

Since 2017, HRO's mission has been to observe, document and denounce state violence at the Franco-British border. Due to recurring hindrances to our observation work, the following figures should be taken as an extreme minimum.

This month in numbers

at least



During the eviction operations, **a series of arrests took place as well**. We also observed **an operation with no living site evicted on 24 March**, and the prosecutors of Boulogne-sur-Mer and Lille have announced in a press release on 13 April that several people had been arrested in the wake of an investigation on an international smuggler network. HRO was able to witness one of these operations, and other information was delivered to us by other organisations present/operating on the ground. We have limited visibility on the nature of these arrests and their outcomes, but we can figure that they form part of the crackdown on smuggling networks led by the Prefecture.

Police harassment orchestrated by the Prefecture

The month of March appears to be far away from the truce established by legal proceedings during the winter (see January and February monthly notes). **With a total of 15 informal living sites evicted during three large-scale eviction operations, the past few weeks confirm the return to the usual pattern of police harassment that characterises the State's anti-migration policies.**

It is **always the same living sites that are targeted by these operations, which exhaust people and sometimes force them to find other places to settle**. Indeed, we have observed that some living sites, particularly targeted by evictions, were left empty by the end of March.



We also observed **the presence of construction machinery and chainsaws during the evictions**. Operated by members of a cleaning company contracted by the State, **these tools and machines are used to destroy and clear the targeted camps so that exiled people have greater difficulty resettling**. On **24 March**, some residents even testified to Utopia 56 that **tents were destroyed by the police during an arrest**. Law enforcement is **not supposed to handle or destroy people's belongings**. These observations and testimonies prove that the laws and commitments of the Prefecture regarding the "humanitarian" care of living sites residents are being trampled over. **The various actors involved in evictions act with complete impunity, further precarising exiled people.**




Exceptional presence of Frontex during an eviction and arrest operation

On **26 March**, for the first time during an eviction operation, **we observed the presence of Frontex agents, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency – in other words, the armed wing of European anti-migration policy**. These agents, easily recognisable by their peaked caps and branded vests, were accompanied by official representatives of the Prefecture.



Representatives of the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII) were also present, with whom Frontex carries out outreach patrols and duty sessions, as stated by Didier Leschi, the Director General, during his hearing at CEP on 26 March. This delegation, which we observed around the distribution point in Grande-Synthe, is part of **Frontex's increased budget** (rising to €3 billion in France) and the **strengthening of staff at the Franco-British border**. Indeed, Didier Leschi confirmed during the hearing the reinforcement of personnel to 300 agents, at the request of the Ministry of the Interior. Spanish and Lithuanian vessels will also reinforce the fleet tasked with controlling crossings in the Channel in mid-year.



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In practice, **Frontex is present to prevent these crossings and combat smuggling networks – which leads it to violate a number of fundamental human rights**. This is why **its presence at living sites in the Dunkirk area is concerning, especially as we have very little information or transparency regarding its mission orders, powers, and scope of action**.

Increasing harassment of solidarity actors

People providing support on the ground have been particularly **obstructed and discouraged from accessing eviction sites**. HRO and Utopia 56 cars appear to be registered in police national databases. In the Dunkirk area, law enforcement regularly carry out vehicle checks to hinder our documentation work and delay our arrival at eviction sites.

● **On 26 March**, the HRO team vehicle was stopped at the roadside without apparent reason while we were simply following the convoy on a departmental road. That day, as on every occasion, police checked the identities of vehicle passengers, **which is not permitted without authorisation from the public prosecutor**. It is also worth recalling that **the deployment of police officers for these eviction operations comes at a cost: the uselessness of these checks only highlights the absurd scale of resources deployed in the repression of solidarity actors and exiled people**.



The illusion of “humanist” management of belongings...

The Prefecture accompanies these operations with **a narrative that once again proves to be illusory**. Indeed, on **22 January, an eviction notice indicated that people’s belongings could be collected directly from a bailiff** (see the *January monthly note*). However, **these notices have no longer been observed in recent weeks**, and information on how to contact the bailiff is not readily available.

When we met a young man who had lost his phone following the eviction of his living site and the theft of his belongings, **we had to argue with a police officer to obtain concrete information about the bailiff**, including their name and location.

We then had to take the person and one of his relatives for translation ourselves to the bailiff’s office, only for them to be met with **racist and defamatory remarks from the bailiff**, who made little effort to hide their mistrust of exiled people.

The bailiff stated that they had not recovered any belongings after the eviction, and **the person was unable to retrieve their phone. This treatment is unlawful.**

At a minimum, seized belongings should be inventoried and stored in a place that is accessible and known to residents, near the living sites.

...and of the “protection” of people during evictions

Evictions are still presented as humanitarian operations, notably through the **provision of buses to take people to Reception and Assessment Centres (CAES)**. However, we often observe that **these buses leave the sites empty**. Residents’ testimonies vary: **some people are offered a place on these buses, others are not**.

We also observed that the majority of people boarding the buses were families with very young children. **Moreover, as people are very rarely informed in advance of evictions, they have no time to prepare for departure or assess the extent and limits of the services offered.**

In CAES, it is not possible to stay longer than one month, even for asylum seekers, and often far less for those who do not wish to, or cannot, apply for asylum. The location of the centres is rarely communicated to people, but they are **always far from the departure points for crossings to the United Kingdom**, which adds uncertainty and additional transport costs to journeys that are already expensive.