

## SUMMARY BORDER REPORTS

FROM OCTOBER 13<sup>TH</sup> TO DECEMBER 20<sup>TH</sup>



ELISA VIALE

## OVERVIEW

I volunteered in Ventimiglia from October 13th to December 20th, and this report sums up all the information I collected as Protection focal point at the Italian-French border.

Conducting border monitoring three times a week (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) both in the morning and in the afternoon, we met a total of 186 released people, with a significant decrease during the last two weeks of November.

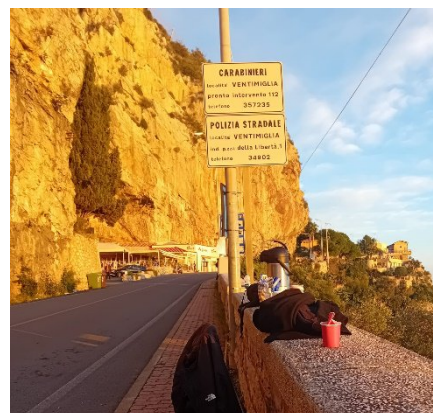
People came mainly from Algeria, Tunisia, and Turkey, but the highest figure referred to people from unknown countries. Ages ranged between 15 y.o. and 64 y.o., with higher numbers of people in their twenties. We met three families, three women, and eleven minors.

Trains and buses are the most chosen ways of transport, although some people choose to walk the Step of Death, which connects a small town close to the border (Grimaldi) to the first French city, Menton. It takes around three hours.

However, this choice is usually taken by people who have already tried to cross the border multiple times. People traveling by train get caught at Nice train station or at Menton train stations, while people on buses are always caught because buses are always checked.

Sometimes, they get caught at Breil-sur-Roya train station. Usually, caught people are brought directly to Menton's PAF, but in the last weeks, we witnessed a change in the strategy: the French police interrogate POMs directly at Menton train stations, and they could spend the night there or be brought directly to the Italian police station.

**T:** They got interrogated at the train station and then were brought directly to the Italian police station (December 7th – two men, one from Nigeria and one from Pakistan).



*Italian French Border  
Ponte San Luigi*



*PAF*



*Italian police station*



*Number people are  
given inside the PAF*

## DOCUMENTATION ISSUES

Once POMs are caught, they should be brought directly to the PAF in Menton, where they receive a number, and they spend a certain number of hours based on what the police must do: verify their right to stay or their identity.

POMs should receive documentation that justifies their detention, such as minutes, readmission

orders, OQTF, invitations to the Questura, or expulsion orders, but it seems common practice for the police not to provide any papers.

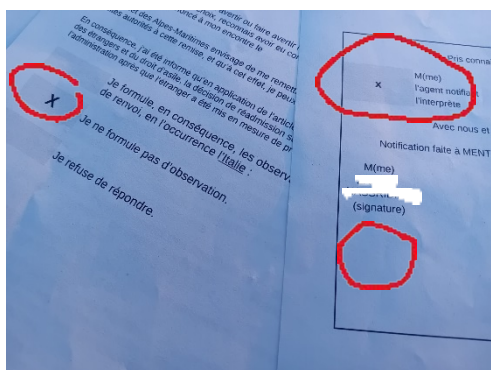
Considering the people who agreed to give us information on their situation, 37 people did not receive any document, 27 received documents only from the Italian police, and 20 only from the French police. This outlines unclear patterns and a continued lack of justification for detentions.

Many times, inconsistencies in documents were observed. For instance, many POMs receive pre-filled readmission orders in both the *formulaire d'observation* sections and where the presence of an interpreter is indicated. This is in total contradiction to the testimonies collected from the POMs, especially with regard to native Spanish speakers, because we know that inside the two police stations there is no one who speaks Spanish, and, despite this, the presence of an interpreter is marked on the documents issued.

**T:** She received a readmission order. In the document, it was written that there was a translator, but she claimed that there was none speaking Spanish, and none explained what the document meant (October 24th – woman from the Dominican Republic).

**T:** There was no Spanish translator (December 14th – man from Ecuador).

In addition, 18 people were not given the opportunity to sign the documents, and many newly released POMs did not know what the documents meant.



The absence of translators complicates the situation because people are given documents or receive treatments without explanations, such as multiple searches and handcuffs without explanation or detention without proper papers.

**T:** He claimed that he spent some hours at the Italian police station, where he signed some documents not explained by the police. Then they took a photo and his fingerprints (man from Senegal).

*Pre-filled not signed Readmission Order*

**T:** They received an obligation to leave the Schengen area. The document said there was no available Arabic translator (October 24th – two 21 y.o. men from Sudan).

**T:** One Tunisian man (19 y.o.) has a residence permit in Genoa. Police forced him to undress without a clear reason (October 29th – 19 y.o. man from Tunisia).

**T:** They got searched four times in 10 hours by the French police (November 26th – 5 people).

**T:** The two guys previously brought by the PAF with handcuffs were released. They both have study VISAs, so they can legally travel around Europe. They are 22 and 23 y.o., respectively.

“They treated us as criminals. We remained in a small cell where we could not lay on the floor at the same time. We stayed there from 9 AM to 4:30 PM. The police did not give us either food or water; they just insulted us” (October 31st – two men, 22 and 23 y.o.).

**T:** French police put them in handcuffs since they woke up (December 14th – man from Guinea and man from Ecuador).

Moreover, POMs were fingerprinted, and the police took photos of them without explanation.



*Released guy with signs of handcuffs*

**T:** The PAF fingerprinted him and took a photo (November 2nd – man from Afghanistan).

**T:** Police fingerprinted them without any clear reason, also because there was no translator. They did not receive any document (November 17th – Morocco, Mali, Afghanistan, and Somalia).

**T:** They all got fingerprinted without justification (December 7th – five people: one from Iran and four from Afghanistan).

**T:** He got fingerprinted without explanation (December 12th).

Sometimes, it seems that people are not aware of their duties and rights. For instance, some did not know that they must have the original copies of their documents to travel abroad, or once, a man had a residence permit that did not allow him to travel in the Schengen area, but he did not know. This underlines lacks and malfunctions in the support system for POMs.

Others don't know that to avoid detention and be put in the asylum process, they must ask for it out loud. On the other hand, several times, people told us that they asked for asylum, but the police did not care about it.

**T:** Even though they asked for asylum, the French police did not give them the right to it (October 26th – 24 y.o. and 28 y.o. men from Turkey).

**T:** He asked for asylum, but they did not give him any rights (November 5th – man from Syria).

**T:** He asked for asylum in France, but the police did not give him any possibility to do it (November 12th – man from Syria).

**T:** He asked for asylum, but French police did not give him any possibility to start the process (November 26th – man from Pakistan).

## **HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND ABUSE**

Often, POMs look shocked when they are released and don't want to share what happened.

**T:** The team felt none of them wanted to share their experiences, and "all of them seemed playful, sketchy, and they did not trust us."

Verbal violence could have a strong impact on people.

**T:** They claimed they had been insulted by the police, who insulted their mothers and families as well.

Even though people mostly claim that French police treat them worse than Italians, once, an Italian military officer shouted at one man: "*Chi cazzo sei? Da dove cazzo vieni?*" (*Who the fuck are you? Where the fuck do you come from?*), and another person claimed that Italian police behaved badly, insulting and threatening him by saying, "*Tornate al tuo paese*" (*Go back to your country*) and "*Figlio di puttana*" (*Son of a bitch*). That day, at the Italian police station, POMs were not allowed to smoke, drink water, or go to the toilet.

However, bad treatment mainly comes from the French police, who often don't provide either food or water, even to people who spend the night there. At the beginning of my period, if the French police gave food, it was canned food, and once POMs witnessed police officers giving the same food to their dogs. Currently, if they give food, they provide one bottle of water and one package of chips.

**T:** The police caught him by force, even though he was acting politely.

*"They took me as if I committed a dangerous crime."*

He entered the French detention center at 7 PM and was brought to the Italian police at 10 AM.

Police threatened and made fun of him, hitting his shoulders and his back, making him feel uncomfortable. He said he felt they aimed at provoking his reaction.

In the cell, there were 10 people, and the ventilation system was not working.

In addition, he claimed there was a toilet in the cell and a non-working tap was their only water source.

Police gave him a tuna can to eat, and he saw that the same can was given to police dogs.

Police officers were rude, and when he asked what time it was, they answered, *"Shut up!"*  
*"They treat you like in jail. They took my belt, my jacket, and my phone. Italy is quite better."*

Then he informed us that a child (male) inside was forced to sign a document where it was written that he was not a minor before being expelled from France.

*"With us, there was a minor who was obliged to sign a document where he appeared to be more than 18 years old."*

He concluded by affirming: *"The French do not accept people; they throw them in Italy. We are in Europe; why do Italians accept us and the French do not? I cannot understand."* (October 17th – 23 y.o. man)

**T:** One man from Afghanistan spent 23 hours at the PAF in a cell in the basement. He received just two peaches and a bottle of water (November 2nd).

**T:** *"They gave us only one package of chips"* (December 7th).

As stated before, usually, POMs claim that the worst treatment comes from the French police.

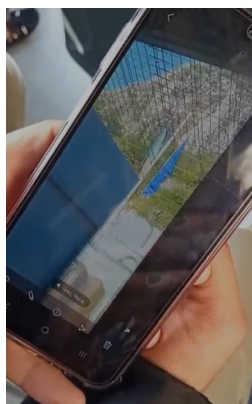
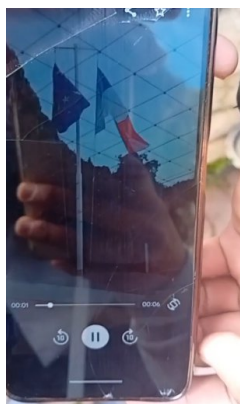
**T:** *"French police, mamma mia"* – The PAF interrogated him, asking if he wanted to marry a French woman to obtain documents. (November 12th – 28 y.o. man from Somalia)

**T:** *"French police good or bad?"* *"Very bad, they are racist"* (November 14th – 22 y.o. man from Tunisia).

Cells are usually overcrowded, and many POMs told us they had been put in a small cell with another person even though there was not enough space.

**T:** *"There were too many people."*

**T:** He spent the night at the PAF in a small place with another person. There was not enough space for both to lay down, so one stayed up while the other lay down.



Then, several people told us that during the night it is almost impossible to go to the toilet because no one allows them, both men and women.

**T:** He remained at the PAF since 8 PM to 11 AM without receiving neither water nor the possibility to access the toilet (October 22<sup>nd</sup>)

**T:** They spent two and a half hours in the basement of the PAF with 11 people, without food and the possibility to use the toilet. - *"None can talk, none can ask anything"* (October 31<sup>st</sup> – 2 guys from Somalia)

*Images from inside the PAF*

**T:** She could not go to the toilet all night long (November 9th – woman from the Dominican Republic).

**T:** The man from Ecuador claims that he could not go to the toilet because he was not allowed (December 14th – man from Ecuador).

In addition, some people are deprived of all personal effects, while others are not. This makes them feel like dangerous criminals.

**T:** *"They took everything from us: belt, jacket, shoelaces, phones."* (December 3<sup>rd</sup> – two men from Algeria)

**T:** During the night, French police took his glasses and kept them until they brought him to the Italian police. He asked several times to have them back, but the police did not return them to him. (December 14<sup>th</sup> – man from Pakistan)

Eventually, until the second week of December, POMs spent the night at PAF without any blankets, even though night temperatures were very low.

**T:** "It was freezing all night long; they didn't even give me a blanket" (November 9th – woman from the Dominican Republic).

**T:** She slept alone in a cell without a blanket (December 3<sup>rd</sup> – woman from Senegal).

## **MEDICAL CARE AND SUPPORT**

Moving on to medical treatments, it happened several times that people with clear emergencies were not helped, with the police justifying this by claiming the absence of a doctor.

For instance, once we met a family with three children. One of them had poliomyelitis, while another one had scabies, but they did not receive any medical treatment. (October 22<sup>nd</sup> – Family from Iran) Another time, two Turkish brothers were released, and the elder one had a problem with his liver and needed a transfusion, but he said that police forces did not help him at all. (October 26th – 24 y.o. and 28 y.o. men from Turkey)

## **TESTIMONY FROM THE TEAM**

The guy from Chad was waiting for a friend of his. He informed us that his friend was sick and had mental health issues. We saw him waiting in the police station, freezing, with only a blanket.

At 12:40, a team member went to ask the police if he could be released on time for the bus (12:55), since he was not feeling well and it would be good to take him to the hospital. The policeman said that he could not be released because they had to finish the documentation. Then, he added that only with the presence of a doctor could they confirm if he was sick or not. However, it was clear that he was not feeling well.

As the team member was leaving, they overheard the policeman shouting to his colleagues not to allow us to come close.

On one hand, it is understandable that the police should follow some strict procedures, but when such cases happen, it means they are not allowing these people to survive with dignity.

## **EXPERIENCES OF DETAINED POMs**

- Obligation to leave the Schengen area, pushed back to Italy, but in the minutes, it was written that they entered Europe passing from Spain. (October 17<sup>th</sup> – two men from Algeria)
- He has a Spanish residence permit, but he got robbed, and even though he had the police report, the PAF took him on the bus. (November 18<sup>th</sup>)
- A couple was stopped at Mentone Garavan. The guy was without documents. The police took the girl's phone and checked the gallery. He got interrogated at Mentone station, and the police checked WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram. Then, they took the SIM card and later gave it back. He did not receive any document. In addition, while the girlfriend was waiting for him in front of the station, one soldier (the one that always causes problems) shouted at her: "Go away, it is illegal to stay in front of a police station." (December 12<sup>th</sup> – a woman and a man)
- Yesterday, I tried to cross the border by bus. When the police checked the bus, a guy said to the police officers that he had documents, and they sprayed him in the eyes. (December 19<sup>th</sup> – 23y.o man from Morocco)

<b>RELEASED PEOPLE</b>	186
<b>COUNTRIES</b>	
Afghanistan	9
Algeria	18
Bangladesh	4
Chad	1
Domenican Republic	1
Ecuador	1
Egypt	5
Eritrea	4
Ethiopia	2
Gambia	2
Georgia	1
Guinea	5
India	1
Iraq	9
Iran	5
Ivory Coast	2
Kurdish	6
Libia	3
Mali	3
Morocco	9
Nigeria	1
Pakistan	9
Perù	1
Senegal	6
Syria	2
Somalia	9
Sudan	7
Tunisia	15
Turkey	11
Unknown	27
<b>WOMEN</b>	3
<b>MINORS</b>	11
<b>FAMILIES</b>	3
<b>DOCUMENTS</b>	
Invitation to the Questura	30
Obligation to leave the Schengen Area	7
Readmission Order total	38
Pre-filled signed readmission order	18
Pre-filled not signed readmission order	19
Minutes	3
OQTF + Minutes	1
No documents at all	36
No documents from France	27
No documents from Italy	20
<b>AGE</b>	
15	1
16	1
17	2
18	1

19	3
20	3
21	2
22	3
23	5
24	6
26	3
28	4
29	2
30	3
32	2
34	1
36	1
42	1
48	1
64	1