

# COVID-19 puts asylum seekers at a higher risk as conditions in camps deteriorate and asylum procedures are suspended



## **Situation at the border**

In the fight against the COVID-19 disease, all EU countries put in place some border or travel restrictions. NGOs had to suspend their search & rescue operations at sea to comply with emergency legislation. Italy, Malta and Cyprus closed their ports for most boats. There were also media reports of Cypriot authorities pushing back a boat with 175 Syrians, including 69 children.

The duty of search and rescue and to allow disembarkation in a place of safety are imperatives of international law.

## **Asylum procedure and residence permits**

Travel bans and other emergency measures led to a 43 % decline in asylum applications in March 2020. Due to the pandemic, many countries suspended

asylum procedures. In Sweden, asylum application facilities remained open with measures taken to ensure health and safety. Denmark reintroduced the resettlement of refugees.

Several countries (Croatia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, North Macedonia and Poland) allowed certain third-country nationals whose residence permit expired to remain legally in the country until the end of the pandemic.

### **Situation in reception centres**

Many organisations raised alarm about the deplorable conditions in reception centres, for example in Cyprus, Greece, Italy or Malta and in the informal camps in France, stressing that they make preventing the infection impossible. Lack of information on the COVID-19 measures in different languages has been a problem across the EU as well.

For countries receiving high numbers of arrivals, relocation of refugees can be an important measure of European solidarity.

### **Child protection**

Many children continued living in precarious and overcrowded conditions, making it difficult to properly implement COVID-19 measures.

### **Detention and return**

Inadequate living conditions and overcrowding in detention and return centres raised serious concerns. In Italy, detainees started a hunger strike to protest against the risk of the virus spreading in the centre. In Belgium, some centres started releasing detainees, simply leaving them with no assistance and nowhere to go.

In addition, numerous countries suspended Dublin transfers.

### **Legal developments**

The Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) rules that Poland, Hungary and Czechia are breaking EU law by refusing to comply with the temporary relocation mechanism which aims to distribute refugees across the EU countries based on a quota system.

### **Background:**

This latest migration quarterly bulletin covers the period between 1 January and 31 March 2020. Moreover, the first section of the report covers developments relating to the COVID-19 outbreak up to 30 April 2020.

FRA has been regularly collecting data on migration since September 2015.

Access [previous migration quarterly reports >>](#)

### **Evaluation of Quarterly Bulletin[s] on migration 2020**

To help us improve our work, we are very keen to hear your feedback about our

migration reports. We would be grateful if you could complete a short [survey](#). It should not take more than 5 minutes to answer the 10 questions. Participation is anonymous and voluntary; your views are very important to us.

We would appreciate your response by 19 June 2020.