

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs
The Chairman

IPOL-COM-LIBE D (2020)11153

Janez LENARČIČ
Commissioner for Crisis Management
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049
Brussels

Dear Commissioner,

The LIBE committee appreciates the European Commission's efforts to coordinate a common European response to the outbreak of COVID-19.

With this letter, we address you in your role as European Emergency Response Coordinator and Chair of the Crisis Coordination Committee and we urge the attention of the Crisis Coordination Committee to the extremely vulnerable situation of over 42.000 asylum seekers on the Greek islands. With the first confirmation of a COVID-19 case on Lesbos, the humanitarian crisis on the Greek islands risks becoming a public health issue for which an immediate European response has to be found.

One of the main issues to be addressed to avoid the quick and wide spread of COVID-19 on the Greek islands is the urgent preventive evacuation of the overcrowded camps. Out of 42.000 asylum seekers on the Greek islands, 26.000 live in or nearby the hotspot Moria, which is only equipped for the reception of 3000 people. Many of those in the camps are already in precarious health situation due to the bad conditions in which they have lived for a long time. Despite measures taken by the Greek authorities aiming to ensure the health of all the people working in the reception centres as well as the asylum applicants, the overcrowding in the camps, which are also in close proximity to local residents, and the dire living conditions, make it difficult under the current circumstances for COVID-19 not to spread. There is no chance of isolation or social distancing, nor is it possible to ensure appropriate hygienic conditions. The capacity of medical staff and humanitarian organisations is very limited, and they face severe problems reaching out to everyone needing their help. There are only six intensive care beds available on the island of Lesbos, for residents in the camps and local residents alike, and the necessary health equipment is not at present available on the islands.

If the EU fails to take immediate action, the situation on the Greek islands will become unmanageable with the risk of many deaths. This is an emergency and the EU has to react accordingly with an action plan that should at least include:

- Preventive evacuation of the population at high risk, including people older than 60 and people with respiratory conditions, diabetes or other diseases that could increase the risk of severe symptoms.
- Increased cooperation efforts amongst Member States' health care systems;
- Increased financial resources for an increased capacity for hospitalization and intensive care; and

- Relocation: the measures to ensure prompt relocation, in particular of children have to be continued and not put on hold due to the COVID-19 virus. This can be coupled with additional quarantine or self-isolation measures.

There will be no true control of the COVID-19 outbreak without preventive measures for all, including asylum seekers. We therefore urge you to undertake immediate action and start with the preventive evacuation of the most vulnerable groups in the camps on the Greek islands. This is of crucial importance to save their lives and decongest the hotspots.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Juan F. López Aguilar', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Juan Fernando López Aguilar

cc. Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Home Affairs