

Clean Water and Sanitation at the Heart of Europe's Migrant Crisis

Country of Project Implementation: Ventimiglia, Italy

Sponsoring College: New York University

Designated Student Leader: Zara Gounden, USA/UK, UWC Pearson College

Other Team Members: Ata Tezel, Republic of Turkey, UWC Mahindra College
Fraser Byers, Canada, UWC Mahindra College / UWC Pearson College (2nd year pandemic transfer)
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Background: Each year, more than 30,000¹ migrants pass through Ventimiglia, the final Italian town before the north-western border with France. A hotspot in Europe's ongoing migrant crisis, the humanitarian conditions in Ventimiglia have further deteriorated with the recent closure of the Italian Red Cross 'Campo Roja' and a hardened French police presence at all border crossings. The Roya river, flowing through Ventimiglia and its estuary into the Mediterranean Sea, is at the center of the dangerous sanitary situation that Ventimiglia and its migrants find themselves in today. In the absence of the Roja Camp, this river is where the migrants must now wash, use as a bathroom, and access drinking water. Beyond organic human waste, the river is visibly polluted with considerable garbage and spilled oil; there is also concern that the water contains hazardous heavy metals from industry upriver. Formally assessing, and then improving the water quality is vitally important to the wellbeing of the migrants, along with the greater community of Ventimiglia and beyond.

Overview: Having prior first-hand experience engaging with humanitarian aid in Ventimiglia, our team is passionate about improving the sanitary conditions of the migrants with the support of a Projects for Peace grant. The sustainability, feasibility, and hopeful scalability of the project is at the heart of our vision, along with our direction taking advantage of the experience and unique skill sets of all of our team members. We hope to draw attention to the sanitary crisis in Ventimiglia, as well as provide direct support for the worst affected: the many thousands of migrants caught between borders. Our project has four main elements. First, to conduct scientific research on the water quality of the Roya River. There is presently no comprehensive report about the major water quality indicators and health of the river. Being able to conduct and share this research would allow us to inform and pressure relevant actors, including local authorities, to take serious action. We would partner with local organizations such as L'Institut Océanographique de Monaco and especially marine biologist Laura Verhegge (who several of our team members have worked with before) to conduct the water quality assessments. Second, to execute a short term remediation plan. Migrants accessing the Roya's water are in need of immediate relief actions. We would lead volunteer groups to clean up visual pollutants in the river to de-escalate the environmental crisis, and deliver hygienic packets that would include masks, reusable water filters, hand sanitizer, and translated educational pamphlets on the location of safer local water sources. Third, to produce and film an intimate documentary on the sanitary crisis in Ventimiglia, involving interviews with migrants, Ventimiglia locals, Italian police, and other stakeholders, in order to understand and explain how the issues of access to water and migration are so closely related. As with any documentary, we will aim to capture and tell a potentially otherwise unheard story and hopefully create awareness among the general public. Finally, we aim to combine the findings from the water quality assessment and our documentary to publish a report on the empirical evidence of the critical sanitary situation the migrants in Ventimiglia experience today, along with potential policy suggestions. We hope that these combined efforts will help address an immediate need for relief and create long term change through increased awareness and hard evidence.

Demonstrated Need and or Research: Even before the closure of the Italian Red Cross Roya Camp, research from the Refugee Rights Data Project (RRDP) illustrated the dire situation in Ventimiglia. They said Ventimiglia was one of the worst refugee locations they had been to, describing

¹ <https://www.weworld.it/en/news-and-stories/news/ventimiglia-migrants-journey-through-the-pandemic-and-new-shelters>

the situation as “terrifying” and pushing for more to be done to improve the inhumane situation. When the migrants on location were questioned about the sanitation in Ventimiglia, the majority of respondents – 85 per cent – said they would use the water in the river, where many go to the toilet, to wash themselves, as well as to drink when desperate. Two of our team members attend university in Menton, the closest French town to Ventimiglia. Speaking to locals we hear consistently that the crisis has only escalated in the past two years. There are as many migrants as ever and a larger police presence. There have been calls for authorities to clean the Roya from groups such as the IMEDD² based out of Monaco, yet no action has occurred. Access to clean water is a fundamental element of human dignity. The UN General Assembly has recognized water and sanitation as basic human rights³ as well as prerequisites to the enjoyment of further rights. The Roya river today endangers migrants passing through Ventimiglia as well as the local community. This is because of the heightened risk of contracting highly contagious diseases such as scabies⁴ and cholera.

Implementation and Timeline: **April/Early May:** Begin water quality assessment. As two of us attend university near our project site, we are able to make frequent trips to the Roya River. In order to make our project as effective as possible, we will research and assess the current state of the river in partnership with local institutes and supervised by a marine biologist. **Late May:** Begin visible pollutant clean up and handing out hygienic packages. We will work with other students from SciencesPo (the university in Menton) to organize a group of volunteers. **Early June:** Conduct interviews and begin the documentation process for the documentary and policy paper. **Late June:** Divide the team into two groups: Group one will continue with the documentary ; Group B will start work on a policy paper combining both water pollution assessment and humanitarian assessment. **July:** Continue and complete work for policy paper and documentary. **August:** Present policy paper to various groups such as RedCross Italy, L'Institut Océanographique de Monaco, UNHCR France, and more, to explain the situation and advocate for long term change in Ventimiglia. Circulate the documentary to film festivals and conferences, ensuring that it will reach a wider audience.

Goals and Objectives: Our goal is to positively impact the sanitary conditions of the Roya River where the majority of migrants in Ventimiglia access water. We believe this goal will be achieved through the progressive completion of the following objectives: 1) A comprehensive water quality assessment and identification of major sources of pollutants. 2) A clean-up of visible solid pollutants, i.e. garbage. 3) distribution of hygienic packages. 4) Gather information and produce a documentary on the sanitary crisis in Ventimiglia 5) Create a report that illustrates our findings and provides policy recommendations.

Assessment and Outcome: Assessment is an integral part of our plan. We will be measuring our impact both environmentally and socially. We will assess the quality of the water during our primary water assessment and later following our volunteer clean-up event(s). Socially, we will conduct interviews of individuals that are affected by the state of the river before, during, and after our project to learn about what was positively impactful and what we can do better to meet the needs of our target population.

Sustainability of Project: Stewardship of rivers and watersheds is important to their continued cleanliness, and we aspire for our project to scale into long-term sustainable protection, monitoring, and cleaning of the Roya River. SciencesPo Menton's student association “Eviromenton” is committed to supporting this primary project and continuing regular cleanup as part of their mission. Our dream is that the outcome of this project catalyzes efforts by others, especially authorities, to improve the sanitary conditions in Ventimiglia – by improving the water quality of the Roya River and/or providing migrants with alternative access to clean water.

² <http://www.imedd-group.com/en/ewwr-a-need-of-a-european-focus-for-the-cleaning-of-the-river-roya-shared-between-france-and-italy/>

³ <https://undocs.org/E/A/RES/64/292>

⁴ “In Dangerous Transit: Filling Information Gaps Relating to Refugees and Displaced People in Ventimiglia, Italy,” *Child Rights Resource Centre*, Denise Charlton and Associates, Refugee Rights Europe, Refugee Youth Service, 2017, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/dangerous-transit-filling-information-gaps-relating-refugees-and-displaced-people/>.

Name: Zara Gounden				Note: all funds in US dollars.	
Project Name: Clean Water and Sanitation at the Heart of Europe's Migrant Crisis					
School: New York University				TOTAL FUNDS REMAINING:	
Projects for Peace grant:	\$	10,000.00		\$	1,323.00
Additional Funding, if any:					
Total funding available:	\$	10,000.00		\$	8,677.00

Student Expenses					Project Expenses				
Travel (Including Airfare)	Lodging	Communications	Food (Biweekly)	Miscellaneous	Non-Student Travel and Lodging	Direct Equipment and Supplies	Marketing and Event Support	Staffing Costs	Miscellaneous
\$80	\$1,200		\$220		45\$	Equipment for riv	Clean-up volunteer event		112\$
\$30	\$600		\$220			\$250	\$75		150\$
\$40	\$300		\$220			\$15	\$100		\$1,200
\$800						\$20	\$60		\$20
\$600						\$165	\$10		
						\$200			
						\$30			
						\$65			
						Hygenic packages			
						500\$			
						\$1,000			
						200			
						\$150			
						Documentation equipment / supplies			
						\$1,700			
Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
\$ 1,550.00	\$ 2,100.00	\$ -	\$ 660.00	\$ -	\$ 45.00	\$ 2,595.00	\$ 245.00	\$ -	\$ 1,482.00

Total Student Expenses: \$ 4,310.00

Total Project Expenses: \$ 4,367.00