**Press release from Protect March 2020**

**Christine M. Jacobsen is a professor of Social Anthropology and Director of the Centre for Women’s and Gender Research at the University of Bergen, Norway. For many years, she has conducted fieldwork among asylum seekers and undocumented migrants in Marseilles, France. She is now observing how the ongoing corona pandemic is affecting their situation.**

Many asylum seekers and undocumented migrants are not able to practice preventive measures such as staying at home, physical distancing, and good hygiene practices simply because they don’t have a home to isolate themselves in. Current reception policies and practices have left large numbers of people without housing, who now live in informal camps, squats, overcrowded and run-down apartments or on the street. NGOs are working to spread awareness about Corona and preventive measures in different languages, but even if the information reaches them, it may be virtually impossible for people to implement these measures under such living conditions.

The current situation reveals how precarious the situation of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants is, given that they are not included in the general health and welfare arrangements that citizens profit from. Most of the NGO-run services that provide much needed health care, housing, food and clothing services to this group are shutting down, since they lack necessary protection gear for both themselves and the recipients and cannot function under the regulations that are now implemented to prevent contagion.

Asylum seekers who already have waited weeks or months to register their application now experience cancelled appointments as public offices and support services are shutting down. This results in a prolonged waiting period during which protection from deportation is weak and access to welfare and health care, as well as to a basic economic income, extremely limited. The anxiety many asylum seekers experience during this waiting time is exacerbated as the emergency-situation leads to further suspension, postponement and uncertainty about the duration and outcome of the procedure.

Complex legal questions also arise as a result of the confinement rules. Are migrants who are obligated to report to the police while awaiting deportation, but are not allowed to walk in public due to corona restrictions, still required to go down to the police station, thus breaking government restrictions? Temporary residence permits have been extended for three months, but deadlines for asylum procedures are upheld even if the lock down makes it very difficult for people to provide the necessary documents or seek legal help. Will the inability to meet deadlines negatively impact people’s chances of obtaining international protection?

**About Protect**

[Protect The Right to International Protection](http://protect-project.eu/) is an international, Horizon2020-funded research project led by Professor Hakan G. Sicakkan at the University of Bergen, Norway. The project studies international frameworks for refugee protection and consists of several experts in international law, and the refugee, - asylum, - and migration field.

**Contact our experts**

* [Theofanis Exadaktylos:](https://www.surrey.ac.uk/people/theofanis-exadaktylos) How are refugees in Greece affected by the pandemic?
* [Christine Jacbosen](https://www.uib.no/personer/Christine.M..Jacobsen): The consequences for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in France
* [Idil Atak:](https://www.ryerson.ca/criminology/about-us/faculty-staff/faculty/atak-idil/) How is the pandemic affecting refugees and migrants on the US and Canadian border?
* Jo Vearey: How is the South African lockdown affecting migrants in SA?
* [Elspeth Guild](https://www.qmul.ac.uk/law/staff/guild.html): Are Europe’s shut borders in conflict with UN’s refugee convention?
* [Frank Caestecker](https://biblio.ugent.be/person/801002037966): Pandemics and increased border control throughout history