

**Public responses to irregular migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic: health and social initiatives of national and local authorities in Europe**

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## Objectives of the report

- Snapshot of how the pandemic impacted migrants with irregular status in European cities
- Explore how local authorities responded to the crisis
- Foster dialogue and knowledge-exchange on the best practices to implement in a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic
- Reflect on longer-term solutions for policy on how to best govern the presence of migrants with irregular status

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## Irregular migrants' vulnerabilities (1/3)

### ➤ Before COVID

=> No consensus but a general trend of exclusionary policies

- Criminalization & marginalization
- Access to bare minimum (e.g. emergency health care)
- Some exceptions: access to healthcare for communicable diseases

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## Irregular migrants' vulnerabilities (2/3)

### ➤ During COVID: Heightened intersecting vulnerabilities

- Health concerns: more exposed to COVID, less access to care
- Economic concerns: relied on informal economy and worked in sector particularly impacted, leading to fall into extreme poverty.
- Risk of exploitation: extreme poverty has increased the risk of being exploited
- Limited social distancing due to the nature of their work and/or their living conditions

=> Less overall support, despite greater needs, leading to increased vulnerability; New awareness of need to include irregular migrants (essential workers)

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## Irregular migrants' vulnerabilities (3/3)

### ➤ After COVID?

- Limited data on long-term consequences
- Impact of lasting crisis
- Lessons for the future

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## National Policy Responses (1/2)

### ➤ Access to Healthcare

- Most EU countries granted access to treatment – generally for free
- Some ensured no data be shared with immigration authorities
- Varying access to vaccination programs

### ➤ Regularization and extension of residence permits

- Some EU countries have offered temporary regularization
- Due to travel restrictions, most EU countries extended temporary residence permits

### ➤ Release from detention and suspension of returns

- Most countries halted returns
- With no prospect of return, some countries released those in detention centres.

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## National Policy Responses (2/2)

- Social protection measures and unemployment support
    - A few countries increased entitlement to social services
    - One offered pandemic unemployment pay
  - Access to shelter and food
    - Some programs were created to provide food and other basic necessities and access to emergency shelter
  - Access to information in native language
    - Most offered COVID-19 related information in native languages
- ⇒ Temporary measures, that may lead to rethink restrictive national policies?

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## City Responses (1/3)

Initiatives include:

- Access to healthcare
  - Provide free consultations at newly created medical centres;
  - Set aside funds to cover for uninsured irregular migrants hospitalized
  - Collect and distribute medicine
- Assistance to regularizations
  - Limited scope of activity
  - Exception: fast-track procedure for the issuance or extension of work and residence permits and lobbying governments to approve the regularizations of migrants in essential sectors.

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## City Responses (2/3)

- Providing food, shelter and housing for self-isolation
  - Increased number of shelter available: hotel rooms, new facilities or repurposed municipal buildings (e.g. sport halls)
  - Intensified food provision: new locations, food vouchers.
- Financial support
  - New practice, due to severity of the economic fallout and crisis.
  - Allocation of funds to NGOs supporting irregular migrants; extension of existing aid programs (e.g. provision of basic income)
- Providing information in native language
  - Creation of drop-in session, leaflets, posters or partnerships, with community leaders or NGOs to circulate information
  - Creation of websites, WhatsApp groups, or broadcast in local radio

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## City Responses (3/3)

- Access to digital services
  - Forced online shift, and need for updated information
  - Partnership with NGOs to provide access to internet; phone credit vouchers; free access to a phone or a computer and communication Apps in guest centres
- Advocacy towards national government
  - The pandemic represents an opportunity for cities to advocate for irregular migrants' right for the mid to long-term.
  - Campaigns to include irregular migrants in relief measures; to widen access to public assistance; to call for their regularization.

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## Conclusion

- The trend of exclusionary policies was replaced by inclusive policies and practices during the pandemic in the following sectors:
  - Public health
  - Public order
  - National immigration system
  - Economic sector
- Awareness of the need to include irregular migrants in policy responses.
- Increased role of local authorities in this process, with cities becoming more confident in their support of irregular migrants
- Question: will this trend continue after the pandemic?

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## Thank you

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