

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 AND MIXED MIGRATION IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION: ‘CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS’

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The peculiar and lingering pandemic is having a devastating impact on that part of the vulnerable and marginalized section of the population which is already in grave misery – the undocumented migrants. Migration is directly proportional to irregular movement, which has been restricted due to COVID-19. Mixed migration is in itself a very complex issue, and it refers to all those who are crossing borders but are not recognized by the International law as refugees which further aggravate their plight and vulnerability. Few nations which earlier had open border policies, are now being forced to shut their doors to the migrants and ramp up vigilance in the wake of the pandemic.

The worldwide lockdown, travel restrictions, inability to maintain social distancing, lack of proper access to healthcare facilities, xenophobia, limited knowledge and awareness of the rules and regulations; all these are taking a toll on the overall well-being of the migrants. In 2018 for instance, Turkey experienced a substantial increase of irregular arrivals (those lacking legal documentation) and Afghan nationals constituted the largest group of new irregular arrivals. They typically belong to the most oppressed and exploited section of the population. Migrant workers directly affected by the pandemic, suffer from psychological problems like post traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, panic disorders and a sense of impending doom. Countries need to come up with both short term as well as long term policies to extend all possible assistance to both internal and international migrants. Lack of proper access to healthcare in times of such emergency especially for the migrants due to unavailability of proper documents, is no less than denial of basic human rights. This pandemic must act as a wake-up call to governments about the need for social protection measures to ensure that migrants get basic services like food, education, shelter and security.