As darkness falls, it seems the entire settlement is overcome by tiredness.

You are lucky enough not to be here every night, sleeping thousands of miles from home beneath a thin sheet of canvas, in a state which is increasingly hostile to you.

You do not wake up with the knowledge that today will once again not be the day you reach the state you wish to, whose government has held you at arms' length for 11 months and appears to be preparing to do so for the rest of time.

So you cannot tell whether the sheer fatigue which arrives in the sun's wake is a daily occurrence, or cumulative, reflecting the sense of abandonment and despair which has taken hold since last January, when the Jungle contained 500, rather than 6,000 men, women and children.

Whichever is true, it wraps itself around the camp as if to suffocate it, even as people continue to walk from tent to tent, talking, arguing, kicking balls, smoking, reading or searching in vain for quiet spots from which to make a phone-call to a loved one – brother, sister, parent or child.

It is almost too much.

You arrived in Calais early in the morning.

On the short journey from the town centre, your cab driver told you that: 'We do not see them (*the refugees at the Jungle*) in the daytime, but at night…'

You know this is because the night-time is when the town is liveliest, when drunk travellers are most likely to buy tissues or trinkets from children, and when darkness offers the best cover for those who are attempting to cling to trains or trucks through the Channel tunnel to the UK.

But it is the day before Hallowe'en. The idea of things unseen in daylight manifesting only when the sun goes down raised a wry smile.

It does not seem to be entirely true, in any case. As your cab comes closer to the Jungle, you see increasing numbers of people, heads down, wearing backpacks or carrying plastic bags, entering and leaving the camp.

And as you enter it, you realise it is all a matter of perspective, and desire: no-one who wanted to see this could possibly miss it in the daytime.

You walk under a flyover, daubed with English and Arabic graffiti, and spread before you, exploding between your left and right diagonals (*at about 10 and 2 O'Clock*), is a sprawling mass of canvas, blue, green, black and brown, stretching as far as you can see under a cloud-smeared late Autumn sky.

You have visited refugee camps before – worked at some – and experienced the white, starched uniformity of their thousands of tall, wide tents arranged in rows on desert edges, or in their centres.

This is not like those.

Here at the Jungle, one- and two-person tents, squat, small, cramped, fight one another for space, packed tightly together on what was perhaps once grassland, but is now very close to a quagmire.

You pick your way through this chaotic entrance, and head into the mayhem beyond.

Much has been said of the international refugee crisis which has fuelled the growth of the Jungle (*though the 6,000 people here are a tiny fraction of the 590,000 people to have sought safety in the EU so far this year. The fact that they ARE here, rather than safe in decent accommodation as many many more refugees are already in Germany, Sweden and other states, is in itself an indictment of the French and UK governments*), and the first few moments here destroy many of the more negative claims about it.

Youngsters running, riding (*an initiative from the UK public has delivered bikes to the Jungle – they are extensively used, extremely popular and offer both some freedom of movement and some recreation to a 'community' which is starved of both*) fighting, being told off, immediately dissolve claims that 'only young men' have come to Europe from the world's most devastating conflicts.

One girl, perhaps about four years old, launches a cuddly, spotted leopard toy on a piece of elastic into your chest. 'Tiger! Tiger! Tiger!' she shouts, laughing as she runs away, pulling the leopard back as you try to grab it.

You are talking to an Egyptian, who is explaining why he fled Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's Egyptian tyranny and though you are extremely interested, you immediately regret not paying more attention to the girl.

Who is she? Does she have a family? In a place like the Jungle, moments of release and play must be important. You should play with her… You look over the man's shoulder, in the direction where she ran. She does not seem to have noted your relative lack of interaction with her, running instead to a group of young people, shouting 'Tiger!' and throwing her toy.

You smile, as you walk past her. She does not notice.

Walk far enough in any place, and you will come to an edge. You pick your way through the Afghan 'village', past a library without books, and a mosque and church which both have believers, down a sunken path which is waterlogged on your left, but still dry enough to walk on, on your right, past a group of people in Dismaland red hooded tops – all refugees – constructing a shelter frame from wood.

You turn left, between two banks of tents, and reach a concrete road. At its end, the Jungle's Sudanese community has most tents, but before you get that far, you meet Alfa.

Alfa, a Mauritanian, left his homeland in 2005, travelling to Syria (*at that point, a destination, rather than a point of origin for Arabic-speaking refugees*). As war broke out and then tightened its grip on the Middle Eastern state, Alfa fled, first to Turkey, then to Greece.

'When war started in Syria I couldn't stay. I lived in Turkey for a while, painting and doing other work, but it was hard because so many people were coming through, and Turkey is not always an easy place to live if you are not from there. I crossed the sea to Greece, and I wanted to come to the UK. I thought that life would be good there, and people say you can work, and be accepted.

'But it has been impossible. You come to the Jungle, where you think you could apply to live in the UK, but there is no-one here who even knows how to apply. There are no forms. There is nothing. Now, I am feeling that I might try to stay here in France. I would like to go back to Mauritania, to my home, but that is not possible now. I do not know if it ever will be.'

In a small space he has carved out on the Jungle's easternmost edge, Alfa has created an interesting creative and educational centre.

To the left of the space's 'entrance' is a small hut containing artworks – paintings and collages – Alfa himself has created while he has been here. There are also small shelters between it and a larger tent bearing the designation 'Ecole' – though you do not notice any children here.

At this moment, an argument breaks out between Alfa and some of the men standing close to the 'school', because a group of French media photographers have missed – or perhaps ignored – notices reading 'no photos' and 'no cameras'. 'Alfa.' The men shout. 'Why are they taking pictures?'

'I know them,' he shrugs. 'It is OK.' The men do not agree, and continue to argue, so you quietly mention that you will come back later, and leave them to it.

Through the course of the day, you see police dressed in body armour marching in groups of 16 – 'hardly a community police initiative' one English volunteer worker comments – past youngsters running from tent to tent, English and a few French volunteers working at kitchens (*there is still too little food for all of the 6,000 to eat one meal per day – most people, of course rely on more than one*) and attempting to ensure water provision.

One stops to mention that the toilet facilities (*of which there are far too few to meet the UN's basic hygiene standards: this is a camp in France, the world's sixth-richest state*) and the insufficient water

supply (*also at risk from contamination due to insufficient toilets, and problems with the collection of human waste*) constitute an epidemic or epidemics waiting to happen.

She pauses. 'There is only so much we can do,' she begins. 'There are so many volunteers here, but we have no support. We are not professionals. We know we can only do what we can do, but we also know it is not enough, and we do not have the support you might get in a major organisation or charity.

'Sometimes, you do see people break down, start crying. You help them, but we all know that the only thing keeping some people going here is the knowledge that they are helping others and are needed, and a sense of guilt at feeling low, when the people who are stuck here have things so much worse.'

You sympathise, but today can do nothing else.

You walk on, meeting and speaking to Ethiopians using a converted bike to charge mobile phones, Afghans queuing to wash their hair under pallet-mounted cold water taps, women and men carrying water to the tents they have called home for up to 15 months, Kurds with children in the UK, Sudanese, Darfurian, Somalian and Eritrean people hoping to contact their brothers, sisters, uncles, cousins in Oxford, London, Birmingham, Sheffield…

In each conversation, when people explain that they want to come to the UK (*'life is good there', 'people will accept us, it is racist in other countries in Europe' 'I have children and a wife there' 'I want the chance to work in safety' 'I speak English' – the latter, manifestly true, is pointed out time after time and it is certainly easier to find work in a state if you already speak the language*) you ask: 'Have you applied? How is your application coming on? When will you find out?'

You are met with blank looks: the most dispiriting response imaginable.

The chaos of life at the Jungle is extreme – even by the standards of refugee camps. They provisions of food and water are worse than you have ever seen at a refugee camp – including camps in the Sahara desert – even though both France and the UK each have more money than 128 of the world's states combined. The tents in which people are clinging to life are worse, and the hygiene facilities are not even at the standard of a joke.

The only established international organisations to have so far started operating here are medical – *MSF* and *Doctors of the World* – and though the many English and some French volunteers are making the best of an extremely awful situation, and working themselves to the point of exhaustion and beyond, they are just about keeping their heads below; rather than above, water.

It is a horror story, unfolding on your doorstep.

But even these things could be borne – though they should not have to be – if there were any possibility for these men, women and children of ever leaving.

As people answer your questions about their applications, it is as if you can feel the ground opening up – or perhaps more accurately, you can sense walls closing in on them, threatening to crush the last remaining life from them.

'We have no applications,' they say. 'No-one has allowed us to make applications.' 'We have no forms to fill in.' 'There is no-one here to show us or help us apply.'

At every single refugee camp you have ever visited, whatever the context, or the region of the world, one thing has always been constant – the lifeline.

The fact that every single person in that camp has the chance to apply to be accepted as a refugee in a safe country.

The fact that, even if their applications fail, every person knows for certain that there is a potential escape route which will not force them either to return to a conflict in which they are likely to be killed, or to live illegally and risk death from hunger, disease, or from meeting the wrong person at the wrong moment and being too scared to go to the police or the hospital for fear of being deported to a state where they may face torture and death.

In other words, even in the most remote and harshest of refugee camps, there is hope.

Here in the Jungle, there is not even that.

The UK government has refused to engage with the thousands of people here – with the men, women and children who have fled war, terror and oppression and now simply hope to be allowed a temporary life in a safe state.

It has turned its back on those people, hoping the 'problem' will simply go away, when what it should be doing is engaging with them, allowing them to apply to live there.

Meanwhile, the French government has taken a more active approach – just not one that anyone with human feeling would have considered. Regarding the extremely visible Jungle as an embarrassment, rumours abound that it is preparing forced evictions from the camp – as if the Jungle, rather than the extreme humanitarian crisis unfolding within it – is the problem.

It is possible to apply for the people here to apply for asylum in France, though not thanks to any effort by the government. People can walk or cycle into Calais, and try to get a lawyer to agree to see them and guide them through the forms.

But there are problems. First, lawyers are often 'busy' when faced by people who have only one set of clothes and have been unable to wash them for six months. Second, most of the people at the Jungle want to stay in the UK, not France, while waiting to be able to return home – and have extremely good reasons for that.

But third, and crucially, the French government (*in common with the UK establishment*) sets notoriously high and unreasonable standards for its application process, including that any application written in less than flawless French can be dismissed. No-one here at the camp speaks French like a native. Because, by definition, they are not native to France.

You walk, a little dazed, nodding, smiling, saying hello through a mask of normality, back to Alfa's area.

As you approach, you see him sat on the ground, head in his hands.

He is visibly shaken, so you sit down bedside him, and wait.

'I have been here for seven months,' he says. 'This is now my house. I have nowhere to go, and nothing left I can do. All the people I still know in the world are here, and this place is the only place I feel sure I can remember any more.'

He turns, haggard. 'This is a hard place,' he says. 'There is no respect for people, no humanity. I have seen the police here stop people from helping others who have too little to eat, or who are in pain.

‘It is why my house is what it is. I have opened a space so people can come, and do many things. I have a space for art, and for creative things, because that is something that helps us remember we are people. I have opened the school. It is to teach people French, so they can exist here, if they must. It is not for children. It is for the adults, because only the adults can make the changes that might help their children.’

(*It occurs to you at this point that this may have been the reason why the argument earlier about photography took place – to save adults the ‘embarrassment’ of being seen to attend ‘school’*)

‘I cannot tell you why I left Mauritania,’ he says. ‘Because I would be scared someone might find me. But I hoped that if I came here, I could get to the UK, and be safe, and live for a while, until I could go home. Instead, I am stuck here, and this is not a good place for human beings.

‘After you left, I rode on my bike. I was not cross, but I needed to think about the argument about the photos. I was riding at the side of the road. A car swerved towards me, then away. I assumed it was an accident, so I slowed down and carried on riding.

‘It did it again. Then again, then again. I stopped the bike, and got off. The man in the car stopped and opened the door. He shouted at me and started to walk, then run towards me. He was angry.

‘I realised he wanted to kill me. If I had not run away, he would have killed me.

‘Life is hard here. We cannot do what we want to do. We cannot do anything. And when we are not here, we are people others want to kill.’

He rests his head on his arms, looking straight ahead. You do not have anything sensible to say to this man, who is working to help people at the Jungle, but is – to those outside – just another expendable human ‘unit’. A ‘number’ to be counted, at best.

You stop, briefly, on the walk back up the concrete road to the camp’s northern region. On your left, a high green fence, topped with barbed wire, has been erected.

Only five yards beyond it sits a white house with red roof tiles. You pause at first to look at it, but your eyes are drawn instead to a small street sign.

‘Rue des Recollets’ it reads.

The Recollets were an order of Monks who became missionaries in the era of French expansionism, believing that colonies could only work if French settlers and native populations intermarried, living as equals in what would eventually be fully mixed (albeit Christian) communities, made up of many ingredients, rather than just one race, language or colour.

Later, as you leave the camp, you note nine police riot vans taking up positions at its edges in what seems to you an example of unjustifiable overkill in response to a dispirited, exhausted, and forlorn tent town on the edge of the Channel. The irony is not lost on you.

The Jungle and the people who live there may well require the assistance of any God or gods who exist. Winter is coming, and it is hard to imagine a scenario in which, left almost to their own devices as people here are, there are not hundreds of deaths before Spring 2016.

But even if they received supernatural assistance, they would still deserve the consideration of the two states which surround them.

The term ‘Recollets’ suggests memory, and it is time the UK and French governments ‘remembered’ the Jungle they are purposefully putting from their minds, and move swiftly to save the people there from death.

2. Miri

You meet Miri in a tea-shop (*in fact, a tent, just as every other 'location' at the Jungle is a tent: the restaurants, the medical centre, the women's centre, the homes, the mosque and the church – all are tents, nothing more*). The tea is good, though a cardomam seed within it worries him momentarily.

'I want to be an engineer,' he says. 'Or a mechanic.' He laughs. 'Or a doctor.'

Miri is 16 years old and has not been to school since he was 14. He speaks German, Albanian, and a little Italian, as well as speaking English well enough to tell you about his life and explain how concerned he is that there is a cardomam seed in his tea.

Though these skills are not necessarily central to forging a successful medical career, they are certainly indications that Miri is sharp, and if he could only finish his education, he could probably succeed at most things he chose to work at.

'I would like to return to school,' he adds.

The sad fact is, he almost certainly never will.

Miri grew up in Albania's capital city, Tirana.

He is an only child who never knew his father. His mother could not afford to send him to school and feed the two of them, and when Miri attempted to work, he too could not earn enough money to keep the two alive.

Instead, he left school and went to Germany, where the money was better. But as a young boy he feared for his survival.

‘When people had a drink,’ he said. ‘They would punch whoever was nearby and different. It was often me. I was a long way from home, I had nowhere to live and I was working even though I wanted to be at school, learning with people my age. I tried for two years but it was too much, to be hit by people as well as never seeing my mother and working when I should be learning. Instead, I came here so I could go to England.’

When you met him, on 30th October 2015, things did not look good for Miri.

He had been at the Jungle for 17 days, and the previous day, he had been hit by a car.

‘I was walking on the road,’ he said. ‘Someone had asked me to go to a shop outside of the Jungle. I was on the road, but there was not a pavement. I walked by the edge, but the car hit me even so. It was travelling at 20 or 30km per hour. It was quite fast. It must have seen me so I do not know why it hit me but it did.

‘I was very lucky because just before it hit me I stepped a little to the right. I heard a car behind me so I tried to move out of the way. So the car knocked me over but did not hit me in the back. I do not know what would happen if it hit me in the back.’

In truth, the car accident could have been worse for Miri: he has a bandaged hand - he says it is only a small wound - and apart from that has aches and bruises on his knees, one shoulder and his head.

But gesturing towards himself, he indicates a potentially greater problem. ‘The accident tore my trousers here,’ he said. ‘And my coat is also torn. I am cold, and these are my only clothes. They do not keep me warm because the wind blows and it blows inside them. I have my hat,’ (he is wearing a dark green benny hat) ‘But I am cold. It is not good to be cold all day and night.’

Miri hopes to get to the UK, but like every single other person at the Jungle, has little idea how to do so legally. ‘I have a friend in Oxford,’ he says. ‘No, I do not think he is helping me. I will have to do it myself. I haven’t seen any forms to fill in. I might hold on to a train. How long is the train to London? Half an hour?’

When he is told it is an hour, he grimaces. ‘Oh. Well where can I find a form to apply to live in England? Do you have one?’

You do not, and in fact this is one of the most serious – indeed vital – problems with the Jungle.

Not only is it a small space filled with 6,000 desperate people about to enter their first European winter with nothing to protect them but a thin sheet of material, it is also a place where in the absence of any large international ngo (*with the honourable exception of Medecins Sans Frontieres and Doctors of the World*), the French and UK governments have refused to provide even the forms necessary to apply for refugee status.

Whatever your opinion on the merits or otherwise of the people at the Jungle, the fact is that when people ask ‘why do they not apply for asylum?’ the answer is ‘because the UK and French governments are preventing them from doing so’.

Almost everyone you spoke to expressed a desire to enter the UK legally – it is the UK which is systematically denying them the possibility to do so.

Perhaps this should be considered the next time desperate people attempt to board trains or cling to lorries heading to England.

And on this evening, there is one more problem for Miri.

‘I have bought dinner for this evening,’ he says. ‘And now I have nothing left.’

You ask whether his friends can send him some money, but he has no-one who can. His mother? ‘She cannot feed herself well,’ he says. ‘That is why I am not at school, and going to the UK to work.’

It is a devastating moment.

Miri is a boy. His one set of clothes does not keep him warm, he is trapped in a refugee camp, has no friends, no family and now no money.

You say goodbye, clasping his hand and demanding he looks after himself (but how?), and that he returns to school (but where?) and stagger away, unsure whether you will be able to fully control yourself.

You stand at the edge of the road, waiting for a car to take you away.

Footnote

All of the above is true, except that as is often the case, ‘you’ is in this case ‘me’.

The night I met Miri, I returned to the UK.

On my own social media account, I posted:

'Today, at The Jungle, the refugee camp at Calais, I met Miri.
'Miri has not been to school in two years.
'Yesterday, he was hit by a car. He is OK, but his clothes are torn, he lives in a tent, and in two days’ time it will be November.
'He is already feeling the cold.
'Miri is Albanian, and as a result stands absolutely no chance of being allowed into the UK.
'He is 16, stuck in a refugee camp in Calais, alone, surrounded by bigger, older, men, and tonight, his money ran out.
*'Welcome to the Jungle, for f***’s f****ing sake…'*

3. Refugees, and how the UK government could help itself

Not every story you hear from refugees is one of heroism, triumph over adversity, or harrowing despicable mistreatment suffered and overcome to reach a destination.

Though almost every person you speak to *has* a story like that, many people are still too emotionally involved – perhaps even ashamed – when you meet them, to share it with a stranger.

Others are simply never likely to do so, preferring to keep certain things to themselves, while others still are focussed on the future, not wanting to pause to look back, perhaps, until they reach their target.

In the next few days, there will be more 'stories' from the Jungle, but today we meet three young men who are looking forward, with an analysis of the barriers they – in common with every one of the 6,000 people here – are facing.

- **Qais, Yemen, 21.**

'There is war where I am from. It is not safe to be there. Many people are dying because of the war and even more are hungry. Some will starve. That is why I came to the Jungle. I have been here two months. It is not good.

'I want to come to the UK because I am 21, I speak English, and I have family there – one uncle in London and two in Birmingham.

'I have not applied because I don't know how to apply. I ran from Yemen and came across Europe to get here but now I am here I don't know how to get out of here.

'It's hard. There are just two Yemeni people here. I don't know what to do. I am waiting and trying to think of what to do.'

- **Gol, Afghanistan.**

'I have been here one year.

'Every night since I have been here, people try to cross the barriers to get to trains. Their legs break, or fingers break and they have to come back. It is very difficult here.

'I want to go to the UK because life is good there. In Afghanistan, it is impossible. There is fighting and kidnapping. It isn't safe to stay there and it's hard to find a job. Europe is finished – there is no work in Italy, France or Germany.

'But people say English life is nice. The TV says so as well, so I am trying to get to the UK so I can have a job and be safe. I would like to go back to my home when it is safe. While I am in the UK I can look and see when it is safe, while I do a job and live in a safe place. I've never been to the UK, but people say it's a good life.

'People who have been, and people from England. The government, and in my country the English soldiers say life is good in the UK.

'I don't have any documents. I ran away and it was better not to have any because if the wrong people had stopped me and seen my documents they could have kidnapped me or hurt me. It is better not to have papers when you are crossing some places.

'Nobody has come here to explain anything to the people who are living here. We don't know what we should do or how to do it. Some people have come to give out clothes and shoes, but there is no medicine when you get sick, and no-one has come with forms to go to the UK.

'It's hard to know what to do.'

- **Abdul, Eritrea**

'People here don't have anything. I need to move to England. That's what most people here prefer.

'I came here to get to England. From my point of view, I prefer England because I know the language, and some other criteria. But the government of England makes it hard. Not just hard to come, because I know countries can make it hard to come. But it is making it hard because it is not letting us even apply to come.

'We are refugees here, but we are not allowed to apply to be allowed to the UK.

'There are big problems in Eritrea. Our leaders and government is a dictatorship, autocratic. It oppresses people. People are not free to express their ideas, or themselves, or to discuss matters in public or in private. There is no freedom of speech and there is violence if people do talk. People are put in prison, or tortured.

'There are big political problems and big religious problems. If you are not Muslim – like I am not – you have very big problems and can be beaten and injured.

'I have been here for almost two weeks.

'It is difficult here. I don't have good experiences here, or a good life. I live in a tent. We all live in tents. I am not satisfied. We are not rich, we have nothing left, so there is no stability.

'And we know within a short period, things will change. The weather will get worse, I think. The governments must focus on these ideas.'

The Jungle – and the problem with the government which ignores it

These interviews – and the Jungle itself – risk painting a slightly misleading picture of the wider international refugee crisis.

The Jungle is a camp on the edge of the English Channel, and so, as one might expect, most of its inhabitants are aiming to get to the UK.

The problem is, that rather raises the question 'why do all these people want to come to the UK?' which is a bad question both in terms of being the wrong *question*, and of leading people to the wrong *conclusion*.

More than 590,000 people have crossed the Mediterranean to reach the EU so far this year. Six thousand of them – about one per cent – are in the Jungle.

That's the first reason the question itself is wrong: people in the UK see that in the camp closest to them, there are 6,000 people, which sounds like a lot; and know they 'want' to come to the UK. It is then easy to extrapolate that as there are 590,000 refugees in Europe, most of *them* 'want' to come to the UK.

The simple fact is, they do not: only one per cent of the people who have entered Europe since January this year have come as far as the Jungle. *They* – that one per cent – are the people who 'want' to come to the UK.

Next. The idea that people 'want' to come to the UK. In the main, they do not.

What they want is to live in their home countries. Because their home countries are too dangerous for them to remain, they want to stay alive and find somewhere safe to stay and work until they can return home.

Those are the two things people 'want'. It is only after the first option is removed that the second comes into play and it is only after they are satisfied that the UK meets the second criteria – it is safe and there may be jobs so they can stay alive – that any 'desire' to come to the UK becomes a factor. And there are simple reasons why it does.

First, the UK is extraordinarily wealthy – the world's fifth richest state. In the EU, only Germany is richer, and in the world, only Germany, Japan, the US and China (*and even then, the number of people living in poverty is higher in the US and China than in the UK*). The chances are high that people arriving in the UK can find a job and have access to education and medicine, and low that they will starve to death or die of preventable disease.

Second, the UK is – generally – politically and culturally tolerant. Because there are communities of Somalians, Eritreans and Sudanese people in the UK, it is reasonable for Eritreans, Somalians and Sudanese people to believe they will be able to live and work without hindrance in the UK.

Third, our films, books, music and other cultural activity – as well as the words of our politicians and soldiers – convince people that the UK is a good place to live. If you are forced from your home, why not choose somewhere you have been repeatedly told is a good place to be?

Fourth, connected to the second point, many people have family and friends in the UK. They hope to be able to reunite with them – albeit only because they have been forced from where they *want* to be by war, oppression, torture and terror, and albeit only temporarily.

And fifth, connected to the third point – because of our (*and the US'*) near cultural hegemony, and the legacy of the British Empire – many people at the Jungle speak English. And it is of course far easier to settle and find work in a country where you understand what people say, and can answer them, than in one where you first have to learn to do either.

But there is another point. Not only do the inhabitants of the Jungle make up only one per cent of the refugees to have come to the EU in the last ten months, not all of them want to enter the UK. In fact, the estimate at present (*it has to be an estimate – the UK government's policy of refusing to help people apply to enter the UK legally also means it has cut off the simplest route to definitive statistics on the crisis and its trends. This may not be accidental*) is that roughly two-thirds do, while perhaps as many as 2,000 have no great desire to live in the UK.

So, you may ask, why are they there?

Since late August, the Jungle's population – which had fallen over the summer from 5,000 to 3,000, has doubled.

One reason is that wars continue all over the world, and people continue to need to escape them.

But another is that states are continuing to act alone within the international refugee crisis – and most are choosing to behave selfishly, recklessly, and irresponsibly.

While Hungary has put up walls and the UK government is using the Channel as both a moat and a sound-proofed barrier between it and the crisis, other states are closing refugee camps and forcibly evicting their inhabitants. One example is at Ventimiglia, on Italy's border with France, which was closed by Italian police at the end of September.

Though Ventimiglia was relatively small, it was not the only example of this process, and to put it simply, refugees are people – they have to go somewhere.

And so we are left with a situation in which – in part because the UK, Hungary and others have refused point blank to allow the EU to address the wider crisis as a political bloc – there are now up to 2,000 people on the banks of the Channel *who do not particularly want to come to the UK*.

It is just one more example of how governments closing their ears and eyes – as well as their minds – to the world around them has made their own predicament, and that of thousands of vulnerable, desperate people, far worse than it needs to be.

It is to be hoped that at some point, the UK government might realise this, and do something about it. Not only might it benefit them, it is also the only way to prevent potentially thousands of deaths at the Jungle this winter, and in the winters which follow.

4. Health, Welfare and Organisation.

You glance inside one tent as you walk by. Two packets of sliced meat are swiftly covered by a man who turns and smiles at you, as if embarrassed.

To have your own food here – even a small amount – is a symbol of independence; of not needing to rely on the meagre handouts that are available (*the camp never has enough food to feed all of its inhabitants on any given day*), and even of a step towards, or memory of, security and stability – a meal beyond simply the next donated bowl of soup.

But there is no refrigeration here, nowhere to store food, meaning that even these sorrowful attempts to have something other than the grim cycle of waking, queueing for handouts, then sleeping, with no possibility of escape other than to risk death on road or rail, are themselves potential carriers of sickness, disease or death.

The Jungle does not reward inaction. But neither does it reward endeavour, or forward planning.

It is simply a trap, a high-sided box without handholds or ridges, into which 6,000 people have fallen and have no choice but to smash their way out, or wait to be noticed by governments which have turned their backs and closed their ears to them.

a) Health

Three caravans tucked away in the Jungle's north-eastern corner – donated by the simply-named UK initiative, *Caravans for Calais* – have been turned into miniature health centres.

They are not exactly 'medical centres' (*Medecins Sans Frontiers and Doctors of the World both operate at the Jungle and provide the only 'technical' medical expertise at the camp*) because the volunteers here are normally not medically-trained (*though two doctors and a dentist – all volunteers – are due to arrive for two days the week after you leave*), but places where wounds can be bandaged, nits and scabies treated and paracetamol issued for aches and pains.

It is not ideal, but it is the best that's available at this holding centre for the people trapped 'between' the world's fifth- and sixth-richest states.

One volunteer turns to you: 'We just do lots of little things, whatever we can. The perception here seems to be that the Muslim men feel they are keeping women safe by keeping them in their tents, so those men come sometimes asking for us to help women. At that point it's good there are three of us here, because otherwise we'd have to shut up the caravans.

'But the Ethiopian and Eritrean women, in particular, are extremely visible and they do not stay in tents. We try to encourage the children to come to see us because this is a safe area and because there are some we worry about. Some of them are extremely vulnerable, and have lost their families at some point on their way to the camp.

'We are very limited in what we can do to help, but if they are near here, we can at least help to make sure they are known within the camp, and they are not getting into more danger and hardship than they are already in.'

'You have seen the police here?' one team member asks. You nod. They wear armour and look a little like Robocop, but in groups of 10-16.

'They don't look all that nice. We haven't seen any actual attacks, but we have had some people come in with what look like baton blows to the eyes, the head and across the back. They certainly look like the results of attacks. A couple of weeks ago, the police wouldn't come. Now there are ten units here daily.'

The majority of wounds come from other sources, however. 'We get a lot of people coming with their hands cut up by razor wire. The major problem is, we bandage the wounds and protect them from infection, but they aren't healing well. It may be dehydration, or poor nutrition, so their bodies just can't do what they should.'

A scabies outbreak has also caused problems. 'We have cream to stop it,' one volunteer explains. 'You have to wear it for eight hours. It's inconvenient, but that's not so bad. The problem is, to prevent getting it again, we are then supposed to tell people to burn their clothes and bedding, and get new stuff, and…' they pause. 'Well, it's just not possible, here, is it? So what we're doing just seems useless.'

The small team, due to leave two days after you, also warn that serious epidemics are a constant possibility. 'Cholera is particularly possible, because people are taking water in bottles, instead of loo roll, into the toilet to clean themselves. Then when the toilets are emptied, the vehicle filters cause the bottles to be dropped back onto the ground, covered in faeces. Of course it would be better to encourage people to use toilet paper but there just isn't any here. So there's a real risk, and we couldn't cope at this point with an outbreak of cholera.'

b) Distribution

Walking from the caravans towards the Afghan village, you happen upon a distribution which encapsulates some of the Jungle's best and worst features.

Women and children do not attend distributions here. Not because they are not living here, or even because they do not venture out of their tents. They do live here, and you see them in the same places as the men, the children playing, the women walking, talking, collecting water, or carrying materials.

It is because the distributions are poorly-organised. That is not a criticism of the volunteers running them – still less of those who donate items to begin with. Both groups are acting with the best of intentions and to the best of their ability. But without experience of distributions – whether of food, water, clothing or anything else – it is easy to forget how difficult they are, and how fast they become a test of courage and physical capacity.

You watch as a van reverses, opens its back doors and the people within begin to hand out clothing.

Within seconds, a crowd – made up of people about to enter a winter colder than most of them have ever experienced, and many of whom have just one set of clothes to call their own – is jostling, manoeuvring, competing physically to reach the shirts, socks, jumpers and trousers. It is not aggressive, just guided by desperation.

Women and children do watch – they are as desperate as the men for warmth and the chance to change their clothes, wash the ones in which they stand. Some of the luckier ones may 'have' a man – a partner, brother, friend or father – in the crowd.

But they cannot hope to compete for themselves, and so the accidental disorganisation disqualifies all but the strongest in the Jungle from benefitting even from the kindness and charity of strangers.

You turn and walk back towards the Afghan village…

5. War and fences: Hamid's story.

Hamid, Afghanistan

'If I could say one thing to the UK government I would say instead of spending so much money on fences and police*, spend it on refugees instead.

**this summer, the UK spent £17m on increasing the size of fences, and deploying riot police and dogs at Calais. The ongoing wage bill will of course rise the longer the policy continues.*

'That will be much better, because people will still try to cross the fences, and some of them will succeed. And it means the UK government will have to keep spending this money, and because the fences will still be crossed, it will be for nothing. The money will be spent on nothing at all.

'I lived in England. My whole family – my parents and me, as well as my brothers – had come to England in 2003, to escape the war in Afghanistan. My parents were allowed to stay in England, but when I was 18, in 2008, after we had all been in England for five years, I was refused a visa. That is when I went back to Afghanistan.

'When I returned to Afghanistan, I started working with American troops as an interpreter. But I couldn't stay, because the Taliban was getting stronger and the details of Afghani people like me were being stolen, and then those people were hunted.

'The Taliban said they were traitors for working with America, but I was not a traitor. I worked for what was best for my country, and what is best for Afghanistan is not the Taliban. But because the Americans did not keep details safely, I saw and heard of people being kidnapped.

'Some were tortured, some were killed. I did not want that to happen to me. So, I ran away.

'I worked with the Americans for two years. I did not fight, but I risked my life because I was with them while fighting happened and also it was a risk to me just to work with them because Taliban supporters and members could find out what I was doing.

'Of course, they paid me. But there is not enough money to risk your life. You have to believe that what you do is right, for that. I thought it was the right thing to do, to oppose the Taliban. But it was too dangerous to continue, so I ran.

'In 2010, I crossed over land to Turkey, and then by boat to Greece. I reached Italy and they accepted my asylum request, but after five years – this year – my status ran out. I do not know why, because things are not better in Afghanistan now. In fact, for people like me who helped the UK and Americans, it is worse, because the Taliban may come into power again when the soldiers leave. Then, we would be hunted and captured.

'Without legal papers, I could not work in Italy, and without work I could not stay there. I could not go back to Afghanistan, so I had to come here. My only chance is to get to England, where I have lived before, and where I have family. It is all that is left for me now.

'I have been here two weeks. It is horrible. The living conditions are awful. The police are strict and will not let you try to get money or a job. They have also started to take people to deportation centres from here, where they stay for five to 45 days. But they let people out in Lyon or Toulouse and then they come back here. Where else can they go to?

'In my case, it is frustrating and sad. I know that there are empty homes in England, where we could live. But at the moment we have to live in tents. It is not right.

'I speak five languages. I have friends and family in England. I do not want to rely on an allowance from the government, on hand-outs or benefits. Most people do not want that, and like me they would not have to. We can work hard and we want to. It's better for the UK government to let us come and work.

'There are high numbers of people here. They need a safe place to live. They need a chance. They can work hard and they will. What is the alternative? Keep spending money on fences and police? What happens when the money runs out?

'What happens if people in the UK stop donating food and clothes? People will die. They do not deserve that – no-one does.

'It is no good pretending that people are not here, or that they do not need somewhere to live. We are here, and we do.

'It is no good pretending that people here can go home. If we could be at home we would be. And it is no good to say we do not want to work or we will not. We can and we do want to. The government must deal with the real things, not the things it imagines.

'Spending money on fences is stupid. Spend it on dealing with the problem here, spend it on people. The reward will be that they will work hard and pay taxes. We want to work. We can.

'People here are really suffering. Children, pregnant women. It does not make sense and it is not fair not to help them.'

6. Feeding 'the' 500 (and why it is never enough)

In late afternoon, you walk again between the camp's central point and its eastern edge.

In the watery early winter sunlight, surrounded by thousands of people whose seemingly hopeless situation – unable to return home and unable even to apply to enter the UK – threatens to overwhelm you, you feel you are being submerged; simultaneously hindered and borne up, as if attempting to walk on a sea-bed.

A man swings by you on crutches, a greater achievement than it first appears given that the path on which you and he are travelling is largely made up of uneven white stones, laid to keep the thoroughfare useable in wet weather, but also presenting a series of gaps, holes and miniature slopes – treacherous potential pitfalls for anyone less than sure-footed.

'Buon pomeriggio!'

It is a long time since someone addressed you in Italian, and here in a refugee camp in Northern France, surrounded by speakers of Arabic, Dari, Pashto, Fur, Somali, and of course English, it comes as some surprise.

A man standing across the path, at the foot of a small verge and a few yards from the corner of a looming white tent, waves you over.

'Buon Pomeriggio,' he repeats. 'Do you understand Italian?'

You explain that you do, but ask him where he is from.

'Egitto,' he smiles.

‘Ah, Misr. Sabah al khayr?’

It takes almost no time at all to ascertain that his Italian – and indeed his English – are better than your Arabic, but out of politeness (*on his part*) and a genuine desire to please (*on yours*) you continue to speak in a mix of the three languages.

‘You must come inside and eat,’ he gestures to the tent. ‘It is cold and people must eat hot food to stay warm here.’

You are in two minds. You would like to eat something, but you are unsure of your chances of explaining to an Italian-speaking Egyptian that you are a vegetarian – particularly in the context of a refugee camp where food is already in scarce supply – and you are also aware that you can leave at any time to eat in a café or restaurant, a luxury not available to the 6,000 Jungle residents.

Instead, you ask how he came to be at the Jungle.

‘I am an Egyptian,’ he said. ‘I was talking about politics. We all liked to talk about politics. I was in a café, and I was criticising Sisi*.

**General Abdel Fatteh al-Sisi. Officially Egypt’s President (he was elected with an impossible 96.1 per cent of the vote in 2014, one year after seizing power in a military coup: he outlawed all powerful political opposition and ran against two candidates, both of whom had previously stated they ‘supported’ Sisi) but in fact its military dictator.*

He shot his way to power in the summer of 2013, ousting the only democratically-elected government in Egyptian history. Sisi killed 1,000 people, maimed 4,000 and imprisoned 18,000. His courts have sentenced his predecessor – deposed by his coup – Mohamed Morsi, to death, along with 720 people sentenced to death for the killing of two police officers, and 489 sentenced to 25 years in prison for the killing of one of the two officers.*

The banned political groups include his predecessors in government - the Muslim Brotherhood – along with many liberal groups, including the youth organisation credited with starting the revolution which removed Egypt’s previous military dictator, Hosni Mubarak, from power.

Sisi’s greatest contribution to political life in Egypt to date came last month when, having banned all opposition to him, he masterminded a 26 per cent turnout in the national parliamentary elections.

‘I didn’t say anything bad, just that I did not think he is a good leader or a good man. I was overheard. The police came, and I had to escape through the back of the cafe.

‘I ran, and I realised the police would find my home, and they would find me. I had to leave. Sisi is very, very bad, and I cannot be in Egypt anymore. Many people will find they cannot. Some will be too late.’

You walk with him into the tent, where he begins stirring a huge pot of soup.

‘It is lucky I like to cook,’ he smiles. ‘Because people here need to have good, cooked food.’

The noisiest people – by far – in the tent are a group of six teenagers, who are in the process of painting large parts of it orange.

In the time you are there, they manage to draw a large sun, with the words ‘We love the sunshine’, and spend the rest of the time painting one another, until one girl’s face and hair are so covered it is hard to remember what she looked like when you came in.

‘We’re lucky it’s a water-based paint, I suppose,’ shrugs Faith. You don’t say what occurs to you first, that the water here is unlikely to be clean, and may run out. The teenagers are enjoying themselves, and you get the impression she would not let them be here if they did not work hard.

Faith is an English woman who has been at the Jungle four weeks, and runs the tent – a kitchen which provides free meals to refugees and volunteers.

‘It was set up by one individual who had a little money and wanted to help,’ she says. ‘But we also receive donations, so now it almost pays for itself.

‘On the other hand, we can only feed 500 people per day, and there are 6,000 people here. So I suppose it’s nowhere near enough.’

She sighs, and sits down, motioning you to do the same.

‘It’s funny,’ she says. ‘You want to help, to be the person who makes a difference, but you get here and you see the reality, and you just can’t do it alone. We can’t do it alone.’

She gestures, seemingly taking in the tent, but watching her arm movements, and bearing in mind what you have already learned today, she could just as easily be referring to the entire Jungle, and all the people within it.

Faith’s an event cook in the UK.

‘I am used to cooking for hundreds of people,’ she explains. ‘I set up at yoga festivals and so I had this gear,’ she waves at the tent and cooking equipment. ‘Already. It was in storage for the winter and I thought “no. That’s wrong. There are people in Calais who might be able to use that.” And so here I am.’

She smiles, a little wearily.

‘We can only feed 500 people, though,’ she says. ‘I wish we could do more.’

Faith’s ‘team’ is made up of some young volunteers from a variety of European states, as well as residents of the camp, including – this afternoon – the linguistically-talented Egyptian, and two Syrians, who seem to be his ‘assistants’, fetching and carrying tins, water and other ingredients at his request.

She has been here a month, more than long enough to have worked out that one should take any opportunity to use visitors to get messages to the outside world.

‘Look at this,’ she points, to an information board you had not noticed before. You realise why not, as she says: ‘There’s nothing on it. It has information board written on it, but there’s no information.

‘Do you know why that is? Because we have no information. Literally nothing whatsoever to share with people. All they want to know is what they can do to get out of here and start a life again, and all we want is to tell them, but what have we got? Nothing. Nothing at all.

‘I want this board full, but all it has is the words "information board" and no information. It would be funny if it wasn’t so upsetting.

‘People ask me, and each other, “what should we do? Where should we go?” Everybody wants to know what their possibilities are.

‘I want to help. I want there to be some hope. An open door, somewhere. But we’re as in the dark as everyone else, until we get back home, and then it’s too late.

‘There’s no hope for these people, is there? The government isn’t taking any notice now it got its dogs and fences in place, is it? It’s hurting us all, just not knowing. All of us. The volunteers as well as the refugees. You can’t just sit here and not care. You can’t ignore people and what they need. And they need hope. Possibilities. A future.

‘We know there are people in the UK that care. We get donations. So why don’t we hear from the government? That’s what it’s there for, isn’t it? To respond to things like this?

‘There has to be some sense of hope, of possibility that things can change for these people. This isn’t a life, what people have here. It’s nothing.

‘There’s so much potential here, in these people. We see them, speak to them every day. There’s so much potential to do so many things, but there’s no hope, no life. Because the whole place is just being ignored by the government.

‘People need hope, to have a life. That’s what people need to understand. What politicians need to understand.’

Outside, on the uneven white stones, you pause to take a breath.

The sun is a little lower in the sky, and you turn your back on it once again, to walk towards the east of the Jungle…

* *In the event, Mohamed Morsi, the first and only democratically-elected ruler in Egypt's 5,800-year history, died in prison on 17 June 2019. He had been refused diabetic medicine by Sisi's regime, resulting in him being posisoned by the very food he ate.*

7. Francois, France, the UK and the real world

'*I live in a little village by the sea. It is out of the real world. This camp, here, is part of the real world.*

'*The real world is dictators. It is trouble, fighting and war. I cannot live near the real world and not be a part of it. I cannot turn away and not be a part of it.*'

Heading east once more on the white stone road, you catch up with Francois, a man you have been hoping to meet at the Jungle.

Francois has been working for *Auberge des Migrants*, an aid organisation focussed on Calais and the rights and welfare of people trapped in the Jungle, for two years.

In that time – and although Auberge itself has been in existence for seven years – he has become known as one of the few true 'experts' on the camp.

'I live near Calais,' he explains. 'And I am now retired. I wanted to be useful.

'My father was so racist. As a teenager, I hated him for it.

'I decided to apply the true beliefs and attitudes of Catholicism to my life – that everyone is good and deserves to be treated well. But I also went further. I try to say that people are my brothers, and my sisters, who I should care about as they would care about me.

'What if I needed help? Who would help me? That's what's happening here. I, and other people, are doing what we can to help people who need help.

'It is not enough. But it is what we can do. It is how we help.'

Auberge des Migrants, Francois explains, provides a variety of services to refugees at Calais, but even as he explains, you can feel his frustration at what it is *not* able to do, at the shortfalls he experiences each day:

'We are trying to build shelters before the end of November,' he begins. 'We have managed 130 so far, which are good for about 700 people. But we have to build 20 per day during November, so we must step up our effort.

'We build frames and give materials to others to build them. These shelters are larger and a little more sturdy than one and two people's tents.

'No, it is not ideal. It is not what is needed. We know that people need heated shelters, which are properly weather-proof, just like they need food, clean water, places to wash. But we can only do what we are able to do, so we are trying to do our best.

'Some things are donated,' (*you have seen people working on the shelter frames wearing the red hooded staff tops from Dismaland, bearing the name of Banksy's temporary theme park. On Dismaland's closure, Banksy publicly donated all the site's building materials – and some other things, including the tops, to the Jungle*).

'And we buy wood pallets so we can use them to build. The largest part of what we can do is paid for by British money. Not from the government of Britain, from donations by people who live in Britain. Private people.

'We are using the money at the moment to manage the building, and to build capacity here so people can build, we meet and train them.

'It is not enough. No-one should die, but all we can hope for is that fewer people will die than if the people here were just left as they are.

'Look at these shelters. They are better than what is here already, but you and I would not want to live in one through the winter. For people with too little food, it's just not possible they will all survive.

'We are working. It is hard, because we cannot succeed. We can only try to make things a little better. Only the governments could succeed here, and they do not help.'

It is not the first criticism of governments' response – or more accurately, lack of it – that you have heard at the Jungle. Nor will it be the last.

But the intensity of Francois' feeling on this, simmering beneath his placid appearance and calmly measured words, adds even greater resonance to the point on which almost everyone here seems agreed: that two governments have not even abandoned the people living at the Jungle – for that would imply they had at one point engaged with them in some way – they have persecuted them by turned their backs on them. They have actively caused their suffering by deliberately not acting.

'I begin work at 8am and finish at 3am. It is not a complaint. How could I do anything else? How could I go to sleep knowing there is more to do here? How can I sleep knowing how people are forced to live here? I have to be exhausted or I would never sleep at all.

(*This is a theme you have heard before from humanitarian workers, including some you have lived and worked alongside – that they cannot sleep knowing that there is so much more to be done, and that their activity is important to other people, so they have a responsibility to simply keep going, without sleep.*

You told them you sympathised, and understood, but that they must understand that this is an ever-decreasing spiral; that without sleep, people simply become more and more tired, and less and less efficient, meaning that in the long term, the amount of work they have to do simply to stand still will increase, rather than decrease. You are well aware that this is not something for which they should be blamed, or blame themselves: what is needed are colleagues; help; support.

At this moment, however, surrounded by thousands of people trapped in a detritus-strewn human trap, it seems somehow inappropriate to reach out and lay a hand on his shoulder. You will wonder, later, whether you should have done.)

'We do try to distribute things,' he continues. 'Clothes, shoes. But there is not enough of anything, especially sleeping bags. We ask people, to say please give us stuff and we will distribute it. But that should not be the responsibility of individual people. It should be being done by the governments.'

He pauses, looks around. His eyes and yours briefly take in a tent with children's toys hanging out to dry.

He sighs: 'Yesterday I met some law students. They were very interested to have information about the fact that here there are food issues, that they had heard people steal from each other. But I asked them, do you know who doesn't respect the law? The government.

'The children here should be at school. That is a law in France.

'Women and children should be protected. That is also law.

'But here, there is no protection for people.

'The police are sometimes violent and they control people at the entry to the road. This is illegal. You cannot restrict people's movements under French law. People are trapped. No law allows the police to do that.

'The government is arresting people and sending them to other places in France, such as Toulouse.

'They are putting them in prison there. This is not allowed by law. And it has no point. People are held for as little as 3-4 days, but then they are freed and they come straight back here. What else can they do? Where could they go?

'We must say that at the Jungle, the French government is not respecting its own laws.'

A troop of police officers, 12 men in all, marches past, carrying shields and wearing body armour including shoulder protectors.

'At the beginning of the camp, the police used to walk around. Then they stopped coming in at all.

'But now the police have started walking here again. We would prefer it if the police wore normal clothes, and were just talking to people, but these people are walking in armour and they do not say anything to anyone unless they suspect them of something. This is not the police you want.

'Some police here are dangerous.' He shrugs. 'Of course, some are not.'

But the French government, and its police, are not alone in creating and developing the Jungle's surreally awful situation.

Francois turns. 'I cannot understand why the French government is OK to 'protect' the British border,' he begins. 'The cost is high financially, and here socially.

‘The government is paying for 1,400 police and private security people here and at the port and Eurostar. It costs more than €100m per year.

‘But I can understand why there are problems here, and it’s because of the UK. Not the UK’s people, but its government.

‘People in Calais are bored and angry with migrants. Port traffic is decreasing because organisations are sending traffic elsewhere to avoid the situation here.

‘I can’t explain why the French government accepts this situation. Maybe there are secret deals. I don’t know.

‘But I can’t understand why the government carries on with this situation. The minimum necessary is for it to have an office here, to work here.’

You both begin walking once again, keeping to the right of the path as it winds between two raised areas, each of which are covered with tents. You both smile and say hello to two young women, carrying blankets and shoes.

‘Most women here are Eritrean, or Ethiopian,’ Francois explains. ‘At least, most of the women you see each day.

‘They are teachers, students, they have university educations. But sometimes they fall into prostitution and they are forced to find a ‘partner’ who can ‘protect’ them.

‘It is not OK. It is not acceptable. But they need money.’

You continue walking, Francois pointing out parts of the camp, and explaining who lives in each, until you reach the end of the path.

You turn left, realising only then that Francois will head right. As he begins to say goodbye, you ask: ‘Francois, what do people here at the camp really need?’

He stops, and cocks his head to the left.

‘People need to be free to enter countries in Europe,’ he begins. ‘They want to work, to send money to their families. They want to live with their families, in safety. They want to finish their studies. They need to be able to finish and add to their education.

‘They need security. They need their families to be safe. Most people here are middle class. The poorest people can’t get this far – I hate to think about what they go through. People here are skilled. They want to use their skills. They speak many languages. They would have no problem being integrated.

‘They need food, tents, blankets. They need information, and legal help.

‘But that’s not all.

‘They need to work, to earn their own money. They just need to have a normal life.’

You shake hands. Francois, head down, white hair moving in the breeze, walks away, working still to make a difference in this ‘real world’.

8. Osman, family and UK law

Osman, Northern Iraq

'I came here yesterday. I had been in Paris with my family. They went to the UK, but I cannot get to the UK yet, so I had to come here.

'I lived in the UK for seven years. I worked there as an electrician. I had a good job, and it is where I met my wife, who is an English woman. We have two small children, a boy and a girl. They are English, they have UK papers and passports, just like their mother my wife, so they are all in the UK now.

'I moved back with my wife to Northern Iraq, to the Kurdish region where I am from, when I was offered a job with Gazprom.

'It was a good job. I travelled in the region and made sure things worked. I managed some engineering projects related to electricity. The money was good and I was happy.

'But my wife could not relax there. She tried hard, but she was scared. She didn't think it was safe. She heard explosions, and gunfire every day.

'I had thought our life would be nice, that she could see my homeland and I could work in my job and provide for my family, but she was not comfortable, so it would not have been fair for us to stay there. It was dangerous.

'She was right. There is fighting and bombing in Northern Iraq now every single minute, every single day. She was right to be scared and it is not a good place to try to bring up children.

'We left Iraq on 4th October. We went on a holiday, to Turkey and we were there for two weeks, in Istanbul. We then came to Paris, where we stayed for two nights. Then, I had to say goodbye to my wife and children. They went to the UK.

'I was extremely sad, but I told them not to cry, because I would be with them soon.

'I think I should be allowed to go to the UK, because I have an English wife and we have two very small children. I lived and worked in the UK already, and I am a qualified electrician and I have proved I am good at my job, successful and hard-working.

'The Gazprom job also proves that I am good at working for international firms, and so I think I should be able to go to the UK, live and work hard, and look after my family.

'But I applied to come back to the UK in April this year.

'It took many months – almost six months – and then they replied to tell me I had been refused.

'They said in the letter that when I had left the UK one of the papers I had signed said I couldn't come back to the UK until 2019.

'I didn't even know that was what it said. I wouldn't have signed a paper like that deliberately. I do not understand. I don't remember that being on the form, and I read the form before I signed it.

'Even if it was on the form, I have a wife and children. I need them, and they need me. And we left Iraq because of the fighting and danger there.

'I speak English and worked in England. I do not know why they will not let me come back to be with my family.

'So I have had to come here. Where else could I go?

'But this is not a good place to be. I thought I would be able to apply again to enter the UK legally, to explain the situation and help them to understand that I have reason to be there and I will be hard-working and useful.

'But there is no-one here who can even help me to get forms to fill in. I am trying to go past here, to go to the UK, to be with my wife and my children who I love. But I am stuck here because no-one will give any of us the chance to come.

'I am beginning to understand the people who try to hold onto trains, or underneath lorries. I don't want to do that – no-one wants to do it, it is terrible and dangerous – but what choices are there? How can I be with my family again?

'When I was in the UK, I worked. When I was in Iraq, I worked. I do not want to live a lazy life, a life where all I do is sleep, then wake up, then sleep, then wake up.

'And that is what life is here. It is not a life. I want to live my life.

'I want to get papers for the UK so I can have a job, a life and be with my family. I love them. That is all I want.'

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