

KUNO Covid-Café in cooperation with Oxfam Novib

Episode 5: How Covid affects migrants and refugees

A conversation with

Mary Monday (I CAN South Sudan in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Northern Uganda),
Iain Byrne (co-author of the 14 principles of protection for migrants and displaced people during Covid-19, Amnesty International) and
Evelien van Roemburg (Europe Migration Campaign Manager for Oxfam International).

Moderated by Peter Heintze (KUNO)

The Covid-19 crisis is posing a challenge to the world in unprecedented ways and it is influencing our daily lives. It changes also our work in the humanitarian sector. This is why KUNO in cooperation with partners, is introducing the KUNO Covid Café. Every week we organize an online café, to discuss the changing world with inspiring speakers and a wide audience.

In this episode we talked about the influence of the Covid crisis on migrants and refugees. We started of with a question to Evelien van Roemburg on what she hopes to take away from this session. Van Roemburg: 'It has been said that Covid is a 'leveller' because it doesn't make a difference between you and me, on who gets the virus. But we actually see that the crisis is exacerbating already existing vulnerabilities and inequalities so I hope to learn from the other speakers, how the Covid crisis impacted migrants and refugees in the contexts they're working in, but also hopefully some positive stories about how migrants and refugees have actually contributed to the fight against the pandemic.'

In her introduction **Evelien van Roemburg** described how Covid affects migrants and refugees in an European context, where arrivals of refugees have dropped with 25%. This probably means that these people are stuck somewhere on the road, for example in Libya where we all know the situation is really terrible. If however they did manage to get on a boat, they are stuck at sea because European cities have closed their ports. Within Europe's borders we also see difficulties for migrant workers who aren't able to travel between countries to see their families or to work. On top of that you have the health risks for people living in camps or in dire living conditions like many seasonal migrant workers do. And last but not least we see a rise in xenophobia, caused by the Covid-crisis.

Iain Byrne then talked about how many of the issues Evelien van Roemburg touched upon, can also be seen on a global scale. For example, the pushing back of migrants by Malaysia, the dire situations in camps in Jordan or the lack of access to health care for refugees in Venezuela. Amnesty's job is it to remind states that even during a pandemic, where there are a lot of other issues, human rights cannot be abolished and hold them accountable if that does happen. One of the opportunities that this crisis gives us, is that it gives an opportunity to amplify the voices of refugees and tell the stories on how they are stepping up and contributing. One of the initiatives working on this is the 14 principles of protection for migrants and displaced people, which you can find [here](#).

Mary Monday works for I CAN South Sudan, a refugee led organization in Bidibidi camp in Northern Uganda, working with children, to give them a voice and advocate for them. The Covid-19 regulations have however put a stop on all of I CAN's programmes, since social activities and gatherings are not allowed. This returns a lot of the children to traumatic experiences. Other effects of the Covid crisis can be seen in the increase of food prices in the camp and the collapse of businesses. Another thing is that there are quarantine centres placed in the camps for people that are being suspected of having Corona. However, in these quarantine centres everyone sleeps on very little space, and even if you have tested negative you still have to stay there for a certain amount of time, which could lead to even more infections in the end. Testing also takes a long time because the kit needs to be sent to Kampala, and it takes some days before it returns to the camp. The last thing Mary Monday talked about is the changing relationship with the people living around the camps, because the food prices are rising within the camps, people are looking for land to cultivate outside the camp, which then sometimes leads to conflict with the people living around.

The take-away from this discussion for Evelien van Roemburg was:

- With regards to irregular migrants, particularly in Europe, there has been a really big push from organizations for the regularization of irregular migrants. It started by international, national and local organizations, but now governments are also picking it up, working on new laws like in Spain and Portugal. I think this pandemic shows that migrants are part of our societies, and they contribute to these societies, which can lead to regularization.