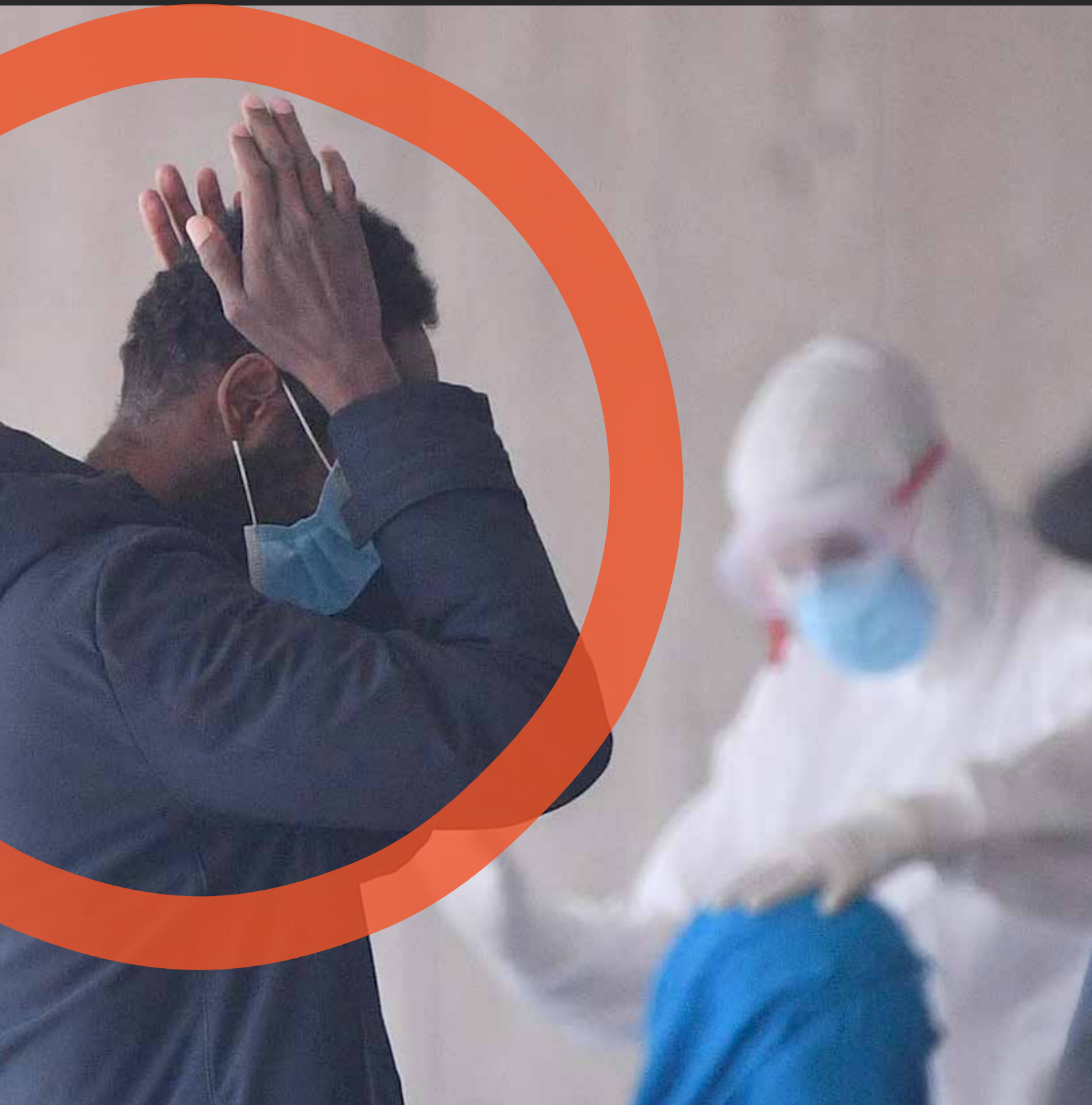


COVID19 and migration: perceptions from some EU member states.

By Mattia Giampaolo and Aurora Ianni

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT N. 8

2020 Nov



COVID19 and migration: perceptions from some eu member states¹.

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"This background document has been realized in the framework of the project, to spread data and information based on a scientific analysis. If you want to know more about this project and be part of its activities, please feel free to contact the leading partner Diaconia in Czech Republic (email: nozinova@diakoniespolu.cz), as well as Focsiv in Italy (email: f.novella@focsiv.it)."

¹This background paper has been realised in the framework of the "Faces of Migration" project (Migrant and SDGs, contract number CSO-LA/2018/401-798), co-financed by the European Union. The paper has been elaborated by Aurora Ianni and Mattia Giampaolo, researchers at the Centro Studi Politica Internazionale (CeSPI), with the coordination of Andrea Stocchiero (Focsiv). This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



1. THE IMPACT OF COVID19 ON MIGRATION

The outbreak of the Corona Virus at the beginning of February 2020 in Europe struck many sectors of the everyday life: from economy, to public services, human relations and freedom of movement. According to CeSPI², reported cases in the European Union were approximately 2.5 million at the end of September 2020, while the highest number of cases were to be found in the LAC region³ (around 8,8 million), North America (more than 7 million) and Asia (9.2 million).

The virus, beside the figures and economic consequences, has had a relevant impact on vulnerable communities, above all migrants. The consequences of the pandemic on migrants' communities, beside the impact on economic status, have been relevant in both countries of transit and arrival.

As for the firsts, the outbreak of Corona Virus in Libya, as an example, worsened by the ongoing civil war³, has pushed the international organizations, such as UNHCR, to leave the country and close their main services for some weeks. In addition, the negative effects of the civil war and the precarious public health services in the country have not helped deliver any effective measure to contain the spread of the Virus. As UNHCR has repeatedly reported, "Asylum-seekers and refugees held in detention because they do not have legal documentation,

are particularly vulnerable and exposed, often given poor sanitation facilities, limited health services and overcrowded conditions"⁵.

However, if on one hand the civil war in Libya has worsened the conditions of vulnerable individuals in the country, on the other it has led people to flee and thus raised fears in the governments of destination countries for a possible spread of the virus from and among migrants. During the lockdown period, Italy, as an example, has declared itself as a non-safety place -according to Hamburg declaration⁶ - due to the impossibility to guarantee the right health treatments for migrants⁷. The Alan Kurdi Boat remained blocked in the open sea for several days before receiving an authorization from the Italian authorities⁸.

However, Covid is playing a central role in limiting migrants' departures: according to IOM figures some 56,000 migrants arrived on the European shores in the first 8 months of 2020, while other 6,000 reached Europe by land, especially along the Balkan route. With the outbreak of Covid-19 figures are lower compared to 2019, with about 70,000 migrants who arrived in Europe⁹. In addition, migrants had to face the challenges related to the public sector closure during the lockdown, which slowed down their legal procedures.

² Osservatorio Covid19 CeSPI. Data for continent as of September, 22, 2020. https://www.cespi.it/sites/default/files/osservatori/allegati/gr_04_contagi_x_continente_-_22_settembre_2020.pdf

³ Latin America and the Caribbean.

⁴ To go in depth see: Mattia, Giampaolo, Libya and Coronavirus: What Are the Political and Health Risks?, ISPI, 09/04/2020, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/libya-and-coronavirus-what-are-political-and-health-risks-25650>.

⁵ Peter, Kenny, Libya's 10 COVID-19 cases, 1 death worries UNHCR, Anadolu Agency, 03/04/2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/libyas-10-covid-19-cases-1-death-worries-unhcr/1791392>.

⁶ Amburg Declaration has been drafted in 1979 and obliges a State, alerted by the authority of another State, to intervene in case of people in their waters and investigate on their identity and their status. <https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/argomenti/ifts/amburg97.shtml>

⁷ Giacomo, Zandonini, Migranti, sono tornati a prendere il mare per scappare dalla Libia dilaniata dalla guerra civile e per il dilagare del virus, La Repubblica, 08/04/2020, <https://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/immigrazione/2020/04/08/news/immigrati-25347721/>

⁸ Jacqueline Faccanti, L'Italia blocca la nave di salvataggio tedesca Alan Kurdi per "irregolarità", Lettoquotidiano, 07/05/2020, <https://www.lettoquotidiano.it/palermo-alan-kurdi-bloccata-dalla-guardia-costiera/55108/>

⁹ Here the figures, source IOM: <https://migration.iom.int/europe?type=arrivals>

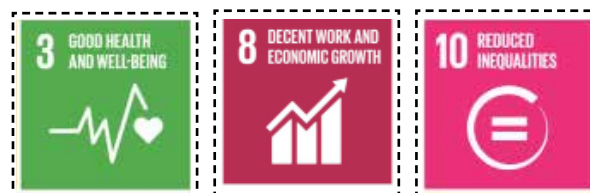
Many offices in Europe closed or suspended some services causing delays on the applications for work permits or asylum procedures. In addition, irregular migrants, whose residence permits expired, could not access health services. However, some European States, i.e. Portugal, adopted measures in order to provide migrants with health care and other services¹⁰. As for the working permits, Italy, due to the lack of manpower in agriculture, proposed a regularization of migrants in order to cover the vacancies after the government banned the travels of seasonal workers toward Italy¹¹. Despite these measures, problems and grievances remained. Many states in Europe, including those which attempted to maintain basic services, did not put enough on the table. Once again, the objective of the Sustainable Development Agenda -Agenda 2030- might be a good guideline for governments in this critical period.

Objective 3 -good health and well-being- is central in this context. Guaranteeing health care services in this extraordinary period is fundamental in order to ensure vulnerable individuals receive the attention they need. Many states do not grant basic health services to irregular migrants, that very often live in informal places, and whose even simplest needs are unmet. This is the case of agricultural workers in Italy -north and south alike- who live close to the camps where they work and lack even drinkable water, electricity and, more generally, social services¹². As to employment, objective 8 -decent work and economic growth- is also relevant in order to grant all citizens the social services they need. During the lockdown, governments applied measures to help dependent and autonomous workers in terms of subsidies. Those who were -are- not employed regularly did not access to those services and ended up living without any grant.

Many city councils in Italy have adopted specific policies for such situations; however, given their non-structural nature at governmental levels¹³, many migrants remained without any social support from the public institutions.



Ph. Global Goals for Sustainable Development



¹⁰ European Website on integration, COVID-19's impact on migrant communities, European Union, 24/06/2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/covid-19s-impact-on-migrant-communities>.

¹¹ To go in depth see our policy paper on Mastergang System in Italy. Aurora, Ianni; Mattia Giampaolo, THE MASTER GANG SYSTEM IN ITALY, Faces of Migration, Focsiv, November 2020.

¹² Giampaolo, Ianni, The Mastergang System in Italy, op.cit.

¹³ The city councils managed the funds from the central government; however, everyone chose how to distribute them.



Finally, objective 10 and particularly 10.7 -reduce inequality and secure safe migrant pathways -, might be the most important, because it acts at structural level and summarizes the previous one. What has emerged in this emergency period of the Corona Virus outbreak, has been the amplification of inequalities within the contemporary capitalist society. Disparities have increased between super-rich persons and subaltern classes -workers, migrants and, partly, the middle class.

The neoliberal and austerity policies in Europe, before and after the 2008 crisis, affected all the above-mentioned services, reducing the welfare states, and changed the job market. The deregulation of the market economy is having negative effects on the rights of workers of which migrants represent the weakest portion, especially during Covid19 pandemic.

UN published a report¹⁴ focused on the risks for migrants and their vulnerable situations -even before the sanitarian crisis- (Box 1). The report is based on three main issues linked to Covid19 and migration: health, socio-economic conditions and protection crisis.

Many refugees and migrants on the move during this period may be returned to their country of origin and may be exposed to persecution and violence. In addition, refugees and migrants in both transit and destination countries, may be denied access to health services, while they live in precarious socio-economic conditions (be

employed in low skilled jobs which very often do not respect norms to prevent infection, as an example).

In this sense, states should make their social and health services available for all, as the Sustainable Development Goals call to¹⁵.

Box 1. UN report, a brief overview of impact and response to Covid-19 crisis¹⁶

The disproportionate impact of the COVID19 pandemic on people on the move presents itself as three interlocking crises, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.

- Health crisis as people on the move find themselves exposed to the virus with limited tools to protect themselves.
- Socio-economic crisis impacting people on the move with precarious livelihoods, particularly those working in the informal economy with no or limited access to social protection measures.
- protection crisis as border closures and other movement restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19 have a severe impact on the rights of many people on the move who may find themselves trapped in deeply dangerous situations.

¹⁴ COVID-19 and People on the Move, UN Policy Brief, June 2020, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_people_on_the_move.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

In order to limit this impact, the report has identified 4 main responses:

- Only an inclusive public health and socio-economic response will help us suppress the virus, restart our economies and stay on track to reach the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The response to COVID-19 and protecting the human rights of people on the move are not mutually exclusive: COVID-19 has not stopped people from fleeing violence or persecution. Many countries have shown that travel restrictions and border control measures can and should be safely implemented in full respect of the rights of people on the move.
- Lifesaving humanitarian assistance, social services and learning solutions must remain accessible to people on the move. For all of us to be safe, diagnostics, treatment and vaccines must be universally accessible, without discrimination based on migration status.
- Facilitating the recognition and accreditation of their qualifications, exploring various models of regularization pathways for migrants in irregular situations and reducing transaction costs for remittances.



Ph. strettoWeb.com



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2. PERCEPTIONS FROM SOME EU MEMBER STATES

The Faces of Migration project has been analyzing the effects of COVID19 in the national situations of some EU Member States (project partners) focusing on its impact on borders management, labor needs, role of NGOs.

First of all, Covid19 has pushed governments to close national borders in order to avoid and limit people's movement as a way to prevent the spread of the virus. Within national scenarios, in some cases this measure led some political parties and the general public to discuss on the need of increasing border control also in the next future. To give some examples, in **Slovenia**, just before the Covid19 crisis, the new right wing government called to activate an article from the constitution which allows the army to protect borders since a big flow of illegal migration was expected.

The amendment did not pass in the Parliament and just a few immigrants arrived in the country during the two months of lockdown, much less than the average before the crisis. In **Slovakia** the nexus between migration and COVID-19 was rather low. To some extent it was reported that some Slovak extremists immediately used the crisis caused by COVID-19 to spread their pro-

paganda. They argued that COVID-19 is a consequence of mass immigration into the European Union. They also pointed out the situation in Greece and said that this is a consequence of an irresponsible EU policy and the lack of protection of EU borders. In development cooperation, out of the 10 mil. EUR total contribution of Slovakia (redirection) to Team Europe to fight COVID-19, 5 mil. EUR was reallocated for COVID-19 activities in the second phase of the project on Integrated border and migration management in Libya. Several other ongoing humanitarian and development projects and calls for proposals were adjusted to take COVID-19 into consideration.

Also in **Bulgaria**, borders were closed and the movement of people nearby border areas is severely restricted due to the Covid-19 crisis. Part of the PM's narrative claiming the government's success in handling the COVID-19 crisis points out the prevention of the migrant flow from Turkey into Bulgaria during the migrant crisis in early March. **Czech Republic** partner reported that no progress in positive approach towards migration issues is under discussion at the Czech governmental level.

¹¹ Mattia Giampaolo, How Italy has been marginalized in Libya, ECFR, Comments, 17/01/2020. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_how_italy_was_marginalised_in_libya

¹² Vladimiro, Polchi, Flussi migratori, 12 mesi di sbarchi in Italia, Repubblica, 07/01/2016, https://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/immigrazione/2016/01/07/news/flussi_migratori_12_mesi_di_sbarchi_in_europa-130787694/

¹³ Centro Astalli, I flussi migratori nel 2016, Centro Astalli, 23/01/2017, <https://centroastalli.it/flussi-migratori-2016/>.

¹⁴ Carlo Lania, «La politica estera in mano al Viminale, ecco i risultati», Il Manifesto, 19/07/2018, <https://ilmanifesto.it/la-politica-estera-in-mano-al-viminale-ecco-i-risultati/>.

¹⁵ Bernardo Monzani, Peace in Libya is no longer a priority for Italy, Agency for Peace building, 16/11/2017, <http://www.peaceagency.org/en/2017/11/16/peace-in-libya-2017/>

¹⁶ Nello, Scavo, L'inchiesta. Migranti, armi e petrolio, tre mesi di misteri su Bija, Avvenire, 29/12/2019, <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/migranti-armi-e-petrolio-tre-mesi-di-misteri-su-bija>

¹⁷ The deal takes its name from former Italian Interior Minister, Marco Minniti.

In **Greece**, when the pandemic broke out, thousands of asylum seekers, migrants and refugees were stranded in Greece's Reception and Identification Centers (RICs) and in the country's detention centres arising from overcrowding and unsafe conditions. Asylum seekers, amongst them many children, victims of torture, women who have suffered SGBV, people with disabilities and other vulnerable persons, who entered Greece with the aim of seeking protection were being detained for the purposes of return, as a result of the Emergency Legislative Decree (E.L.D) issued on 1 March 2020. The E.L.D. entered into force to stop migrant and refugee movement at the Evros northern land borders with Turkey before the pandemic measures were applied. Contrary to the Geneva Convention requirements, it had suspended the submission of asylum applications allowing for the immediate deportation of those entering the Greek territory to their countries of origin or Turkey. Since mid- March, the Greek Government has adopted a series of measures to respond to COVID-19. Public services were not fully operational with the Asylum Service being one of them. The smooth processing of asylum claims and the submission of the new ones was de facto suspended with many asylum seekers having to wait for an extended period of time. Other prevention measures such as the restriction of movement in RICs are in force until today. A large number of refugees and migrants was being held in detention centres that still keep springing up throughout Greece. This was happening without ensuring minimum standards of either hygiene or protection, even during this public health

emergency. In some cases, fines were imposed on asylum seekers for breaching the restriction of movement measures, while media coverage of COVID-19 cases in the asylum seekers' population was xenophobic (Ritsona and Kranidi). Homelessness increased with many vulnerable asylum seekers and recognized refugees being exposed to precarious living conditions during this public health emergency.

The pandemic has shown also an impact on **solidarity**. At the diplomatic level, Covid19 crisis has generally shown cooperation among countries and solidarity to those more affected by the virus. This feeling of renewed sense of community, however, has been, mostly directed to local populations rather than the migrant ones. Despite all of this, good practice examples of solidarity have been reported in some member states coming from different actors (government, NGOs, migrant communities). In



Ph. Vatican News - Un migrante sottoposto al tampone (ANSA)

¹⁸ The interview took place in London during Mattia Giampaolo's Pan-European Fellowship within ECFR project.

¹⁹ Aldo Liga, Playing with molecules, The Italian approach in Libya, Etudes de l'IFRI, April 2018, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/liga_playing_with_molecules_italian_approach_to_libya_2018.pdf

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Liga, op.cit.

²² Mark Micallef; Tuesday Reitano, The anti-human smuggling business and Libya's political end game, Institute for Security Studies, The Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime, North Africa Report, N°2, December 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Libya_ISS_Smuggling.pdf.

the **Chez Republic** there was one great success of the Vietnamese community which was among the first who started to support medical workers and police (by serving free refreshment to emergency medical teams and police). They also distributed home-made masks to hospitals, police and firemen gaining acknowledgement from the wide public (organizations and State Institutions).

In **Slovenia** government accepted 4 unaccompanied minors from Greece. In **Greece**, during the pandemic, ActionAid, along with many organisations in Greece and abroad, increased its advocacy efforts in order to protect migrants and refugees and relocate them from the Greek islands to safer destinations in Greece and abroad. European countries such as Luxembourg reacted positively to the constant requests for relocating UAC with the firsts transfers being implemented in April. Other countries have also declared their intention to relocate UAC but transfers have not been completed yet. NGOs continued the provision of services during the lockdown facing difficulties in accessing refugee and migrant populations.

Bulgaria has joined the coalition of EU member states interested in taking in and providing shelter to unaccompanied migrant children currently located on the Greek islands but so far it is still unclear when and how many children will be accepted. Besides the fact that local populations and governments right now are more focused on dealing with Covid-19 at national and local level, trying to ensure medical equipment for the people on the frontline. At the same time some of the far-right populists used the mass psychosis caused by the Coronavirus as a chance to justify some restricting measures taken

under the state of emergency that can affect the human rights of some minority groups.

With regard to the **labor needs**, Covid19 has put in crisis some economic sectors (agriculture, manufacturing) that employ many migrant workers. In many cases, such as **Italy**, this crisis demonstrated that some of our economic sectors depend on migrant workers. In **Slovenia** as an example, the Government with consular support managed to get few buses of migrant workers from Romania to come on the hops fields in Slovenia in the middle of the Corona crisis. This situation opened discussions on workers' income because it was almost not possible to get people to Slovenia to work in the fields for 3 Euros per hour. Also **Greece** and Albania, whose borders are closed because of the coronavirus outbreak, agreed to allow Albanian seasonal agriculture workers to get to Greece by mid-May. Greek farmers needed 50,000 fruit and vegetable pickers in May also for working the land. Usually those hands come from neighboring Albania and fellow EU members Bulgaria and Romania as well as from migrants already living in Greece.

Bulgaria has the opposite situation. Many Bulgarians are reported to be seasonal workers employed in agricultural, hospitality sector, etc. in other EU member States. Since the beginning of March more than 200.000 economic emigrants have returned to Bulgaria due to the Covid19 crisis. It has to be noted, however, that the dependency of national economies on migrant labour force is also a matter of sectors. Economic and social crisis has made some companies and sectors less dependent on the migrant labour force because of the economic downturn.

With respect to the **role of NGOs** during pandemic, the majority of Project partners reported that no instrumental and negative use on communication have been made with regard to the role of civil society organizations working in the field of migration. **Slovenia** reported that Covid19 has taken most of the time and place on the media, so civil society was barely heard, using mainly social media tools to present views and statements.

In **Slovakia** as well, NGOs are currently working both within the country and abroad (distributing food packages, providing equipment, working with excluded communities, raising awareness). Nevertheless, the pandemic has reduced, in some cases, the attention to humanitarian and development cooperation since political attention is focused primarily on domestic contexts. In the case of **Bulgaria**, as an example, attention to development policy and cooperation was not reduced completely. The Bulgarian government decided to give additional financing to the Bulgaria's UNESCO Trust Fund for an ODA funded project. Bulgaria redirects its ODA in the Western Balkans to support projects and activities dealing with COVID-19 consequences.

In the case of Greece, however, some governmental provisions taken during the pandemic period, negatively affected the work of the NGOs in the country.

There were rumors about a Ministerial Decision that would regulate the operations of INGOs and local NGOs that work with refugees and migrants that were implemented in March.

The Ministry of Migration and Asylum decided to establish a new registry for all the civil society organizations¹⁷ that work in the country with the aim of "taking control" and coordinating the provision of services to refugees and migrants. However, the establishment of the registry could be a positive step, as the hostile narrative towards NGOs and the disproportionate registration burden that was placed on the smallest organizations, triggered the public discourse on the shrinking of civic space in Greece.

The practical barriers and the challenges that emerged due to the COVID -19 pandemic for the operations of NGOs in Greece seem to increase as a result of government measures such as the aforementioned Ministerial Decision and a new law that regulates street demonstrations.

In addition, according to the Greek Government, demonstrations often cause disruptions to the public and affect commerce. The permission of the authorities needs to be asked and provided for after assessing that a demonstration is not a threat to public safety and public order.

The post- COVID -19 period will be challenging for NGOs as many temporary restrictions to their operations and to the human rights of people they support may become permanent.

¹⁷ In the months that followed the Ministerial Decision, the Expert Council on NGO Law of the Council of Europe provided a detailed opinion on the compatibility with the European standards of the recent and planned amendments to the Greek legislation on NGO registration. It concluded that the changes raised both procedural and substantial amendments with respect to freedom of association and the protection of civil society space and recommended the Greek Government to revise the requirements after consulting with the civil society in Greece so that the amendments are brought into line with European standards. So far, the registration process runs without any changes and no invitation consultation has been addressed to the NGOs in the country.

3. ITALIAN GOVERNMENTAL DEVELOPMENTS ON MIGRATION DURING COVID19

The outbreak of Covid-19 in Italy has opened many windows of debate about migration and the virus: from the role of NGOs to the lack of manpower in the sector of agriculture and care, and the instrumentalization of fears of contagion through migrants in the political debate.

As for the role of the NGOs, -especially those who became famous for their rescue and search activities in the Mediterranean Sea- they have been long criticized by the parliamentarian parties -right wing parties and more smoothly the democratic forces¹⁸ - for easing migrants to reach Italian shores and being a push factor for migration¹⁹.

Although this position, NGOs have been crucial to support the Italian health system in facing the virus. Especially in northern Italy, where Covid19 had a deeper impact, they helped hospitals providing volunteers, staff-doctors and nurse alike- and setting up field hospitals in some cities²⁰. From MSF to Emergency and Action Aid, all of them offered health support, information services and food assistance to vulnerable individuals -Italians and migrants alike-. Many small migrant associations collected funds to support civil protection and the red cross, showing that immigrants are an active and positive player in emergency situations and for social cohesion.

As for the lack of agricultural workers, given the impossibility to open new seasonal flows, the agricultural enterprises strongly need manpower. Despite the little attention paid in the last few years by the Italian government to the agricultural workers, the law on regularization of migrants enacted during the Covid emergency may represent a turning point for thousands of workers but, as many outlined²¹, it is only a temporary measure that will expire at the end of the agricultural season.

On May 19, 2020, the Parliament approved Decree law n.34 which includes in art. 103 a proposal of the Ministry of Agriculture. Art 103 enables Italian employers or nationals of a EU Member State, or foreign employers in possession of the residence permit, to sign an employment contract with foreign citizens already living on the national territory or to declare the existence of an irregular employment relationship still ongoing with Italian citizens or foreign nationals.

Most important have been the reactions of the labor organization -especially those led by migrants- that criticized the law to be an opportunity only to safeguard the interests of the enterprises without taking into account the lives of migrants in Italy and ensuring them good working conditions. In this sense, the law has been depicted as being useless to grant rights to workers and, particularly, to migrant workers.

¹⁸ Here how Lega Party face the debate: <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/piano-salvini-contro-ong-italiane-togliere-navi-i-soccorsi-1721224.html>, here how Democratic Party (center-left wing) treat the topic: <https://www.ilpost.it/2019/10/29/immigrazione-nuovo-governo/>

¹⁹ These accusations have been deconstructed by Matteo Villa in his paper on migration and the role of the NGOs in the Mediterranean. Matteo, Villa, Sea Rescue NGOs: a Pull Factor of Irregular Migration?, ISPI, Issue 2019/22, https://immigrazione.it/docs/2019/EUI_PullFactorIrregularMigration.pdf

²⁰ Here to go in depth: Davide, Falcioni, Così le Ong stanno aiutando l'Italia a combattere l'epidemia di Coronavirus, Fanpage, 20/03/2020, <https://www.fanpage.it/attualita/coronavirus-cosi-le-ong-stanno-aiutando-litalia-a-combattere-lepidemia/>

²¹ Arturo Raffaele Covella, Allo studio un'ipotesi di regolarizzazione dei migranti tra polemiche e problemi normativi, Diritto Civile e Commerciale, Diritto.it, 11/05/2020, in <https://www.diritto.it/allo-studio-unipotesi-di-regolarizzazione-dei-migranti-tra-polemiche-e-problemi-normativi/>.

In order to be 'regularized' the enterprises should pay 500 euro to legalize their past irregularities, but this amount, according to some witnesses, has been paid by the migrants that very often refused to do so and thus remained irregular²². This prevented many migrants from applying for the regularization -since the enforcement of the Law, only 123,000 requests mainly from care-workers (87%) and only 13% from workers in the agricultural sector have been presented²³.

Finally, in July and August 2020, right wing political parties began to blame migrants of being vehicles of Covid contagion. They asked Italian authorities to close reception centers that could be major virus' outbreaks, to close ports and impose naval blocks to push migrants back. This is a clear instrumentalization of Covid used to regain popular consensus, after the good management of the emergency reinforced the government majority.

Analysis has showed that migrants are not the main culprit of contagion²⁴, while government is implementing security measures to control the arrivals with health devices and quarantine.



Ph. Popoffquotidiano.it



Ph. Jdidi Wassim/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images

²² Karima, Moual, Sanatoria a ostacoli per i migranti "Costretti a pagare o restiamo invisibili", La Repubblica, 09/06/2020, https://rep.repubblica.it/pwa/generale/2020/06/09/news/lavoratori_irregolari_la_sanatoria_che_non_funziona-258830184/

²³ Data are from Mol and are updated to 16 July, here the figures: https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2020-07/dlci_-_analisi_dati_emersione_15072020.pdf

²⁴ <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/fact-checking-migrazioni-e-covid-19-27058>

4. THE EU, COVID19 AND MIGRATION

Covid19 represents an event of historic proportion whose consequences are far-reaching. All member states have been dealing with the economic drawbacks due to Covid19 at national level and some of them, such as Italy, asked for a massive intervention of the EU for the recovery. To this regard, on 21 July, European Union leaders agreed on an articulated package of EUR 1 824,3 billion which combines the EUR 1 074,3 billion of the multiannual financial framework (MFF) with an exceptional recovery effort (Next Generation EU) of EUR 750 billion²⁵ in order to spur recovery and re-launch national economies.

A step forward has been taken for the recovery of European economy, but a step forward is needed in relation to the improvement of migration policies. During the pandemic, as reported above, Member States have been mostly focused on domestic issues related to health and emergency measures, and the opening of a new debate on how to facilitate the development of new policies on migration at European level was not at the top of National Agendas.

The outbreak of Corona Virus “has initially reinforced a trend towards national solutions and limited EU-wide coordination”²⁶, risking to undermine the European policy on migration and to leave in the hands of the single Member States decisions on it. This may have consequences on migrant’s security, especially regarding deaths in Mediterranean Sea.

In order to develop a common framework on migration, the European Commission launched consultations on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. As outlined in the summary of the initiative, the “New Pact on Migration and Asylum aims to create a comprehensive, sustainable and crisis-proof framework for managing asylum and migration in the EU. It will cover the whole migration route – from origin and transit countries to the receiving countries in the EU”²⁷.

The new pact on migration is needed also considering the effects of the health and social crisis generated by Covid-19. The vulnerable status of irregular migrants, that are often out from the sanitarian systems in the country of arrival, as well as their social and economic inclusion, need to be improved. In this sense, member States in Europe should invest further resources on policies aiming to both promote safer pathways for migration (as humanitarian corridors and resettlements but also labor migration), and to fully integrate migrant communities in destination countries avoiding their social exclusion.



Ph. lusinitinere.it

²⁵ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/policies/eu-recovery-plan/>

²⁶ Rene, Wildangel, Haven and hell: How the EU should protect refugees during the covid-19 crisis, ECFR, Comments, 24/04/2020, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_haven_and_hell_how_the_eu_should_protect_refugees_during_the_cov

²⁷ See <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12544-New-Pact-on-Migration-and-Asylum>

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This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of Focsiv and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.

This document is part of the SDGs and Migration – Multipliers project and Journalists Addressing Decision Makers and Citizens project funded by the European Union's Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) programme