

COVID-19 as Catastrophe and Catalyst, on the human rights of people of African descent in Switzerland.

Statement from the NGO Pawa and Agrocity in Switzerland.

A. Communication and language barriers

1. The lack advice and information on issues of COVID19 in non-national languages at centres in all cantons and in all major cities, coupled with the myth of the immunity of the African people caused a lot of deaths, misunderstanding and insecurity among people of African descent.

B. Residence and naturalization

2. Most People of African Descent (PAD) are low income earners and work in precarious working conditions have lost their jobs due to job shortages, downsizing of organisations and organisations going bankrupt. These has caused increased deportations of PAD as they lose their temporary residence permit or their right to naturalization both of which require regular employment and no dependency on social welfare as conditions for their renewal.

3. The undocumented PAD - Sans papier are being exploited by their employers and forced to work without adequate protective gear like sanitizers, face masks, and gloves since they depended entirely on their illegal jobs.

C. Tighten the social network

4. There is a lack of a social safety net for temporary workers and self-employed PAD most of whom lost their income due to Corona.

5. The undocumented PAD lack legal access to social security and health care making it impossible for them to receive any medical attention.

6. PAD are mainly self-employed and or small company employees with high risk of falling into debt.

7. The conditions in asylum centres, homes and institutions are completely unsustainable. Refugees have been forced to share living spaces with infected refugees causing some to attempt suicide. Collective housing for asylum seekers often applies heavy violence against the residence and lack adequate hygiene supplies.

8. There is no comprehensive survey made by the government on the effects of the COVID19 crisis on the migrant population so the Federal Migration Commission can not develop measures to close identified gaps.

D. Ensuring the right to education especially during the COVID19crisis

9. The economic crisis in the wake of the COVID19 crisis is particularly hard on adolescents and young adults. Due to social biases and discrimination, adolescents and young people of African descent usually have difficulty finding internships which leads to dependency on social welfare.

10. Most PAD households are not equipped with the required technological necessities, space or learning environment for distance learning due to financial difficulties.

E. Fundamental rights and entry and exit

11. The right of asylum has been restricted due to the corona crisis.

12. The asylum procedure have been put on hold with most of the legal representatives of the asylum seekers doing home office as required by the health regulations.
13. Judicial deportation hearing and cuts on social assistance for asylum seekers went on despite ramifications of the COVID19. Asylum seekers released from the shelters, were given no information on how to attain social assistance and official governmental bodies were understaffed.
14. African descent reside in the neighbouring Schengen countries due to low living costs although they work in Switzerland. With the COVID19 restrictions is difficult for these essential workers to commute to work. With restrictions affecting border traffic and cross-border visit of loved ones.
15. Racial profiling has increased, making free travel within the Schengen countries impossible for PAD.
16. An Afrophobic myth from China stating Africa as the origin of COVID19 increased Afrophobia and Swiss nationalism. Africans became the new scapegoats and alleged culprits of the COVID19 crisis.
17. Five weeks after the start of the Corona measures, there was a marked increase domestic violence, which became more invisible, since the victims feared violating the quarantine regulations. It was also difficult for the victims to call and ask for help since they were under the constant control and watch of their abusers due to the quarantine.

Specific recommendations on the protection of human rights of people of African descent in the context of COVID 19 pandemic.

- A. Information centres in all cantons and in all major cities should provide information in non-national languages on issues of COVID19 provision, health, social safety networks and on residence and naturalization in order to debunk myths and provide correct information. Proper and efficient information distribution can be achieved by collaborating with the people of African descent and their available media of communication like their internet tv, radio stations, social media, newspapers and so on.
- B. Waiver on the right to governmental social services assistance as a condition of residence and naturalization during the corona pandemic.
 - The legalization of sans paper and an amnesty for illegal workers.
- C. Urgent legalization of sans paper and an amnesty for illegal workers.
 - A funding initiative that substitutes the loss of wages and incomes during the Corona crisis under certain conditions.
- D. Targeted support for students with learning difficulties and those with insufficient digital infrastructures.
 - A guarantee fund created for children and young people currently doing their internships to ensure lack of dependency on social assistance if they are unemployed, and continuation in their education and training.
- E. The right of asylum must not be restricted due to the corona crisis. The additional border closure must hinder the right to apply for asylum.
 - The asylum procedure must be carried out correctly despite the social distancing rules; In particular, legal representatives of the asylum seekers must be personally present at the procedures and the deadlines may have to be extended.

- Due to travel bans and restrictions to the COVID19 crisis, the deportation custody measures and cuts in social assistance, decisions to deport asylum seekers should be on hold.
 - Switzerland should allow freedom of travel in coordination with the Schengen countries stages in accordance with health policy requirements. The systematic use of data by Schengen countries for discrimination purposes should be forbidden and fundamental rights must be respected. The deployment of the army on the national border must end immediately.
- F. Increase in racism, Afrophobia and the nationalism that is growing in many countries must be put an end to it.
- G. The state needs to invest additional costs incurred by Corona for the advice domestic violence centres, plus women's and girls' shelters. Specific measures are required so that children and adults who experience domestic violence are recognized and protected. The counselling centres and women's shelters adapted their offers to the situation within a very short time and expect a longer state of emergency during the pandemic.
- Official recognition and categorisation of the support and protection as well as the medical care these structures, shelters and centres provide, in the event of violence as critical.
 - Professional 24-hour advisory service hotline for domestic violence and women's shelters in all the cantons must be financed by the state and a sustainable offer must be set up for everyone affected.
- H. Global dimension
- The best instrument for the medium and long-term prevention and combating of global pandemics is the implementation of the 17 sustainability development goals of the UN Agenda 2030 and the proclamation of a worldwide ceasefire.
 - Switzerland must commit itself to the multilateral level and help to fight the COVID19 pandemic and its consequences worldwide, out of solidarity and self-interest