



Covid-19: Doctors warn of humanitarian catastrophe at Europe's largest refugee camp

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A UK based charity that provides healthcare to residents at Europe's largest refugee camp has warned that overcrowding could prompt a humanitarian catastrophe in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic.

Siyana Marhroof Shaffi, director of the UK based charity Kitrinis Healthcare, which runs a medical clinic on the island of Lesbos, Greece, warned of an "alarming" risk to thousands of vulnerable refugees in the Moria camp.

The island's first case of covid-19 was confirmed last week. Shaffi said that mitigation strategies of self-care, isolation, and social distancing were "a physical impossibility" at the camp, which is designed for 3000 people but has over 20 000 residents. She called for an immediate action plan from governments to de-congest and evacuate residents.

She highlighted that many residents of Moria already have serious illnesses or injuries. Infectious diseases such as respiratory infections, gastroenteritis, and scabies are "rampant," she said, including elderly people and families with children who lack access to shelter, sanitation, food, water, and clothing.

The island's sole hospital has been under severe pressure since the migrant crisis began and currently has only six intensive care spaces, Shaffi added.

She urged the UK government, all EU governments, and European public health authorities to act now. "We ask all of those with power and responsibility to put aside political arguments and make the only humane choice possible: to protect the forgotten people in Moria camp from being struck with coronavirus while being trapped in an overcrowded, dangerous, and unsanitary camp, without specialist treatment facilities and, so far, minimal preparedness measures."

In the midst of the global pandemic, Zaher Sahloul, president and co-founder of the humanitarian charity MedGlobal, urged authorities not to forget the most vulnerable people.

He said, "While the global health community and countries are busy with curbing the spread of the covid-19, let us not forget the refugees and the displaced. It is our humanitarian duty, and it is also the right thing to do to prevent catastrophic morbidity and mortality in a population that is unable to deal with the pandemic effectively."