

## **Statement by the Coalition on the Right to a Nationality in Africa:**

### **INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS AND STATELESS PERSONS IN THE RESPONSES TO COVID-19 IN AFRICA**

**14 April 2020:** COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique global health challenge. It has also brought to the fore multiple layers of inequality that exist globally. Africa registered its initial cases much later than the rest of the world. Currently, there more than 10,000 confirmed cases across the continent. Urgent and significant action is needed to address the impact of the disease, both to save lives and to mitigate the social and economic impacts. However, as this action is taken, marginalized populations mustn't be left behind. Refugees, migrants, stateless persons, IDPs and undocumented migrants, as highlighted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, have unique challenges during this crisis and risk being excluded or out-rightly neglected in the responses to CVID 19. This is because most African states have inadequate data on these categories of people. Therefore they often leave them out of country-specific processes in times of normalcy. The risk of exclusion in this time of crisis and acute pressure on existing resources is significantly magnified.

Including these populations in COVID-19 response is critical not only to protect the populations themselves, but also all other populations in the region, who will inevitably be exposed to them. Addressing the needs of these populations means including them in prevention, treatment and recovery plans.

In terms of prevention, it is critical to recognize that individuals whose movement is restricted, particularly in densely populated detention centres, refugee camps and informal settlements are unlikely to be able to protect themselves from the virus through social distancing and preventative hygiene. To the extent possible, overcrowding needs to be reduced and hygiene services improved. Besides, these marginalized populations are likely to be underserved by information and awareness-raising campaigns designed to educate the population about the disease and how they can protect themselves. They will require information that is available in appropriate languages and form, and which offers advice about how general advice can be adapted most effectively in cases where the ideal mechanisms of staying home and social distancing are impractical.

Children, especially those who are unaccompanied, are particularly vulnerable. Children are at heightened risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence as containment measures intensify. It is vital that organisations that are working with at-risk children be allowed to maintain necessary contact with at-risk children in a bid to ensure their protection.

In order to ensure that these populations can access treatment and monitoring programs, they will need to be assured that they will not be making themselves more vulnerable by coming forward. In this context, individuals must be assured that seeking testing or treatment will not result in immigration enforcement. Further, detention centres are particularly vulnerable sites due to their congested nature and limited surveillance. In this context, a moratorium should be

declared on all immigration or documentation related arrests, detentions or deportations. Additionally, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, globally. The gender based violence that is experienced by women and girls, is exacerbated in the wake of COVID-19, with very little or no processes available to them for reporting and seeing redress for such violations. It is therefore critical that both state and non-state actors ensure that the measures adopted to deal with COVID-19 are sensitive to and responsive to the vulnerabilities of women and girls.

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Further, the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are likely to be widespread. Some governments have already instituted measures to mitigate these impacts such as providing food relief and assistance with electricity bills. Stateless, migrant, refugee and undocumented populations risk being left out of these assistance measures even though they are likely to be most in need due to their vulnerable status.

We urge all African governments to take urgent action to ensure that these concerns are addressed in their COVID-19 response plans.