

Governments and Institutions Must Unanimously Commit to the Rights of Migrants

Alianza por la Solidaridad, Emergency, ISGlobal, Oxfam Intermón, Save the Children and UNICEF call for action on migrants' rights at the 11th European Development Days in Brussels

Brussels, 7 June 2017. The mission: to travel to the heart of Europe and signal—not only to Europeans but also to the governments and institutions of the countries involved in migratory processes—that a coordinated response to guarantee migrants' rights is urgently needed. This was the objective of the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal)—a centre supported by the "la Caixa" Foundation—in organising a panel discussion at the 11th European Development Days, held this week in Brussels, Belgium.

The discussion, entitled "Vulnerability during the migration process: A health perspective", featured the participation of Alianza por la Solidaridad, Emergency NGO, Oxfam Intermón, Save the Children and UNICEF, all organisations that have directly witnessed and analysed all phases of the migratory process—pre-departure, travel and destination—as well as forced displacement and economic migration.

"The migratory system multiplies the health risks and severely limits our ability to address them; this is something we have to change from the top down," commented Gonzalo Fanjul, Policy Director at ISGlobal and moderator of the discussion. "Migrants' rights is one of the great challenges of the 21st century," argued Fanjul, noting that the number of people living outside their country of origin is currently 240 million and growing.

The five panellists—Jara Henar (Alianza por la Solidaridad), Agostino Miozzo (Emergency NGO), Claire Fehrenbach (Oxfam), Diego Curutchet (Save the Children) and Verena Knaus (UNICEF)—agreed that the current actions of "fortress Europe" do not prevent migration but encourage the use of more dangerous routes and lead to greater exploitation of migrants. The panellists noted that different routes are used by different migrant populations, and that some routes are used by more children than others. In Italy, for example, nine out of ten migrant children travel alone. Although most of these children are boys, the panellists noted that migrant girls face a higher risk of trafficking, exploitation and sexual abuse. Similarly, the vast majority of children in West Africa do not appear in any sort of official record, and without documentation they are unable to access health services.

The panellists also observed that migrant women are four times more likely than Spanish women to be victims of femicide. The health needs of migrants, they noted, do not tend to be especially intensive in clinical terms, although migrants do require considerable mental health care due to their psychological vulnerability after a harrowing journey.

The panellists agreed that the situation requires urgent action. Specifically, they called for the formation of institutional partnerships to increase health care capacities, identify migrants' needs (especially in the areas of health and human rights), and find innovative solutions in order to provide adequate care.

About ISGlobal

The Barcelona Institute of Global Health (ISGlobal) is the result of an innovative alliance between academic and public institutions and the “la Caixa” Foundation. The Institute was set up to contribute to the efforts of the international community to address health challenges in a globalised world. ISGlobal has consolidated a hub of excellence in research and medicine that has grown out of work first started in the world of health care by the Hospital Clínic and the Mar Health Park and in the academic sphere by the University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University. The pivotal mechanism of its work model is the transfer of knowledge generated by scientific research to practice, a task undertaken by the Institute’s Education and Policy and Global Development departments. ISGlobal is a member of CERCA, the Catalan Government’s network of research centres.

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