**How is the corona pandemic affecting the lives and rights of refugees in Italy and Greece? Insights from two researchers**

**Francesca Longo** is Professor of Political Science and International Relations. She is Jean Monnet Professor of European Union Public Policies and PhD doctor in International Relation. Her research interests are focused on the EU migration Policy, EU policy against organised crime and the security policy of the EU. Longo’s comments on the Italian situation are as follows:

Italy is currently in its third week of total lockdown. Borders’ closure and limitations to personal movements have been in effect since March 8 and will last until at least April 13. These exceptional circumstances strongly impact vulnerable and marginalized populations, such as asylum seekers, refugees and international protection seekers.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 has resulted in reinforcement of xenophobic attitudes, particularly against Asian populations, pushing the notion that foreign migrants are some way involved in the spread of the virus. Right-wing parties have criticized the decision of the Italian Government to authorize two migrant rescue ships, thereby suggesting that they might contribute to the contagion. This consolidates the Italian decision to approach the emergency with isolationism and border-closures, turning COVID-19 into an external threat.

Since the outbreak, all economic activities have been suspended. Migrants and asylum seekers engaged in illegal work have therefore lost their work and are at the same time excluded from any form of public support.

The COVID-19 also raises concern for the health condition of migrants and refugees hosted in the Reception and Identification Centres (CIE). The actual five camps are overpopulated, and it is very difficult for hosts and personnel to respect the social distance, to stay apart and to comply with the measures of personal hygiene required by the actual situation. These overcrowded and unsanitary conditions represent a risk for the health of people living and working in these structures.

**Theofanis Exadaktylos** is Senior Lecturer in European politics at the University of Surrey in the UK. He has been researching the Greek financial crisis and the aftermath of austerity politics on Greece for many years alongside studying the implementation of public policy reforms in the country. He says the following about the situation in Greece:

According to medical reports released last week, there are currently 8 confirmed cases and one death on the island of Lesvos. The island is already quite stretched out in terms of the medical facilities available and the medical personnel and a further outbreak is likely to bring down any capacity of the island to cope. The refugee camps, especially the one in Moira, are already in a bad state with limited sanitary facilities and low accommodation standards.

The restrictions on movement currently imposed on the whole of the country are quite severe but the flow of new refugees has not stopped. The government has requested European support to accelerate the transfer of refugees to the mainland where, understandably, medical facilities are better equipped and, in this way, reduce the strain on the camps on the islands. An outbreak of infections in a camp will be devastating.

**Contact our experts:**

[Protect the Right to International Protection](http://protect-project.eu) is an international EU-financed 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.

* [Theofanis Exadaktylos:](https://www.surrey.ac.uk/people/theofanis-exadaktylos) How is the pandemic affecting refugees in refugee camps in Greece?
* Francesca Longo: How is Corona pandemic affecting migrants and refugees in Italy?
* [Christine Jacbosen](https://www.uib.no/personer/Christine.M..Jacobsen): How is Corona is affecting refugees and migrants 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: The South African response to the Corona pandemic
* [Siri Gloppen:](https://www.uib.no/personer/Siri.Gloppen) How is the Corona pandemic threatening refugees’ and asylum seekers’ human rights?
* [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