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**REPORT
FROM
EUROPE**

The ‘New Normal’ *in* Europe

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We are facing one of the most complex situations ever, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Numbers are rising every day, in almost every corner of the globe. Europe has reported more than 2,250,000 cases and almost 200,000 deaths. The countries reporting the most cases and deaths are the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Spain, Russia, Germany and Belgium.

Europe decided to close its borders, imposing a lockdown on all residents. Health and economic consequences have been dramatic in some regions around the continent, especially affecting the most vulnerable people, including migrants, refugees, and forcibly displaced persons.

What is the situation faced by people on the move?

#StayAtHome

#StayAtHome is one of the most used hashtags these days in social networks and health and public administration directives. The tragedy is that there are many vulnerable people, including many migrants and refugees, who have no home in which to isolate themselves. Other people live indoors, but they cannot call it home. These are underprivileged homes where entire families or strangers live together in 20 square meters.

Refugee Camps

Images in Greece make clear the incompatibility of refugee camps to house those who have fled hunger or violence in their home countries. Crowded camps, with no sanitary conditions for quarantine and isolation, would surely have terrible consequences.



Isolation

Some migrants are living in their homes, these days, with no support networks with which to communicate or to feel accompanied. The drama is even greater for people who do not master the language and have serious difficulties about knowing the rules of sanitation and isolation. Many of them are afraid to leave their homes to seek medical care or to buy groceries because they think the police will ask for their documents and they will get into trouble.

Detention Centres

There are different types of detention centres around the world. For example, in Spain, there is no possibility of expelling people due to the closure of the borders of more than 120 countries. The overcrowded conditions in which they live puts people at risk.

Prejudices and Xenophobia

Societies look for scapegoats when they face a crisis. The global pandemic we are experiencing is no stranger to that trend. There are voices saying migrants are the one spreading the disease. In some cases, the scapegoats change sides and we no longer are speaking only of the migrants who jump the fence, but also of the Chinese immigrants who brought the coronavirus from their country.

Essential Workers

Many migrants, particularly women, work as caregivers to children and the elderly. As essential workers, many are not permitted to self-isolate at home and must continue working at great risk to themselves and their families. Unfortunately, this invaluable contribution to society often goes unacknowledged. Many people who work in this sector are not able to live with dignity.

Trapped at the Border

With the closure of borders around the world, families find themselves divided and trapped in transit sites with no means of survival, sometimes without the knowledge of the local language or legislation. People blocked at airports around Europe, unable to access basic information, overflowing consulates and embassies, are elements that present a strong threat for certain groups that have been isolated by the closure of borders.

Economic Impact of COVID-19

There are quite a few migrants with precarious jobs, who are already affected by layoffs and even self-employed people have seen their professional futures endangered. The economic blockade caused by the coronavirus affects the most vulnerable people, especially those in the lowest strata of our labour market. A large percentage is migrants and refugees in need.

How can we take care of the most vulnerable people on the move?

Given the current situation in Europe, several measures would need to be implemented soon.

1. Evacuate overcrowded refugee camps and detention centres and provide safe accommodation for migrants.
2. Stop the deportations of migrants, due to weaknesses of the health systems in many countries.
3. Promote access to medical care for the homeless, migrants and refugees in transit, especially for the most vulnerable groups.
4. Provide humanitarian and financial support in solidarity with the countries and areas most affected by the humanitarian care of refugees.
5. Support the right to asylum, including the right to due process, especially in this time of crisis.
6. Provide safe emergency resources for homeless people or those living in overcrowded situations who cannot comply with prevention and isolation measures.
7. Offer information in several languages about the current situation, as well as health measures.
8. Implement networks of care providers, especially for people who are lonely, sick or have been trapped by border closures. Some civil societies and various churches, which had anticipated such a need, have set up various networks from the beginning of the current crisis.
9. Raise awareness in favour of the most vulnerable groups. Many migrants are taking care of our elderly, the group

most affected by the pandemic. A large part of our labour market and care networks are supported by the immigrant community. In these complex times, these key elements should get frequent headlines in our newspapers.

10. Fight against falsehoods and populist trends that associate migration and the spreading of COVID-19, stigmatising migrants, refugees and displaced people.

What measures may we adopt in the 'new normal'?

Promote a sensible regularization policy that helps the integration and the safeguarding of human rights, as well as the construction of a 'social fabric'. The global health emergency has also brought to light the great vulnerability of rights that these situations cause in people, given the loss of employment and social protection.

Foster international cooperation to minimize the causes of migration. Countries of origin need to minimize the structural factors that compel people to leave their country.

Reinforce integration and social coexistence in our pluralistic and multicultural societies. Hospitality and integration are key elements to ensure that our diverse societies build a future and inclusive citizenship.

Realise that migration is an opportunity. Migration is an opportunity for societies to grow and be enriched not only from an economic and scientific point of view but also in the social and cultural fields and the world of values.

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