



OHCHR, IOM, UNHCR and WHO joint press release: the rights and health of refugees, migrants and stateless must be protected in COVID-19 response

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In the face of the COVID-19 crisis, we are all vulnerable. The virus has shown that it does not discriminate - but many refugees, those forcibly displaced, the stateless and migrants are at heightened risk.

Three-quarters of the world's refugees and many migrants are hosted in developing regions where health systems are already overwhelmed and under-capacitated. Many live in overcrowded camps, settlements, makeshift shelters or reception centers, where they lack adequate access to health services, clean water and sanitation.

The situation for refugees and migrants held in formal and informal places of detention, in cramped and unsanitary conditions, is particularly worrying. Considering the lethal consequences a COVID-19 outbreak would have, they should be released without delay. Migrant children and their families and those detained without a sufficient legal basis should be immediately released.

This disease can be controlled only if there is an inclusive approach which protects every individual's rights to life and health. Migrants and refugees are disproportionately vulnerable to exclusion, stigma and discrimination, particularly when undocumented. To avert a catastrophe, governments must do all they can to protect the rights and the health of everyone. Protecting the rights and the health of all people will in fact help control the spread of the virus.

It is vital that everyone, including all migrants and refugees, are ensured equal access to health services and are effectively included in national responses to COVID-19, including prevention, testing and treatment. Inclusion will help not only to protect the rights of refugees and migrants, but will also serve to protect public health and stem the global spread of COVID-19. While many nations protect and host refugee and migrant populations, they are often not equipped to respond to crises such as Covid-19. To ensure refugees and migrants have adequate access to national health services, States may need additional financial support. This is where the world's financial institutions can play a leading role in making funds available.

While countries are closing their borders and limiting cross-border movements, there are ways to manage border restrictions in a manner which respects international human rights and refugee protection standards, including the principle of non-refoulement, through quarantine and health checks.

More than ever, as COVID-19 poses a global threat to our collective humanity, our primary focus should be on the preservation of life, regardless of status. This crisis demands a coherent, effective international approach that leaves no-one behind. At this crucial moment we all need to rally around a common objective, fighting this deadly virus. Many refugees, displaced, stateless people and migrants have skills and resources that can also be part of the solution.

We cannot allow fear or intolerance to undermine rights or compromise the effectiveness of responses to the global pandemic. We are all in this together. We can only defeat this virus when each and every one of us is protected.

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