



Speaking notes for webinar of Council of Europe Conference of INGOs,

Session on Migrants and refugees facing the Covid-19 crisis, what lessons for the post-pandemic time ?

22 June, 14.30-17.00

The Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this session.

As representation of national medical associations across Europe, CPME has long-standing policies on migrant health, which all depart from the principle that doctors must provide appropriate healthcare to every patient, regardless of ethnicity, background, legal status or other factors and cover all forcibly displaced persons regardless of legal status or reason for displacement.

The dangers of excluding these groups from the healthcare system or parts thereof, such as preventive healthcare, have been highlighted in numerous CPME policies.

In fact, CPME recommends integrating migrants into their host country's healthcare system as a way of overcoming inequalities. At the same time, it is critical to take into account impact of housing, the living environment and other factors such as nutrition on health.

The COVID-19 pandemic made it even more obvious that the conditions many refugees are living in are harmful to their health, be it in private accommodation or reception camps in the hotspots. Often their living environment does not allow adherence to containment measures, such as social distancing. In some cases even basic hygiene facilities were scarce already prior to the pandemic's outbreak. One of the first calls to action which CPME co-signed was the SOS Moria appeal, initiated by a group of Dutch doctors working in the camp. It is an urgent appeal to all European Union Member States to comply with their commitment to take in refugees from Greece and Turkey, which so far has not been fulfilled. In reaction to the pandemic, there have been very small-scale attempts to evacuate children from Moria but there has been no long-term support. CPME therefore continues the call on national governments to comply with their commitments for the sake of the fundamental right to health.

CPME also expressed its distress about the escalation of the humanitarian crisis on the border between Greece and Turkey and called upon all authorities involved to safeguard the human rights of every person present in the border region. Action is most urgent to protect the most vulnerable migrants, in particular children, from any further violence.