



FRANCE



In France, a number of asylum seekers and non-French speaking patients face problems accessing psychological care. Many of the migrants have fled violence, human rights violations and deprivation at home, only to find themselves homeless and destitute in France. Migrants without valid immigration papers are extremely vulnerable and susceptible to anxiety and emotional trauma as a result of their experiences at home, the journey to France and their current living conditions. Living on the streets also leads to physical health problems. In 2007, MSF set up a new programme in Paris to provide migrants with medical assistance, psychological care and social support.

CONTEXT

Asylum-seekers in France are caught up in regional political objectives aimed at controlling immigration flows throughout Europe. As a consequence, reaching France is becoming more difficult, and administrative procedures to submit asylum requests are increasingly complex. Asylum-seekers who don't speak French and find themselves sleeping on the streets have real difficulty obtaining psychological assistance.

MSF IN FRANCE

In Paris, MSF runs a centre offering psychological care to people in distress who come to France seeking asylum and protection. Most of them have fled conflict or political violence at home. Some arrived in France only recently, while others have been living in the country for some time. MSF patients, like many asylum seekers in France, have problems accessing existing psychological care and services because of the nature and intensity of their psychological distress, their social and administrative insecurity, the language barrier and other factors.

A multi-disciplinary MSF team offers treatment and assistance tailored to each patient: therapeutic care is complemented with medical, social and legal referrals

and advice. Since the centre opened two and a half years ago, more than 650 people have received care. In total, MSF medical staff have conducted more than 7,000 consultations: 50 percent for psychological care; 25 percent for medical care, and 25 percent for social assistance. MSF psychologists have assisted 365 migrants and asylum seekers and have 160 regular patients.

People without valid immigration papers are extremely vulnerable and likely to suffer from high levels of anxiety, due to their current extremely poor living conditions but also because of what they went through in their home countries. Psychological care is essential to avoid a deterioration of their emotional state, which can lead to suicide attempts. Of the patients attending the centre, 41 percent reported that they have had suicidal thoughts.

During the summer 2009, MSF also organised a weekend of scabies treatment for Afghan migrants living on the streets in Paris. In November, MSF provided emergency supplies to help homeless and destitute migrants over the winter period.



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L. was born in Afghanistan, 30 years ago. Like most Afghans, he reached France after a long and painful journey across Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Greece and Italy. Part of his family died in a bomb blast in Afghanistan. L. fled his country with his wife and children to seek refuge in Iran because he was scared; he travelled alone to France.

He is in constant fear of being sent back to Afghanistan. He has applied for asylum, but his request has been rejected, and he no longer has the right to remain on French territory.

L. has been receiving healthcare at the MSF centre for a year, supervised by an MSF psychologist. The violence he shows towards himself reveals his distress. Every day, his

thoughts are haunted by what he suffered in Afghanistan.

“The disorder in my head corresponds to the disorder of what I saw, to inhumanity, and to the disorder of war. War makes normal people crazy.”

CHECHEN WOMAN

“Healthcare can’t solve all troubles, but it relieves, strengthens, reconstructs, and establishes new perspectives and reference points; this may not mean full recovery, but it allows remission or the reduction of the most overt and debilitating problems.”

JACKY, PSYCHOLOGIST AND MEDICAL COORDINATOR

