



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on August 10, 2016

Migrants' New Path Through Europe Posing Problems for Italy and Switzerland

The favored final destination for most migrants fleeing the conflict in Syria and economic and political turmoil in parts of northern and northeastern Africa is still Germany, but their path to that country is changing. While previously, most migrants had gone first to refugee camps in Turkey and then crossed northward through Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, and Austria, stricter border controls in those nations have caused many refugees to seek an alternate path through Italy.



Migrants who travel to Italy across the Mediterranean by boat usually land first in Sicily, and then go on across the narrow, two-mile wide Strait of Messina to mainland Italy. From there, they travel up the Italian peninsula bound for one of two destinations — the region near Lake Como and the Swiss border and the Italian Riviera town of Ventimiglia, just a few miles from the French border.

Since most of the migrants are headed for Germany, they favor the route across the Italian-Swiss border to Switzerland's southernmost canton, Ticino. Once they arrive in Switzerland, they are basically free to travel anywhere in Europe. A report in Britain's *Daily Express* newspaper notes that most migrants travel on foot to the northern Swiss area of Baden, northwest of Zurich, and then cross into southwestern Germany, north of Basel.

Some migrants do not travel far beyond the Italian border, however. The *Express* reported statistics indicating that Swiss border guards discovered 5,760 "illegal residents in Ticino during July."

Many of the migrants traveling on to cross the Swiss border into Germany carry the address of a police station in the town of Weil am Rhein, the most southwesterly town in Germany. As they arrive at the station, they say the only European word they know: "Asyl," ("Asylum").

Police there identified most of the migrants reporting there as African, with the majority of them coming from Eritrea, in the horn of Africa. Human Rights Watch has said of Eritrea: "Torture, arbitrary detention, and severe restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and religious freedom remain routine."

Kathrin Mutter, who manages the Weil am Rhein police station, said the number of arriving migrants has become too much for officers, who are not responsible for border protection or asylum applications.

As the *Express* quoted Mutter: "In May 60 applicants came to us, in June and July it was 140 each."

Not all of the refugees from the Middle East and Africa are headed for Germany, however. Some try to get into France, with most of those trying to cross the border along the Italian-French Riviera. The Italian town of Ventimiglia has become a major staging area for such migrants. (Ventimiglia is four miles from the French border and just 24 miles from the French city of Nice, where on July 14 a native of Tunisia, North Africa, deliberately drove an 18-ton truck into a crowd of Bastille Day celebrants,



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killing 85 people.)

Not being able to cross the border into France on the roads, many have walked along the beach or even gone into the water to swim around the land border. Britain's *Telegraph* reported on August 9 that about 150 migrants who jumped into the sea were returned by the French authorities to Italy over the previous weekend.

The *Telegraph* noted that many of the refugees are living in charity-run centers where they are provided with basic shelter, food, and drink. About 500 of them are being housed in a temporary reception center on the outskirts of the town.

Some have even camped out on rocky shoals on the Italian side of the border, waiting for an opportunity to make an undetected crossing, probably under the cover of darkness.

Franco Gabrielli, the director of Italy's Intelligence and Democratic Security Service (SISDE), said the situation at Ventimiglia has to be brought under control, insisting: "There is only one way to do that — by taking these people to other parts of the country."

In speaking about the increasingly serious situation at Ventimiglia, Italian Interior Minister Angelino Alfano told *La Repubblica* newspaper, "Our border with France will not become another Calais."

Alfano was referring to the migrant camp in Calais, France, near the French side of the Channel tunnel connecting France with England, which has been nicknamed the "Jungle" because of its wild and disorderly conditions. As has started happening in Ventimiglia, charities have set up facilities near the Calais migrant camp to feed and house the refugees there, only on a much larger scale. Thousands of refugees have occupied the camp and hundreds of small businesses — some run by charities and others for profit — have set up around the camp to provide food and other necessities to the migrants.

However, French authorities now view the "Jungle" as a hazardous and threatening entity, and are moving to shut it down. *International Business Times* reported that following a decision by French authorities on February 25 to evict those on the southern part of the Jungle and a follow-up decision to close the restaurants on July 18, 150 police have conducted raids on two dozen establishments providing food for the residents of the camp, and the food was seized and disposed of by the Departmental Directorate for the Protection of Civilian Populations (DDPP). French authorities served business-owners with an eviction notice on August 3, stating that their businesses would be demolished on August 10.

The association Help Refugees reported that there were 7,300 people living in the camp according to the July monthly census, of which 608 were unaccompanied minors.

That the French authorities would take such apparently extreme measures as to start shutting down the camp indicates how strongly they believe that its presence represents a threat to public safety and security.

The Italians seem determined that the situation that developed at Calais does not also occur in Italy. Interior Minister Alfano said: "The truth is that until now we have not had the problems that the British and the French have had at Calais. The system in Italy has worked well."

The *Daily Mail* reported that the Italian government has sent many migrants to reception centers in other parts of the country and does not want a refugee camp being set up in Ventimiglia like the one in Calais.

Photo of African immigrants in Ventimiglia, Italy: AP Images



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