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# COVID-19's impact on migration and migration studies. Exploring directions for a new migration research agenda

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**GRITIM-UPF Policy Briefs** disseminate research outcomes that can contribute to policy making and provide a common ground for debates across the institutional boundaries between research, policy making and advocacy.

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## 1) **Introduction: The focus of GRITIM-UPF engagement towards COVID-19** [Ricard Zapata-Barrero]

This document is a collective GRITIM-UPF output, motivated by its social and ethical engagement towards governance aspects of migration now directly affected by COVID-19. The main purpose has been to promote an internal reflection (April 2020) on the consequences of the current pandemic on both migration and migration studies, with the final purpose of exploring directions for a new migration research agenda.

The ultimate goal is to contribute to the already existing virtual debate that most of the prominent institutions and research centres working on migration are engaged in. We hope that it can stimulate future discussions, probably better focused, and, for sure in the coming social/policy relevant COVID-related debates that will certainly shape future migration agendas.

Before properly moving to the key-questions and issues let us first share, very briefly, what have been the main pillars criss-crossing most of the issues we have tried to cover.

1. First, if COVID-19 has literally broken our body system, it has the same destructive effect on the migratory systems and on the systems of inclusion, both at the global and the local levels. It not only affects all of the stages of the migratory process, but the multiplicity of actors intervening in each or several stages. It has broken the already scarce solidarity/social attention practices, leaving most migrants in an unknown situation.
2. Second, the effects of COVID-19 are clearly increasing migrants' situation of vulnerability (inequality) and even worsening them at levels that we are not able to predict at the present moment. At the same time, COVID-19 is strengthening the state-security narrative and the reactive governance practices towards migration, probably providing them with more legitimacy towards citizens, which is also difficult to predict. This makes the implementation of policies, that only weeks ago seemed unthinkable, possible. But what matters more is the fact that this combination of effects can be one of the coming determinants of future scenarios.
3. Third, from a research point of view, we all have the impression that we are producing arguments a little blindly. This is because we really do not have direct valid data nor reliable information on what is really currently happening and what the future scenarios may be. Since the issue of migration has categorically all but disappeared from most media, political agendas and public debates, as well as our own limited contact with our objects of study, the arguments presented here are necessarily the production of our own expertise and knowledge about immigration. Even if most of our members are in touch with migrants and social stakeholders and policymakers, this too has affected our task as "workers on migration issues". So, this is definitively a way to express our concern about the difficulties we are facing in producing knowledge and evidence-based arguments due to social distancing, since the majority of the information we have at hand is from selected leading institutions.

4. Fourth, we need to avoid Eurocentrism in dealing with the effects of COVID-19 on migration. West-centrism and Eurocentrism always problematize issues in terms of benefits/threats too their own vantage point, without having a holistic view of the topic being assessed. It can be perfectly considered as “our proper virus” in migration studies. We have discussed this view and tried to avoid this unidirectionality in carrying out the arguments, and even incorporated a necessary section on the situation of origin countries, and how COVID-19 may affect them.
5. Fifth, we are also aware that even though it is difficult to disentangle a diagnosis with future short-term scenarios, this difference will be the first criterion defining our focus. An additional criterion will be to separate issues related to international migratory processes from issues related to the inclusion of migrants within mainstream society. Roughly speaking, we also think that this distinction corresponds to the view of the impact of COVID-19 from a global and local perspective.
6. Lastly, the focus and content are necessarily dependent on GRITIM-UPF's own key features and area of interests: Mediterranean migration concerns, qualitative research in migration studies, bottom-up approaches in conducting research, and also surrounding arguments with social values.

## **2) The Global level: What is the impact on global migration flows and global and EU migration governance? [Ivan Martin and Lorenzo Gabrielli]**

Not a single one of the factors determining global migration flows have disappeared as a consequence of the pandemic: demographic dynamics, global and regional inequalities, lack of economic opportunities and development, conflict. These factors risk becoming even more acute in the short to medium term, particularly in Africa, as the economic crisis caused by the consequences of coronavirus include: the drastic reduction of the global flow of migrant remittances to countries of origin (the World Bank has already estimated a reduction of 20% of global remittances in 2020, and for Africa from \$48 billion in 2019 to \$37 billion in 2020), the fall of the prices of commodities, in particular oil, on which many of the biggest economies in the continent depend on (three of the six biggest economies in the African continent: Nigeria, Angola and Algeria), the sudden stop of tourism (on which the other three biggest economies are very dependent on: South Africa, Morocco and Egypt. In parallel, intra-African migration will become more restrained as African nation-states consolidate, reinforce the control of their territory and their borders and develop their own anti-immigration attitudes and policies in the wake of their own economic crisis (as shown by the backlashes against immigrants in South Africa, which even announced the construction of an anti-immigration wall in its border with Zimbabwe) and under the exogenous pressures of European countries and EU to buffer mobilities.

At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis has led to a sudden stop of regular and irregular migration flows as most of the global borders have been closed and the lockdown has made the circulation and the border crossings of irregular migrants on the move more difficult. States have proven their capacity to control borders and territories, the threat of the pandemic has given it the legitimacy and undisputable public support, for

public health reasons, to apply all the strength to prevent irregular migrants to access or to circulate in their territories. On the medium term, the impending economic crisis -with the loss of hundreds of millions of jobs worldwide- will reduce the demand for labour in destination countries and hence the openness to and attractiveness for migration. As a matter of fact, it is highly probable that a high number of regular migrants in Europe and other destination countries will fall into unemployment and sometimes they may also fall back into irregularity as a consequence of the crisis. The resolution of this tension between increased migration pressures and reduced migration demand in destination countries will depend highly on global migration governance arrangements.

Within the European Union, the COVID-19 crisis has on the one hand compounded some trends which were already ongoing, and it has dramatically changed priorities. Public attitudes towards migrants are at risk of becoming more xenophobic in the wake of the fear caused by coronavirus, and in turn legitimizing stricter police control of borders and territories. Right populist political parties were already on the rise, and risk to further press governments to adopt anti-immigration policies. This was already obvious right before the crisis, as the Presidents of the three main European Union institutions flew to Greece to support the Greek government in its brutal rejection of a limited flow (up to 15000) of Syrian and Afghan migrants trying to cross the border from Turkey (encouraged by Turkish authorities which wanted to press the European Union to align with their interests in Syria and renew the €6 billion 2016 agreement to support Turkish authorities in supporting the 4 million refugees they host in their territory). Greek authorities suspended the right to file asylum applications in their territory and there was no outburst of political protests or legal recourse of EU institutions against such a violation of international law.

The recent decision of Italy and Malta to declare itself “non-safe harbour” in order to prevent the disembarkation of boats by several NGOs operating in the Mediterranean and carrying on search and rescue activities seems to reinforce this trend.

The degradation of the health and overall humanitarian conditions of the 40.000 refugees confined in camps in the Greek islands during the weeks lapsed since the outbreak of coronavirus, the increasing animosity of local populations towards them, and all being out of the spotlight, as the European public opinion was focused on its own coronavirus-induced humanitarian crisis, is a strong indication of the new times. Restrictions to intra-European mobility, with the reestablishment of internal borders and the closure of external borders, puts a question mark on the principle of free movement of persons within Europe, with a direct impact as well on the mobility of migrants (who in a large majority arrive to Europe through legal entry).

At the same time, political priorities in Europe have shifted. Regarding the *Asylum and Migration Pact* the new European Commission was due to present this year, the priority now being to further border control -preventing the arrival of irregular migrants- and forced or voluntary return -reducing the presence of irregular migrants in Europe-, i.e. to security policy approaches, rather than regulating the modalities of intra-European solidarity and organizing the reception of asylum-seekers. At the same time, intra-European solidarity and the mobilization of all European resources to fight the impending

economic crisis has become the main priority of European institutions: since mid-March, they have mobilized more than €500 billion funds to support European States in fighting the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further they are discussing a massive mobilization of funds (equivalent to all the EU budget for seven years) in the coming years. In this context, EU institutions have not reacted with the same swiftness and determination to the impending humanitarian and economic crisis in Africa, limiting itself to the reallocation of some already approved aid funds to reorient them to the fight against the consequences of the COVID-19 and to support the alleviation of external debt of African countries. The *EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027* has to be approved in 2020, and the last stance of the negotiations between EU Member States implied only a marginal increase of funds for the Southern Mediterranean and the Sub-Saharan African countries, and it is not very probable that those funds will be increased under the new context.

In this context, the new *EU Comprehensive Strategy with Africa* launched by the European Commission on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, proposing five EU-Africa “Partnerships” and due to be discussed and approved this year will probably fall into the following lines:

- A freezing or a marginal increase of financial resources for development cooperation with Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan African countries;
- An increase of humanitarian aid, as the COVID-19 crisis is already causing health crisis in different African countries. This will require immediate mobilization of financial resources; in this sense, development cooperation will go back to basics, and the obsession for migration conditionality which we have seen in the last four years could give in, at least formally;
- This notwithstanding, a deepening of the migration externalization strategy pursued by European institutions in the last few years, and in particular since 2015. First and foremost with the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Turkey), then since 2016 with the Sahel countries, Nigeria and Ethiopia through the so-called Migration Partnership Framework. The new “Partnership on Mobility and Migration” and the renewal of the “EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa” created in late 2015 for five years as the pivot of EU cooperation strategy with the continent risks to consolidate this externalization strategy.
- Legal pathways of migration to Europe, which were under discussion with several countries of origin as a part of the negotiation of readmission agreements, seem out of the picture for the foreseeable future.

At a global migration governance level, as international organizations prepare the biannual reviews the implementation of the non-binding Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration adopted by 152 countries in December 2018, destination countries will have an additional reason to demand a more strict control of migration flows by countries of origin and of transit: the risks to public health of uncontrolled circulation of migrants on the move and their potential condition of vectors of disease.

### **3) Countries of Origin: How might COVID-19 affect the situation of countries of origin?** [Mohsen Manouchehri and Paolo Leotti]

Combating COVID-19 in developing countries and least developed countries, which are usually origin and transit of migration, is challenging due to their fewer resources and capacity to respond to the impacts and challenges that the pandemic provokes. As we have already outlined, predictions show economic growth would decline sharply in African countries in 2020 and this trend may be continuous in the next years. In particular, the reduction of monetary flows to African countries in terms of investments, tourism, remittances, incomes from commodities and foreign aid are expected to severely impact on the living conditions of large shares of the population. Besides, ongoing intertwined processes like, drought, climate change, food insecurity, terrorism etc. are added stressors to this situation.

Part of the solution should be to reinforce labour markets at regional and at Africa-wide level, however profound reforms are still needed and economic integration is still in an early stage. The most promising reform, the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) expected to come into force in July 2020 has been postponed at least until January 2021 and the African Union (AU) protocol on the Free Movement of Persons is still yet to be implemented. The lack of leadership of Regional actors and of the AU, has obliged African countries to adopt measures and to launch debates unilaterally, like those about debt relief from G20 countries, by Ethiopia's prime minister and Nobel peace prize winner Abiy Ahmed.

As a result, COVID-19 is likely to have a more long-lasting impact on migration patterns and migrants' decisions than the health system. In the near future, increasing shares of migratory movements are expected to be irregular. This is not only the consequence of some kind of restriction in border crossing introduced in more than half of African countries and the porous nature of many borders itself, but also to the increasing presence of forced migrants. The decision to migrate will be growingly due to the impact of unexpected factors and as a result, the lack of preparedness in terms of skills, information, contacts and opportunities. Therefore, migrants are more likely to be exposed to severe exploitation practices and trafficking, potentially increasing virus-transmission and reducing states' abilities to trace it.

A less challenging decision is the internal displacement from urban to rural areas, whereas adequate food stocks are available. It consists of a temporary strategy to ensure informal social safety nets thanks to the presence of extended family and networks. Some countries are trying to curb this trend (Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria) to reduce the spread of the pandemic, however if lockdown measures are protracted and if living conditions become unsustainable in cities, countries should consider specific programs by identifying safe areas, ensure basic services and monitor the displaced flows. For those who have already migrated or are in the migration routes, it is likely that they will face harder conditions, for instance, blocked in no-man's land between borders or more exposed to xenophobic attitudes, fear authorities, including healthcare professionals. Many try to remain invisible and have low knowledge of their health rights. These migrants are less likely to seek care if symptomatic. For those trying to reach Europe from Maghreb shores, after some weeks of lockdown, attempts have resumed probably

managed by the local smuggling industry, like before the COVID 19 pandemic. It is necessary to ensure their rights in a non-discriminatory manner.

In this matter, how to mitigate and adapt to the impact of COVID-19 in the countries of origin and transit of migration with a proactive and reactive perspective would be our next challenge. Through the resilience lens, a framework can be developed to address the needs and problems associated with immigration and migrants. Being resilient helps migrants cope with external shocks. Regarding the recent crisis, what solutions can be considered for the problems and needs that have arisen for them and what plans do we have for their future issues and needs, according to the dimensions of resilience: social (social linkages and networks and mechanism of self-help, raising awareness about COVID-19 threat), economic (diversifying livelihood during the crisis, facilitating remittances, insurance for supporting activities such as agriculture, diverse funding mechanisms for international and national organizations), governance (develop new relevant laws and regulations for this new situation, develop legal avenues, ensure the rights of asylum seekers and refugees during the crisis) and Physical (providing health service, protecting food security).

#### **4) The Local level: What is the impact on inclusion and integration systems [Zenia Hellgren and Camden Bowman]**

The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on socio-economically vulnerable groups in Europe, as many immigrants and Roma people, is rapidly becoming devastating in Catalonia, as elsewhere in Spain. These groups often already lived with scarce resources before the confinement started on the 15th of March of 2020. Since then, many of those who worked for instance in cafés or restaurants, in the tourism industry, in shops and with sales in market places (all of them sectors with an overrepresentation of migrant workers), have lost their jobs, in the best of cases only temporarily, but for many this situation has rapidly become indefinite. For people with small margins, the loss of one or two months' income leads to basic needs not being covered: inability to buy enough food, or to pay for water and electricity.

Currently, social organizations collaborating with GRITIM-UPF have had to change their daily routines and priorities and enter some of the most marginalized housing areas to deliver food packages to families in this situation of acute social exclusion. They declare that they find it particularly worrying that many families who used to make ends meet and enjoy a comparably high standard of living, are now rapidly falling into situations of poverty. Simultaneous to the economic precariousness and insecurity, people with poor housing standards are suffering more severely than others during the lock-down in multiple ways, also, and not insignificantly, at the psycho-social level. At present, it is impossible to foresee how the situation will be like for these groups of people in the coming months, or years, but we can assume that the social and economic crisis following the health crisis of COVID-19 will have lasting effects that are particularly strongly felt by groups like migrants and Roma. This will be an emerging research area with central importance for the integration processes of migrants.



Regarding the effects of the Covid-19 crisis on the local and national labor market, this has accentuated issues related to the digital divide to an unprecedented level. People whose livelihood depends on in-person contact are worried about survival.

Some professional groups that are worth specific mention in the context of COVID-19 are:

*Domestic workers.* This group of workers, of which large numbers of particularly female migrants from Latin America, Northern Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, is among those most hard hit by the confinement, as this has in practice made it impossible for them to continue conducting their work. As domestic workers are not covered by general labor rules, they are for instance not covered by unemployment benefits, and unless they have been able to reach an agreement with the (long-term, stable) employers to continue paying them during the confinement, they have no income at all at present. The possibility that some of the many currently unemployed workers in this sector could, for instance, cover needs in elderly care has not been contemplated for now.

*Day laborers and ambulating sales workers.* These sectors of the economy, often racialized and always associated with connotations of class and lack of access to formal work, depend heavily on the kind of face-to-face contact that is currently prohibited by law under the state of emergency. Online platforms offering connections between consumers and “freelancers” such as delivery riders, rideshare services, and hundreds of other services are likely a big part of the future of precarity. One of the key aspects of precarity is that it pushes risks and liabilities onto the workers, and we can expect that any new costs of doing business (Personal Protective Equipment, for example) will be put on the workers, and if they do not have it, they will pay the fines for being unable to afford compliance in the first place.

*Riders.* Riders, delivery drivers and other logistics employees occupy an in-between space, as they are instruments through which the online economy operates in the real world. There is no shortage of work here, and at first glance one could say it is a good time to be in the delivery business. Work as a delivery rider, however, is highly informalized. In most cases the polished applications and platforms give only the illusion of formality, and riders often face very precarious situations. The increase in demand on riders will be felt in their equipment and in their bodies, in the form of repeated stress injuries, fatigue and accidents, in addition to increased exposure to the virus, as is the case with many low-cost, precarious professions.

*Agriculture.* This sector indeed reflects how dependent a country like Spain is on migrant labor in order to meet the demand for (cheap) products. During the Covid-19 crisis, there has been television broadcasts showing migrants working in agriculture in the south of Spain, living in inhumane conditions and without any security measures to avoid the virus from spreading. The Government recently declared that between 100,000-150,000 foreign workers may be needed this season, and exceptions from border policy restrictions are made to meet the sector’s need for labor that cannot be recruited among the national workforce given the extremely poor job conditions. This case is illustrative of the contradictions between health care concerns, migration policies and economic priorities, which are strongly felt across the Spanish society.

*Health care staff.* Currently there are indications that the Government intend to facilitate the regularization of migrants with degrees as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and laboratory technicians, among groups without language barriers as for instance asylum seekers from Venezuela. It remains to be seen who is considered eligible and not, and the duration and conditions of these permits. We can also mention the issue of the access of vulnerable groups, and in particular irregular migrants, to public services (health for instance) and also there has been a clear increase in the demand for social assistance (food and shelter).

Besides the labor market, another sphere of the Spanish society that is hit particularly hard by the current situation is the education system. While the confinement and the suspension of all school activities until September are affecting all families, it has particularly negative impacts on children and youth from vulnerable environments, as the Roma and families with migrant background. The closure of schools enforces home-schooling and the use of digital technologies. Yet, this new type of schooling discriminates against children from disadvantaged backgrounds, without the necessary equipment at home. Children that rely on school lunches are affected badly during the crisis. Also, the language education of migrant children is hampered during this process. Moreover, while the confinement is scheduled to end progressively during the coming months, the lack of open childcare centers will in practice make it very difficult for many families with small children to attend to their economic activities outside the home.

In the rapidly deteriorating social and economic context that follows the COVID-19 crisis, it is likely that priorities are changing overall. Feelings of solidarity with particularly vulnerable groups may increase, but as needs are growing among large segments of the population, there is also a risk that migrants will be the last ones to be attended to. The current situation has a direct impact on the life conditions of large groups of people, on relations between neighbors, on forms of social membership, and on integration processes. We are only in the beginning of a new situation, and can only begin to understand its consequences, but we will inevitably need to consider how they impact the human beings that are generally our objects of study. In a recent World Bank report on remittances it is said that “So far government policy responses to COVID-19 crisis have largely excluded migrants and their families back home” (World Bank report, Dilip Ratha).

## **5) Legal aspects, Human Rights and Democracy [Maeva Despaux and Silvia Morgades]**

Measures taken to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have a potential impact on the Human Rights of migrants, but also on individual rights enshrined in EU norms:

1. *Impact on Human Rights.* Measures taken to contain the Covid-19 pandemic have a double impact on the Human Rights of migrants enshrined in European and International instrument, and in particular, within the Council of Europe, under the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) (ECHR). These measures (a) should not generate disproportionate interferences with migrant’s Human Rights in line with State’s negative obligations under Human Rights Law and (b) are also the very

measures capable of guaranteeing migrant's Human Rights during such a context of hardship in conformity with State's positive obligations. Measures adopted to contain the Covid-19 pandemic include the adoption of (a) particularly restrictive "derogation" measures. In themselves, such measures entail potential interferences with Human Rights in general and the Human Rights of migrants and refugees in particular. [For these interferences to be lawful](#), the measures adopted must respect the principle of proportionality. They must be provided by law, be reasonable and strictly necessary to uphold the objective of tackling the Covid-19 pandemic. The general closure of borders, the interrupted registration of any new asylum application, and the imposition of confinement measures, including for migrants in reception centres, are some of the measures of concern for [the guarantee of the rights of international protection seekers](#). Imposing for migrants to remain [in reception centres](#) where social distancing cannot be observed and health services are lacking is problematic in the face of the right to life (Art. 2 ECHR) and the right to be protected against torture and inhuman and degrading treatment (Art. 3 ECHR). It is also a concern for the protection against arbitrary detention (Art. 5 ECHR) and the freedom of movement within the territory of a state (Art. 2 Protocol 4 ECHR) as lockdown measures have transformed these reception facilities in effective detention centres and as forced returns have largely been suspended. In accordance with [the prohibition of discrimination](#) (Art. 14 ECHR and Art 1 Protocol 12 ECHR), States must also ensure medical assistance and other relevant services without discrimination on grounds of race, national origin and immigration status. States must also categorically refrain from spreading hate speech and stigmatizing discourses against particular groups based on their race, national origin or immigration status. As regards State's positive obligations under Human Rights Law (b), concerns are raised by the lack of measures actively guaranteeing the Human Rights of migrants during this period. It is the responsibility of States, in particular under Art. 2 and 3 ECHR, to provide access to food, health, and humanitarian aid. States must also take proactive measures to ensure access to information for migrants and to protect them against the actions of others who engage in xenophobia and the incitement of violence. These positive obligations are particularly relevant when concerned with vulnerable persons such as unaccompanied minors and other marginalised groups. Finally, the legal scrutiny of such measures from supranational jurisdiction, such as the European Court of Human Rights, will take months if not years to be achieved. For this reason, it is especially important to remain vigilant towards State actions in order to ensure that the current Covid-19 pandemic is being tackled in compliance with the legal requirements embedded in the fundamental values agreed upon by democratic societies.

2. *Impact on other individual immigrants' rights enshrined in EU Law.* Measures taken by states to contain the Covid-19 pandemic have an impact on several areas of individual migrants' rights. Two areas appear particularly affected in regards to the EU policies on immigration and on asylum: (a) The ability to enter into the Schengen area and (b) to move within it. Certainly, (a) migrants do not have a general right to enter into a foreign country according to International law. Nevertheless, third country nationals can have some expectations to be admitted on certain grounds. Either as asylum seekers or as non-forced migrants, the measures taken by the European states following the Commission [invitations](#) to restrict non-essential travel from third

countries into the EU+ may raise legal problems. A complete closure of borders is considered as non-conform to the International legal standards for the protection of refugees (even in case on massive influxes); and may be assessed as breaching the principle of proportionality if they are applied irrespective of the concrete circumstances of each case. The [Schengen Borders Code](#) (SBC) does only contemplate the possibility to deny the entry of third country nationals in cases involving a “threat to (...) public health” on an individual basis. As regards internal mobility (b), even though the right to freely move within the territory of the Member states is a fundamental right only for the citizens of the EU (Article 45 of the Charter), third country nationals benefiting from certain migratory statuses hold the right to move according to EU secondary norms (students, researchers; high skilled workers; and long term residents). The SBC envisages the [reintroduction of controls at the internal borders](#) as general measures that states may adopt under certain conditions. The European Commission should exercise a role of control and coordination of these restrictive measures in cases where several states are implicated. Internal border closures are not foreseen and can be considered in breach of EU law and of the principle of proportionality. States have taken different measures with different [levels of restrictions](#) in relation to the right to freedom of movements, which also reveals the lack of leadership of the European Commission regarding the management of the Schengen area restrictions and over unexpected events affecting EU affairs. The Covid-19 crisis is overlapping with the so-called “refugee crisis” initiated in 2015. Both are putting at stake not only the Schengen area of freedom security and justice but also the whole EU project aimed at addressing European common issues with a true spirit of solidarity. Individual intergovernmental decisions and forums are taking precedence over an integration path in migratory matters in Europe.

#### **6) Perspectives on migration: A utilitarian approach redefined through the pandemic lens [Dirk Gebhardt]**

European governments’ response to COVID of restricting personal mobility has also been applied to migration and immigrant mobility, as images of stuck cross-border workers, for instance in the Spanish African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla illustrated harshly. At global level, the US government’s executive order “[Suspending Entry of Immigrants Who Present Risk to the U.S. Labor Market During the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-19 Outbreak](#)” has been one of the most discussed reactions in terms of reacting to the pandemic with more restrictive migration policies. But just like with restrictive migration policies in general, the reality has not been one of a hermetically closure to migration, but rather ambiguous, reflecting the continuity of a utilitarian approach to immigration in general, and its slight redefinition along “system relevant” and “essential” economic sectors during the pandemic.

Already the measure of the Trump administration reflects this, as it did not apply to healthcare professionals, immigrant investors and temporary workers which are crucial for the agricultural sector and food production in the US.

Similar trends can be observed in the EU. The EC's 30 March "[Guidelines to ensure the free movement of critical workers](#)" ask member states to treat seasonal workers in particular in agriculture as "critical workers" whose "smooth passage" should be ensured by "specific procedures". While generally confirming the view of the "critical" nature of seasonal work, member states' responses have varied. The German government changed its ban on temporary migration due to the pandemic in early April, when it allowed 10,000s of harvest helpers from Romania to come, France tried -with limited success it seems- to cover demand by mobilising domestic unemployed, whereas the Italian government discussed in March incentivising immigrants without papers to help in the agricultural sector by offering them temporary regularization. This is at least somewhat surprising, as it suggests that agricultural workers in Italy so far were mainly carried out by regular workers.

In Spain, Europe's main producer of fruits and vegetables, the shortage of workers was unsurprisingly particularly hefty. Even the anti-immigrant party Vox has asked in a statement that Moroccan day-labourers who are tragically stranded in the Spanish-African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla be hired for harvests in mainland Spain. Of course, Vox made it clear that they should not be granted any rights of residence in that way. A widely shared [video](#) of an African seasonal worker from Sevilla addressing voters of the far-right party illustrates this contradiction quite bluntly, and asks "Where are the 3m voters of Vox now that Spain needs us", "now that farmers need 300,000 and nobody is there". The worker states that "we will be in the first line, we will stick up for Spain and Africa", "we will enter the fields and harvest all the fruits, although you don't respect us, you see us like animals and treat us like animals, like sub-humans. Now in the midst of the pandemic we will stick up for you, we will give you food" (excerpts translated D.G.)

#### *Cutting red tape*

While recruiting health care staff from other countries was certainly considered by some governments, but proved to be difficult, some cut red tape and restrictions to overcome obstacles that so far impeded qualified non-national staff already residing in the country to get recruited. In Spain, where procedures for recognising foreign qualifications are particularly complex, the government announced a fast-track procedure to recognise the qualifications of non-Spanish health care staff. Following a precedent set by Bavaria, several German states decided to let 1,000s of qualified doctors waiting for a response by the administration to be temporarily allowed to reinforce staff to respond to Covid-19. Another example for cutting red tape for "critical" staff is the UK Home Secretary automatically prolonging visa of health care staff and their family members which were about to expire automatically for another year.

#### *Policies motivated by public health and human rights concerns*

Beyond labour market concerns, some immigration measures taken by national governments also addressed public health and human rights concerns. As the earliest reaction of this type, the Portuguese government granted a temporary residence permit giving access to basic social support to all immigrants and asylum seekers with pending

decisions on their residence status. With the suspension of organised devolutions of immigrants without residence permits several European governments (e.g. Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands) also released at least some of the detained immigrants. In a statement, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights called on member states to follow these examples ending detention of immigrants during the pandemic, "to safeguard their dignity and also to protect public health in member states."

All in all, in spite of some new humanitarian and public health concerns, the pandemic has not changed much about the dominant drivers of migration policies, which allows some in, while declaring others unwanted. Nevertheless, we see a light shift in how these two categories are defined: in the same way as the shortage of basic medical equipment has pointed to possible limits of economic globalisation; and similar to the pandemic causing a reconsideration of what system-relevant sectors are (not banks, this time), there might also be a slight reevaluation of what is considered "useful" labour migration. Albeit in a continuation of a utilitarian perspective, the potential social contribution of certain professional categories of immigrants might have gained some importance, and agricultural and care workers might have gained some terrain on those categories which are usually privileged by migration policies due to their higher market value.... or at least this is to be hoped.

#### **7) Migration Studies: How might COVID-19 affect knowledge production in this field? [Evren Yalaz]**

The current situation of confinement, national and international travel restrictions, and an expected slow process of adaptation once the de-confinement is initiated is having significant effects on how migration researchers design and carry out empirical research. The general lockdown rules out on-site fieldwork options at the moment and makes Internet Mediated Research (IMR) as the only viable tool to conduct research. This situation is unprecedented. We acknowledge that digital research technologies have already been increasing their share in migration research– let it be researching online transnational networks of migrants or using IT tools in complementary ways along with traditional research methods e.g. sending emails to the participants, conducting Skype interviews etc. Yet, in this pre-COVID-19 world, researchers had the control over whether and the extent of which they wanted to incorporate IMR tools in their study. On the contrary, today, IMR is not an option, but an obligation to conduct empirical research. This will have severe consequences on the questions we ask, the way we collect data, the type of knowledge we produce, and the way we teach research methods to our students. Impediments on face-to-face, participatory, offline fieldwork have particularly serious effects on qualitative migration research, which highly relies on researchers' immersion in their field sites. Below, we identify several imminent risks and challenges that migration researchers face during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- *Reformulating research topics and questions*: The COVID 19 pandemic has detrimental consequences on already vulnerable populations. Social distancing disproportionately affects marginalized communities, who cannot afford staying at home

and whose economic activities cannot be managed from home. For many migrant groups, the main issue is now how to survive in its very literal sense in the times of the pandemic. What we already see in a recently initiated GRITIM-UPF project on discrimination against Roma people is that while there are tendencies indicating that racism and anti-gypsyism is increasing since the Covid-19 crisis started (for instance, fake news and hateful messages blaming Roma for spreading the virus, or for “assaulting supermarkets”, are circulating on the social media), their priorities by necessity change towards issues related to basic survival. Migration researchers need to adjust their research agendas to these rapidly changing situations and produce policy-relevant knowledge. Yet, one of the biggest challenges that we face is how to work on extreme levels of poverty, precarity, exclusion and discrimination, while we are ourselves locked at our homes and have few digital means to reach out to participants.

- *Sampling and case selection:* Migration researchers have both methodological and ethical responsibility to enable participation of disadvantaged migrants, who can easily go out of the research radar. This requires an active recruitment strategy, building rapport and trust before using the means of snowball sampling and key participants. When our research is dependent on IT tools such as Skype, Zoom or other tools for online meetings, our sampling necessarily carries the bias in demographics of internet users. Secondly, even though our target group has access to the basic IT tools, the worsening situations of extreme precariousness and social emergency will inevitably affect their possibilities to participate in a research project.

During the pandemic, researchers are either stranded in their fieldwork places or cannot go back to their field-site. The ban on national/international traveling particularly affects migration scholars who “follow people”, conduct comparative case studies, and have their fieldwork site in remote places without access to IT tools. This situation will eventually have significant effects on how migration researchers choose their cases, or better to say, which cases are practically feasible for them to study.

- *Data collection:* The present COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns take current traditional data collection methods out of the option. Under these circumstances, it is no longer possible to conduct field and ethnographic research, which is based on researchers’ immersion in the lives of people under study. This is a serious challenge for researchers who are interested in observing socially unfolding phenomena in their natural setting. Migration researchers who opt for “soaking” themselves in the lives of people they study and building bottom-up and grounded theories are now deprived of their main tools.

Until further notice, face-to-face interviews can only be conducted through IT means. Online interviews, in addition to their potential sampling bias as mentioned earlier, are scrutinized for their doubtful capacity of producing rich, in-depth, reflexive, and reliable knowledge. In other words, migration researchers, even though they handle the challenge of recruiting participants for an online interview, will be left without a proper observation of the interview setting, facial cues, body language of their participants, and how their participants relate to their environment.

Reaching out in a virtual way poses serious challenges to building rapport and trust between the researcher and participants. In a traditional fieldwork setting, researchers can establish rapport through multiple visits, long duration of stay, showing their eagerness

to listen to and learn from their participants. Qualitative fieldworks do not only serve to extract information, but they have a transformative role both for researchers and participants. In a research setting with only virtual tools, these transformative processes are quite limited.

- *Anonymity, confidentiality and data security*: Last but not least, ensuring participants' anonymity, confidentiality, and data security becomes further challenging in research mediated by IT tools. This might have serious consequences for researchers working on migrants living at legal precariousness, since any accidental disclosure of information might have serious risks for their participants. One of the key ways of managing data security includes storing participants' personal information separately from research data. Yet, this becomes problematical in video interviews where the identity of participants can be easily disclosed. In traditional fieldworks, participants are often more aware when the recorder is turned on and off, yet this becomes ambiguous in video interviews without the presence of an actual recorder.

- *Knowledge sharing, discussion and dissemination*. International travel restrictions have also strongly limited the opportunities to meet with other researchers, to organize and attend academic seminars and conferences, and this has a clear impact on the process of knowledge production, limiting the possibilities for discussion and cross-fertilization, hypothesis checking and peer review. Research communities have been quick to try to make up for this through virtual contacts of all kinds (webinars, virtual conferences etc.), but this will no doubt have an impact on the perimeter of research communities, the way knowledge circulates and ultimately knowledge production.

All in all, the COVID-19 pandemic is transforming the ways we do research and produce knowledge. In addition to all these methodological issues, migration researchers also struggle with other logistical problems to carry out their studies. Already limited research funding for social sciences, and migration research in particular, has got a harder hit. For the most part faculty hiring is already frozen. It is reasonable to expect that even though confinement and social distancing measures relax, the COVID-19 days will have deep impacts on future research designs and agendas.