



INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

COVID-19: HOW TO PROTECT ULTRA-VULNERABLE REFUGEES

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Moderated by Mr Pierre Ruetschi - Directeur, Club suisse de la presse :



Mme Gillian Triggs - Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR

Migration routes are still opened. But **rescue operations** are suspended and it is really hard to assess the current migration figures. We are expecting to see a great push across the Mediterranean sea.

Nightmare scenario: COVID19 spreading in **refugee camps**, which are extremely **vulnerable areas**. We are doing everything possible to take **preventive measures**. We can't get our staff into particularly isolated areas and camps. Also, it is not the best idea to put **European staff** in camps, they may not be welcome by the refugees in this context of pandemic.

COVID19 caused a huge **challenge for human rights**. It triggered a massive wave of **discriminatory behaviours**. COVID19 is not only a health crisis but also a **human rights crisis**.

About funding: new **funding plan** will be made in the next days by the UNHCR secretary general. UNHCR operates through NGOs. Part of the appeal will include and **increase NGO funding**. We currently have significant **support from USA** (43% of the UNHCR budget). We expect this level of support to continue, because it is vital to our work. But of course, we are subject to the need to **demonstrate the efficiency of our work**. We will be judged by the way we deliver our mission.

The tragedy is that people of concern, in vulnerable situations, will be the **first impacted** by the **economic consequences** of the crisis. There will be **long term effects** that we will witness during years.



Mr Gianluca Rocco - Chief of Mission and Regional Response Coordinator, IOM Greece:

The **combination of COVID and political crisis** with Turkey resulted in fewer arrival of migrants in Greece. We went from **2000 arrival per months** in average to **0 arrival in April 2020**.

In the Greek Islands, we still have **40.000 people in camps** with 10.000 people capacity only. So far, **no cases recognized in the populations in camps** in Greek islands.

In the mainland, migrants are accommodated in apartments and temporary hotels (6000) and in camps (27.000). We have experienced around **200 cases of COVID in our mainland facilities**.

We have to look separately between mainland situation and islands camps. In the islands, the main problem is **overcrowding**. We try to **limit contacts between people** in camps, but we don't have experience in implementing such practices.

We have to start discussing how do we want to **manage migration**. Asylum and border management are component of migration management. All these elements must be **tackled together**. You cannot manage migration by building walls and closing borders.

Regarding the future, either we find a way as a **unified Europe** regarding borders and asylum seekers either we fail. We will continue to have high number of inflows from Central Asia and Africans. It is **not only related to the situation in Syria**.



Mme Caroline Abu Sa'da – Director, SOS Méditerranée :

There are currently **no assets to conduct rescue** in the sea. The testimony capacity is gone for now, not because people are not crossing the sea, but people **rescue operations are suspended**. At the moment in the central Mediterranean sea, we are fearing the **worst case scenario**.

People are still inside **detention centres in Libya**. Any virus, not only COVID19 are dangerous in such conditions. People are trapped in the centres and cannot benefit from **health assistance**.

We are currently **stuck in the ports**. The situation is changing so much and so quickly that we cannot predict what is next. We hope to **sail back** as soon as possible.

Some NGOs will be in a very **difficult situation**, because of the **lack of funding** caused by the crisis. It is also a funding crisis for NGOs. It is not going to get any better soon probably.



Mr Etienne Piquet - Professor University of Neuchâtel, Vice-president of Commission fédérale des migrations à Berne :

COVID has **exacerbated political tendencies** that were already there, especially **border closing** and **nationalist** tendencies. I am not optimistic regarding the future political context.

We were really afraid of the **virus spreading in asylum centres in Switzerland**, but finally it did not happen, it is a good thing. This period was marked by **lower requests** of asylum seekers, it eased the **social distancing in asylum centres**.

We are not flooded by people trying to come to Europe. It would be **perfectly possible to manage** the situation. A clear decision must be made before implementing rescue actions.

Difficulties are huge: **fundamental tension** between helping **refugees** and helping your **national** population. It is a very difficult and rather new task. 100 years ago when we started to think about refugees, everything was new.

In short and medium term consequences will be a **rise in nationalist tendencies**. Only in the longer term, we may see positive developments