

Migrants resort to treacherous night hikes through snowy, frozen Alps from Italy to France

Since October 1,500 have been intercepted - and some left with permanent injuries, such as amputated fingers, due to extreme cold.

Migrants and asylum seekers are resorting to dangerous night hikes through the Alps to reach France, aid workers are reporting.

As borders within Europe become increasingly difficult to cross due to pandemic restrictions, some asylum seekers who entered Europe through the Balkans are now braving the extreme, sometimes lethal, mountain cold - often with young children.

The Italian Red Cross has been monitoring the Italian side of the Alps in the town of Claviere for four years.

But for a few months now, they report they are seeing an increase in families, mainly from Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq attempting the route.

Since October more than 1,500 have been intercepted.



If they are spotted near the border, migrants are returned to Italy after only a few hours of detention.

Michele Belmondo, a volunteer with the Italian Red Cross, patrols the mountains to warn people of the dangers, assists them with blankets, and sometimes rescues them.

She said: “Unfortunately there have been cases of migrants who were rescued with serious injuries, serious hypothermia.

“In some cases, there have been permanent injuries. People who had their fingers amputated due to the extreme cold.”

She added: “Initially it used to be young migrants of African origin, often francophones who tried to join France and other European countries.

“Starting some months ago, in 2020, the type of migrants passing in this area has changed a bit, there are many families, often with children who come down the Balkan route, so the main nationalities are Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi.”

Amir Hotak, 23, fled his native Afghanistan years ago to get away from the daily violence and insecurity he was facing there.

His odyssey to Italy passed by Iran, Turkey, Greece, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia.

Now he wants to go to Paris.

“In France is the good life,” he said. “No war.”

Hiking the Italian-French Alps, especially in the winter, is difficult even for those who have overcome other obstacles along the way.

Many try to do so at night to avoid being spotted by France’s National Gendarmerie who patrol aboard snow bikes.

If they are spotted near the border they are returned to Italy after only a few hours of detention.

Source:

<https://news.sky.com/story/migrants-resorting-to-treacherous-night-hikes-through-alps-to-escape-to-new-lives-12231351>

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