**Press Release**

**Violence and pushbacks at Italian-French border. People on the move left without shelter or healthcare in Italy.**

**MSF report *Denied Passage - The continuous struggle of people on the move pushed-back and stranded at the Italian-French border***

*Ventimiglia, 4th August 2023* - Systematically pushed back at the border by French police – often with violence, inhumane treatment as well as arbitrary detention – and left without adequate shelter and with limited access to healthcare in Italy. In its new report *Denied Passage - The continuous struggle of people on the move pushed-back and stranded at the Italian-French border,* the international medical organisation Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) documents the conditions reported by hundreds of people transiting in the city of Ventimiglia, in North-West Italy, and attempting to cross the border towards European countries.

Between February and June 2023, MSF - which runs a mobile clinic in Ventimiglia to assist individuals in transit - provided medical treatment or orientation to services to 320 patients. Among them, 215 patients reported acute conditions, including skin, respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases, as well as musculoskeletal complaints and injuries, while 14 had chronic illnesses such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. MSF also offered health promotion as well as socio-medical group sessions to 684 people.

Among the 1.004 people assisted by MSF, 79.8% declared to have previously attempted to cross into France, making multiple attempts, only to be pushed back at the French border. Among them are men, women and children who, after fleeing their countries of origins and embarking on very dangerous journeys to seek safety, are once again exposed to violence, humiliation, threats and inhumane conditions in Europe.

*“Our team has witnessed extremely vulnerable people being pushed back indiscriminately by French police, regardless of their individual circumstances and without appropriate assessment,”* says Sergio Di Dato, MSF project coordinator in Ventimiglia.

Many of the people encountered by MSF reported procedural violations during the notification of the refusal of entry by French authorities, such as inaccurate transcription of personal data, lack of information or absence of intercultural mediators,

Vulnerable people such as minors, pregnant women and new mothers, elderly or severely ill persons are not exempted from this practice. More than a third among the 48 unaccompanied minors assisted by MSF reported to have been pushed back to Italy, while several individuals told MSF team to have been arbitrarily detained in containers during the night, without any specific protection for women and children. They have also stated that food and water are not provided systematically, medical care is often denied, sanitary facilities are inadequate, and people are forced to sleep on the floor in situations of overcrowding. Moreover, during the reporting period alone, MSF staff in Ventimiglia identified at least four cases of family separation occurring during pushbacks, with some instances causing trauma for the victims, including children.

“We were stopped yesterday in Nice by the police,”said Jean\*, a man from Ivory Coast to MSF team in Ventimiglia. “My wife is pregnant. She was taken to the hospital because she fainted while they were handcuffing her. My two-year-old son and I were taken to the border police station in Menton. We spent the night in the cold and this morning we were pushed back and taken to Italy, but we have no news of my wife”.

Moreover, access to adequate shelter, healthcare, clean water, or sanitary facilities is extremely limited for people transiting in Ventimiglia. Despite the recent opening of two new ‘first assistance centers’ in the city (*Punto Assistenza Diffusa – PAD),* where extremely vulnerable migrants who have been pushed back from France can find refuge for a few nights, dozens of transiting people are still forced to sleep on the streets or in makeshift shelters. Two out of four promised PAD are still not functioning and fundamental services such as accommodation, healthcare and legal support are provided by local associations and civil society. Skin diseases, gastrointestinal, urinary, and upper-respiratory tract infections are just some of the ailments registered by MSF team, often a direct consequence of the poor living conditions.

*“It is crucial that people in transit, regardless of their legal status, are granted the right to receive comprehensive protection and services that address their needs,”* says Di Dato*. “The bottleneck created in Ventimiglia is not an isolated case but rather reflects the larger trend of European migration policies that prioritise containment and securitisation over fundamental rights and international protection”.*

Drawing from the testimonies and medical data collected by the MSF team in Ventimiglia and at the Italian-French border, MSF urges Italy, France, and other European countries to implement all necessary measures to prevent further harm to this vulnerable population, and specifically calls on them to**:**

* Put an end to systematic and indiscriminate pushbacks, and to degrading and inhumane treatment both at European Union internal and external borders;
* End the practice of arbitrary detention of people on the move and the use of violence at borders;
* Ensure humane and dignified treatment as well as access to healthcare and decent living conditions for people transiting in Ventimiglia, across Italy and throughout Europe;
* Guarantee and increase safe and legal passages for people seeking assistance and protection in Europe;
* Guarantee the right of all foreign children to seek asylum on French and European territory.

ENDS

***MSF in Italy***

*MSF has been working in Italy since 1999, assisting migrants and refugees arriving by sea, in reception centres and informal settlements, to provide them with medical, humanitarian, psychological and socio-healthcare assistance, in partnership with Italian authorities.*

*In Calabria region MSF provides medical and psychological assistance at landings, providing continuity of care in reception centres, while in Ventimiglia, near the border with France, MSF runs a mobile clinic to assist migrants and asylum seekers transiting in the area. In Palermo, Sicily, MSF runs a project for the rehabilitation of survivors of intentional violence and torture in collaboration with local health authorities.*

***MSF in France***

*Since 2015, MSF has been providing medical assistance to migrants excluded from healthcare in France.*

*In the Ile-de-France region, MSF opened a day reception centre in 2017 offering multidisciplinary care in four areas: somatic health, mental health, legal support, and social support. The centre has welcomed more than 3,000 young people since it opened.*

*MSF also provides shelter to age-disputed unaccompanied minors in Sevran (north of Paris) since October 2020, and in Marseille through a 20-bed shelter opened in January 2020. A 10-bed house in Bobigny (north of Paris) has been receiving young girls since April 2021. In total, since 2019, more than 350 unaccompanied minors have been accommodated and cared for by MSF adopting a multidisciplinary approach and more than 900 emergency beds in guest houses have been financed by the association.*

*In April 2023, MSF has launched activities in Calais, northern France, to provide migrants and refugees with medical and mental healthcare.*

**Notes to editors**

The irregularity of pushbacks at Italian-French border is related to several factors. Refoulements are often collective, they do not take into consideration individual circumstances and vulnerabilities, and they lack proper assessment for each person. Migrants often reported procedural violations during the notification of the refusal of entry by French police, people are not informed of their rights, and they are often prevented from exercising their right to claim asylum. Some individuals also reported cases of abuse of power and racial profiling during controls. Entry to France can only be refused if the asylum application is evaluated manifestly unfounded or inadmissible and after the appeal period is expired. During the application examination, the asylum seeker may not be pushed back.