

**Draft Remarks by Vice-President Margareta Cederfelt
Acting Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration**

Bureau Meeting

(Copenhagen, Monday, 27 April 2020)

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Dear President

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

The COVID-19 pandemic caught us all off guard and even countries with the advanced health care systems are struggling to cope and to save as many lives as possible.

We have the opportunity to prevent an even greater **humanitarian catastrophe** by acting now to mitigate the spread of the pandemic amongst refugee and migrant communities in the OSCE region and beyond.

At the beginning of this month, I joined my voice to that of other international actors, **urging action** so that refugee camps and immigration detention centres do not become death traps.

These communities are extremely vulnerable to the spread of the coronavirus due to high population density, limited access to clean water, sanitation and health services, as well as lack of access to reliable information due to mistrust of authorities and language barriers.

The situation is particularly concerning in the **Greek Aegean island of Lesbos** but also in overcrowded facilities and informal camps in the **Western Balkans, Calais** and elsewhere.

Let us also not forget the internally displaced persons in **Syria** who cannot rely on a broken health care system in the event of an outbreak.

Turkey, which is already hosting 3.6 million Syrians, has implemented measures, in cooperation with UNHCR and other international organizations, to prevent the outbreak of COVID-19 in refugee camps as well as in removal centres.

The current pandemic has underlined the need for an equitable mechanism for sharing responsibility for asylum seekers between EU Member States. I hope that the new **Migration and Asylum Pact** which the European Commission is preparing will finally fill this gap.

Upcoming activities

As with the rest of the activities of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration has had to postpone its planned field visits.

We can nevertheless make use of technology to pursue dialogue on addressing common challenges in the field of migration.

On 6 May, the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration will meet virtually to review the impact of the pandemic on migrant and refugee communities in OSCE participating States and to discuss how we can continue to implement the mandate of the Committee under current restrictions.

Former OSCE PA Vice-President Isabel Santos who, as you know, is now a Member of the European Parliament, will share her thoughts on current challenges and what parliamentarians can do to address them.

Together with the Secretariat, we will organize two or maybe three online discussions on the coronavirus pandemic and migration-related issues.

The first one on 26 May will focus on **how to protect refugees and migrants in camps and closed centres under lockdown**. We will also pay attention to vulnerable categories of migrants and gender sensitive policies.

Other topics of interest could include looking at the impact of **border closures** both from the human rights perspective – for example the **suspension of the right to seek asylum** – as well as the economic perspective, such as the consequences for **labour migration**.

To end on a positive note, we have fortunately seen examples of solidarity and 'good practice' which the Migration Committee will compile and disseminate.

Portugal, for example, has extended access to health care and other social services on a temporary basis to all those who have applied for permanent residence.

Luxembourg and Germany have taken in groups of unaccompanied minors from Greece.

A number of countries have also **fast tracked the accreditation of refugees** with medical qualifications in order to help tackle the pandemic.

Sweden has reduced the number of asylum seekers residing in shared accommodation, and migrants who belong to a vulnerable group, in particular those over 70 years old are given priority for the allocation of an apartment and support.

Concluding Remarks

The need for a **co-ordinated response** to the threat of COVID-19 is only too evident.

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers must be included in measures to combat the pandemic without being stigmatized or scapegoated.

Neglecting these populations will have serious implications not only for these communities but also for the general populations.

No one is protected until we are all protected.

Thank you for your attention.