REFLEXION ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANTS AND MIGRATON- Best practices in Africa

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There is a deep concern about the marginalization of the most vulnerable groups among us- such like migrants, refugees and asylum seekers residing in other countries than their countries of origins and who do not enjoy the same rights as nationals, especially the right to health. Around the world, migrants and refugees can be excluded in law, and policy administrative regulations and practices. They are often facing obstacles in accessing health care, including language and cultural barriers, costs, lack of access to information, and discrimination and xenophobia. Migrants' conditions have worsened under these circumstances.

Migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees face risks, as they live in cramped conditions, including formal camps, informal settlements, or population-dense urban spaces. Multiple families are often forced to share the same bathroom, the same cooking, and the same bathing facilities- if they have access to them. Some are forced to share the same tent even under these circumstances of this global sanitary crises. In some countries, asylum seekers and irregular migrants are placed in detention often in appalling conditions. The ease with which the coronavirus spreads makes these living situations potentially disastrous and even worse, as they may be confined to camps and settlements, or living in urban areas with overcrowding, poor sanitation, and overstretched or inaccessible health services[1]. Migrants in an irregular situation can be unable or unwilling to access health care or provide information on their health status because they fear or risk detention, deportation or penalties as a result of their immigration status[2]. We also emphasize the double vulnerability of these groups who are already suffering from social exclusion and who live in poverty, deprived of any resource to earn their livelihood to face the Corona pandemic and to be able to isolate themselves. Their administrative situation deepens their suffering and makes them, and their families face challenges that cannot be overcome without courageous government intervention to help them.

Several European countries have suspended the admission of migrants either as a transit zones or as a destination country claiming Corona virus and illegal immigration. While an urgent international action needs to be taken to protect migrants and refugees under the Corona pandemic. Each country is

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[1] https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/3/29/covid-19-and-the-displaced-addressing-the-threat-of-the-novel-coronavirus-in-humanitarian-emergencies

[2] https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/COVID19Guidance.aspx

encouraged and requested to plan its preparedness and response actions in line with the global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP)[3], in terms of migrants protection as the most vulnerable, WHO has focused on the necessity to support them and to invite each country to provide for them with refuge or safe spaces where necessary through coordinated economic and social measures that provide incentives to participate, and which mitigate negative social and economic consequences. Food security, mental health, and gender safeguarding issues, including the need to protect women from an increased risk of domestic abuse, are high-priority areas for attention[4]. African countries across sub-Saharan Africa have begun taking precautions to stop the arrival or halt the spread of COVID-19 within their borders since February 2020 blocking most of the incoming flights or screening and quarantining passengers of certain nationalities or arriving from specific countries. They are trying to limit as much as possible the spread of this virus, as I will not be contained in a certain phase if the spread cannot be controlled.

Accordingly, governments need to take a national initiative to spread a climate of trust and reassure this group (migrants, refugees and asylum seekers) by formally sponsoring them and by being able to enjoy the right to health on an equal basis with national citizens. The Government of Tunisia for instance, has taken positive measures targeting the situation of foreign migrants residing in Tunisia. Providing approval of suspending the calculation of the legal deadlines for residency in the country from the beginning of March 2020 until the expiry of the obligation- considering the national level and the countries of origin of the residents. Further suspending the calculation of the entry visa expiry dates for Tunisia, its extension, and the financial implications of that expiry of the obligation- while working to provide them with benefits in social services and other financial benefits, in addition to inviting real estate owners to postpone the conclusion of the rental information required for April and May. Local governance plays also an important role responding to COVID-19. Some municipalities such as the Municipality of Sousse, the Municipality of Manouba, are working on providing social aid for migrants and providing Data Base for migrants in their regions according to their geographical distribution.

In Burkina Faso, some measures of security have been taken to empty the refugees camp ''*the Goudoubo refugee campubo''* by force making Malian refugees who lived in near the border of Burkina Faso and Mali live the camps after militants' attacks. With the closing of school, health center and even the camp's security post, Malian migrants find themselves obliged to move to another locations in Burkina Faso where they face hard conditions of the main basics of life such as access to health, water and

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[3] https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/srp-04022020.pdf
[4] World Health Organization Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, 14 April 2020.

security or to return home where the security situation in Mali does not allow it since authorities have imposed a curfew as part of its COVID-19 response. To facilitate their return, UNHCR is working with the Malian authorities on the ground, to provide a safe return for refugees with shelter, relief items and cash to support their initial needs. UNHCR is also providing the authorities with the needed health and hygiene equipment as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has registered nearly 3,000 refugees in Gao, Mopti and Timbuktu regions beneficiaries of UNHCR initiatives and partnership with the Malian authorities. Hundreds of refugees in Libya are worried about being cut off aid in the corona virus outbreak. After they were forced to leave a UNHCR run center in Libya earlier this year, they are now facing the risk to be infected by the virus without having any sort of aid or assistance after that the UN has announced the suspension of their activities in Tripoli community day center where they usually help migrants and refugees. They are facing health issues and a huge threat especially for refugees and migrants still locked up in detention centers. Contrary to some countries measures to empty refugees' camp, other countries like Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroun, South Sudan and DRC still hosting 80 per cent of migrants and refugees and maintain their shelter in this crisis in isolated border camps. Although isolation offers a degree of protection, but the risk of infection is highly exposed while Government officials, aid organizations, and vendors regularly have individuals going in and out of these camps. In addition, the illegal situation of migrants and refugees is another restriction and a reason for them to not seek for help from governments and other parties and to avoid drawing attention to themselves in their everyday lives and nowadays especially within the Corona Outbreak. Even if they will be exposed to the virus or doubt to have symptoms they will not prefer to declare on their situation fear of recognition at borders from officials and also fear of the violence against asylum seekers and informal migrants from local populations spurred on by fears of the pandemic[5].

Moreover, a serious challenge faces the Government of Ethiopia in the last two weeks with the unexpected arrival of more than 5,000 returnees to Ethiopia from Djibouti, Kenya and Saudi Arabia without prior health screenings. The government, working with partners, is preparing 30 quarantine sites to cater for the returnees, with IOM assistance to make the four in Addis Ababa ready to host returnees. The government of Ethiopia with IOM assistance have provided food and palatable bottled water hand washing facilities, and sanitary pads for women. They are also working to provide support at the site,

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[5] https://africacenter.org/spotlight/covid-19-and-africas-displacement-crisis/

including registering arrivals and identifying vulnerable returnees, such as unaccompanied migrant children, for further assistance after quarantine.

Throughout these months, African countries are developing precautionary measures against Coronavirus, but they can only be classified them as general precautions concerning not only migrants and refugees but the whole population. Some countries such Tunisia, Nigeria and Ghana are using the digital competences of its engineers, developing a vital tool in the fight to halt the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. West Africa is using systematic response to Corona, the Surveillance, **Outbreak Response Management and Analysis System (SORMAS)**[6], which has been already in use for several years to monitor outbreaks of infectious diseases in West Africa and was expanded at the beginning of February to enable authorities to document cases of Covid-19 in both countries Nigeria and Ghana. GIZ is currently assisting regions in Nigeria and Ghana in applying the coronavirus drawing in SORMAS process. Tunisia has been using the artificial intelligence of their young engineers' in the coronavirus outbreak. A police robot made by a Tunisian young engineer has been deployed by the ministry of interior to patrol areas of Tunisia's capital, Tunis, to ensure that people are observing a coronavirus lockdown and to sensitize people about the necessity to stay indoors. A software has been developed to identify symptoms of COVID-19 more quickly on chest X-rays of potentially infected people- Users for this application are from France, Belgium, Germany and the USA and has marked in the first day more than 1.200 hits to identify coronavirus symptoms. Civil Society has also marked its important role in helping governments to halt the spread of coronavirus and to ensure sensibilization and mobilization about it. Civil Society has also expressed its concerns about migrants, refugees and seekers and insisted on the fact that governments should not forget about this vulnerable category.

In conclusion, I can say that COVID-19 has only further highlighted the challenges of migrants and has not created them. Fighting COVID-19 is not a choice, it is a global threat for global security, safety, and humanity in the same time. To halt the spread and the risks of COVID-19, a new inclusive spirit needs to be adopted. It is a call for all pertinent parties to act and to frame inclusive policies responding the Coronavirus pandemic. Inclusive policies here will build inclusive communities for the future, where there is no separation between nationals and migrants in such crises. It is always the political will which govern such weaknesses in our systems in such a critical time.

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[6] https://sormasorg.helmholtz-hzi.de/About_SORMAS.html

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