



CARAVANA CALAIS 2025

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My Experience in Calais – A Personal Reflection - Khadija Najlaoui

I was invited to join the Caravana in Calais, representing Unite the Union, the largest trade union in the world; Waling-Waling, an organization supporting domestic workers; and the Transnational Migrant Platform Europe, in solidarity with migrants and refugees.



I had heard many times about the situation in Calais, but nothing could have prepared me for what I witnessed.

Upon arrival, I joined a group preparing to support refugees. We were divided into smaller teams and given clear instructions: no pictures, no videos, and we must approach people with respect,



as if we were entering someone's home. That struck me deeply. We were being reminded of the dignity of people who are too often ignored or dehumanized.

I thought we would be going to a shelter or a building. But instead, we were taken to the forest. That alone was shocking. I never imagined people were living in such conditions. As we began collecting rubbish along the paths, I was still trying to understand the purpose. But when I saw the place where people lived — children, adults, entire families — I was heartbroken. I held back my tears and thought: How are they surviving here?



It was summer — but I kept thinking: What about the winter? What happens when it rains? What can a small tent protect them from? The smell, the insects, the piles of rubbish... it was inhumane. And yet, they live in the middle of it.



We collected as much rubbish as we could and placed it by the roadside, hoping it would be seen and picked up by the authorities. We were told this visible act might inspire others in the camp to do the same — that it might offer even a small sense of dignity or hope. I'm grateful for the team I was with — we did our best, but it never felt like enough.

One moment I'll never forget: I recognized a young man, maybe in his early twenties. He had been on the train with me from Lille to Calais. I thought he was joining the Caravana too. But later, in the camp, I saw him again.

"Oh! You are here?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "I arrived yesterday. This is my tent."

That hit me hard. He wasn't there to help — he was one of the people in need. His tent was tiny. He didn't know how long he would be there or where he would go next.

Later, we took part in a Popular Tribunal in a park near Calais station. The commemorative march from the park to the beach was a powerful demonstration. Along the way, they laid out banners listing the names of those who were murdered at the borders — migrants and refugees lost in Nador-Melilla, Sudan, Italy, Spain, and beyond. Each name was hand-stitched into fabric — an act of remembrance, honouring lives that were otherwise erased or forgotten.





Even now, back in London, my heart is heavy. I can't stop thinking about what I saw. I keep asking myself: What if it rains? What if it snows? What happens to those children? These questions stay with me. The emotional weight is real.

I remember a couple of years ago, someone circulated a phone number: if you saw someone sleeping on the street, you could call and give their location, and a team would try to find them shelter. I've tried to do what I can locally — I know it's just a small act, but it matters.

And maybe sharing what I saw in Calais matters too. Because the world needs to remember: those people are not numbers. They are human beings — just like us — deserving of shelter, care, dignity and human rights - including the right to move. Strength and Solidarity with the Caravana!

