

French police clearing refugees from encampment near Paris

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**French police evacuate a migrant camp of some 2,000 people in Saint-Denis, northern Paris.
(Photo: AFP)**

Paris, November 18 (RHC)-- Police in France have started evacuating refugees camped under a motorway junction in suburban Paris, where they have been living for several months under poor sanitary conditions.

A massive police force began the operation early on Tuesday morning to vacate and transport the asylum seekers to various reception centers and gymnasiums in the Ile-de-France region, near Paris. Some 2,500 refugees lined up to board buses, with some trying to burn their belongings prior to leaving the camp.

“These camps are not acceptable,” said Paris Prefect Police Didier Lallement in a press briefing. “This operation takes place to ensure that people in a regular situation are sheltered and those in an irregular situation are not intended to remain in the territory.” French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin also welcomed the operation in a Twitter message.

According to local reports, the asylum seekers were to be tested for the new coronavirus in screening centers set up by the ARS regional health agency to either be quarantined or transferred to designated shelters.

In all, 70 buses were deployed to transport the refugees, while 26 shelters were set up by Ile-de-France Prefecture to accommodate them in a joint operation by the Paris police headquarters and the prefectures of the Ile-de-France and Seine-Saint-Denis.

According to local reports, the insanitary encampment, where several hundred tents were set up, mostly housed single men, mainly from Afghanistan, but also from Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Many of the refugees have previously passed through other camps on the outskirts of Paris, successively dismantled but recreated again and again a little further away in the northern suburbs of Paris.

Nearly thirty local relief agencies and associations, including Cimade, Secours Catholique, and Solidarité Migrants Wilson, have denounced the refugee situation as “an endless and destructive cycle.”

“For five years, evacuations have been repeated, despite the dysfunctions of the accommodation system that accompanies them... Today, the authorities continue to organize these operations while the previous 65 have proven to be ineffective, and that their only effect was to disperse people,” the relief associations said in a statement.

“The situation is very worrying. We were unable to distribute masks. There are a lot of people here, more than 2,000,” said Philippe Caro of Solidarité Migrants Wilson.

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