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INTRODUCTION: MIGRANTS AND MIGRATION IN THE ECO-PAN-SYNDEMIC ERA

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In 2021, *Dve Domovini / Two Homelands* published a special issue entitled *The Coronavirus Crisis and Migration* (vol. 54), which contained numerous articles on various contexts and specific aspects. Considering the importance of the topic, one year later, *Dve Domovini / Two Homelands* is devoting a new issue to migration in the pandemic era. In the editorial of issue 54, we analyzed the coronavirus crisis's origins, characteristics, and social effects. In this editorial, we present an overview of migratory movements and migration policies and the impact on labor and health for immigrants. The current eco-pan-syndemic[1] has produced new elements compared to the pre-COVID era, at the same time consolidating existing phenomena and highlighting old problems. While it has limited, interrupted, and disrupted migratory movements, at the same time, it has deepened the underlying causes of migration by accentuating the need to emigrate.

OLD AND NEW DIMENSIONS OF MIGRATORY PHENOMENA

In 2020, the pandemic led to a significant transformation of the global system of mobility, which entailed the restriction of international mobility, re-bordering, tightening of controls and monitoring of travelers, and differentiation of the right to international or local movement based on various factors (nationality/citizenship, administrative status, profession) and a dense system of restrictions/exceptions.

Between March 10, 2020, and October 4, 2021, 109,519 travel restrictions (out of which 82,187 conditions for authorized entry and 27,332 entry restrictions) and 998 exceptions came into force (IOM, 2021). Although restrictions on international mobility are a known phenomenon, due to their heterogeneity, ubiquity, and scope, restrictions on border crossings, re-entry of citizens, or departure/transit of foreigners have been a novelty—especially in the "age of migration." This transformation,

1 We reproduce, supplementing, Powers et al., 2021.

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together with lockdowns, economic crisis, unemployment, trouble in production systems and labor markets, and changes in migration policies, has led to a disruption of global, regional, and local migration systems.

In the second part of 2020, with the partial reopening of several entry points (airports, ports, land borders) and the easing of land mobility restrictions, there was a relative upturn in travel. In 2021, a slow but progressive resumption of migration movements followed along some main migration routes (the US–Mexico border, Central America, Colombia–Panama; the Mediterranean; Balkans/Eastern Europe–Western Europe; the Gulf). However, these movements did not have the same pre-COVID characteristics and size and took place under the various countries' health measures and restrictions. Due to the different pandemic waves (third and fourth waves), the local semi-lockdowns, a difficult recovery of productive activity and employment in some contexts, the state of social and political crisis widespread in different areas of the world, migratory movements have resumed on and off, with changes in the migratory routes, strategies, and pathways—for example, the reshaping of temporary and circular migration,[2] the posting of workers (in Europe),[3] cross-border work (everywhere). Especially in the lockdown phase in 2020, due to the loss of jobs, the worsening of living conditions, and the desire to face the pandemic at home, large mass returns and forced return migrations took place—especially in Central America, the Indian sub-continent, the Gulf, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Whether voluntary or forced, returns are not a phenomenon that arose with the pandemic, but this time, the modalities, timing, volumes, and causes were unprecedented and peculiar.

In addition to the interruption of remittances, which has worsened the poverty of entire families and countries that live mainly on remittances, these massive returns have "burdened" the countries of origin with an "over-population" to be assisted at a social, economic, and health level. The returns have increased the economic burden on the countries of origin and exacerbated insecurities, accentuating the factors underlying emigration. As genuine "foreigners at home," returnees have sometimes been accused by politicians and the media of being an inconvenient social burden and of carrying the virus.[4]

Over time, some returnees left to go abroad again, although not only to their previous destination and with the same occupation. Another part remained in their home country because they were unable (due to a lack of documents, permits, and resources to migrate again, lack of job opportunities and contacts abroad) or because they found opportunities there.

Due to restrictions on (internal or international) travel, a lack of economic resources or employment, a lack of documents, permits, health certificates, and the

2 In the Balkans, for example, see Lukic et al., 2021.

3 See Geyer et al., 2020, Stefanova-Behlert & Menghi, 2021, and in this issue Toplak & Lukšič Hacin, 2022; Vah Jevšnik & Milharčič Hladnik, 2022.

4 For Bangladesh, for example, see Parvez, 2021.

closure of humanitarian corridors, in 2020 and partially in 2021, many migrants found themselves stranded, stuck, or confined at the borders of the destination country, in a transit country, or in a place where they had not planned to stay (Sanchez & Achilli, 2020; Ullah et al., 2021). This phenomenon is not new, but with the pandemic, it has taken on a wider dimension in terms of numbers and the contexts involved.

At the same time, many returning migrants were also stranded. The restrictions due to the pandemic caused a temporary halt in returns. Many of those who lost their jobs found it very difficult to return and were stuck during the lockdown. On several routes, Southern Europe–Maghreb, Colombia–Venezuela, on the Indian sub-continent, Singapore, in some Gulf countries, many migrant workers and families found themselves at a dead-end, sometimes confined in dormitories, reception centers, detention centers—despite social distancing measures—as some articles in this issue highlight.

NEW STRATIFICATIONS: DIFFERENTIATED RESTRICTIONS, SELECTIVE PROTECTION, AND REINFORCEMENT OF THE UTILITARIAN CHARACTER OF MIGRATION POLICIES

During 2020–2021, a fully-fledged system of restrictions and exemptions was set up in addition to the existing one (Luconi, 2021; Piccoli, 2021; Triandafyllidou, 2022; Wihtol de Wenden, 2021), which highlighted the new processes and mechanisms of migrant selection in the COVID era.

The new and multiple restrictions (self-isolation, quarantine, screening, and testing, medical certificates, visa, no entry) vary depending on the context and the period, affecting people in a differentiated way according to their nationality, the residence of travelers who legally reside in an affected country, the presence of travelers in an affected country. Various health filters (medical tests, vaccination certificates, the green pass in the EU) have been added to traditional travel documents. Restrictions include numerous exceptions, again depending on the context: nationals, residents, passengers in transit, family members, transport personnel, health care, and humanitarian workers, military, official delegations, individuals with a temporary residence status, and international students (Piccoli et al., 2021).

This system of selective bans, restrictions, and exemptions—based on nationality (sometimes irrespective of the actual residence or origin), residence, area of origin (health risk), legal status, profession, and health status—has affected the population in a differentiated manner. Asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, "non-essential" workers, and temporary workers,[5] have suffered the heaviest consequences and, as is often the case, have found themselves in the lowest circle of the variable geometry of citizenship. This new system of restrictions has added the limitation of the

5 For Australia, for example, see Ricatti, 2021.

movement of the poor (now also considered "infected"), as well as to the war on migrants and the poor that has been going on for years.

These groups, considered undesirable, are often confined in buffer zones, liminal zones—a sort of "new sacrifice zones"—in very harsh conditions and with high health risks. This has further reinforced the leitmotif, public discourse, and public image of "desirable" versus "undesirable" groups. New and multiple requirements supporting restrictions and exemptions have produced further fragmentation of social figures and stratification of legal-administrative statuses, reconfiguring, and increasing civic stratification. The new admission criteria have redesigned and complicated the internal hierarchy of migrants; migrant workers themselves have been subjected to differentiated measures so that new ones have been added to the old stratifications and differentiations that existed in the world market and the world labor market. These include the figure of "pandemic-era essential workers" employed through priority entries and *ad hoc* measures (special permits, special transport, regulations, etc.) in specific sectors of the various national labor markets (agriculture, care, health services, frontline services). Seasonal agricultural workers (Della Puppa & Sanò, 2021, Kukreja, 2021; Küppers, 2021), food and slaughterhouse workers (e.g., in Germany), and truck drivers have been co-opted into the COVID-era system of foreigner entry preferences, an era in which "passport privilege has been temporarily displaced by a different hierarchy based less on desirability than on immediate necessity" (Macklin, 2022: 24). Referring to the Canadian context—but this can be extended to many other contexts—Macklin observes that now the entry of the migrant worker is to be declined in the categories of legally essential, politically essential, and economically essential, in the sense that, concerning transborder movement, "pandemic restrictions have in turn, generated exceptions organised around a conception of 'essential' that was produced, revised, and represented through the interaction of pandemic-driven exigencies and nationally-specific articulations of the legal, political, and economic constraints in play" (Macklin, 2022: 39). Nevertheless, these workers deemed "essential" must still prove themselves disposable and, at some point, are excluded as no longer "essential" (Olayo-Mendez et al., 2021).

Can we, therefore, speak of exceptional migration policies? Policies of a state of exception? We do not believe so: the pandemic has highlighted the selective and utilitarian character of migration policies, which are actual policies to control foreign labor, almost always policies against immigrants. The pandemic did not create hyper-selective and stratifying mechanisms: it has been the direction of public policies and the political use of the pandemic has produced new stratifications that have added to the old ones. In the pandemic era, several governments have opted for even more selective and repressive migration policies; the new stratifications derive from the type of migration policies set up in the COVID-19 era, not from COVID-19 itself, which only highlights the condition of migration in the neoliberal era: casualization and criminalization of migrations.

PANDEMIC DISCRIMINATION: THE BIENNIUM HORRIBILIS OF ASYLUM AND THE STRENGTHENING OF THE REPRESSIVE CHARACTER OF MIGRATION POLICIES

The years 2020–2021 were the *biennium horribilis* of asylum. From Greece to Bangladesh, from South America to the Middle East, the pandemic descended on overcrowded camps and reception centers in terrible conditions, where degrading and inhuman practices were not unusual. Even after the first wave, many countries intensified measures against the arrival of asylum seekers (push-backs, forced returns, confinement), restricted access to asylum, and refugee protection.[6] Services and programs for migrants and refugees suspended in the first lockdown were not always fully resumed. The pandemic exacerbated the process of asylum restriction that had been ongoing for several years. The EU's own New Pact on Migration and Asylum 2020 partially ends asylum in Europe.

Besides asylum, the pandemic has often been used politically to reinforce punitive migration policies and anti-immigrant discourses, restrict migrants' rights, and build xenophobic political agendas (Adamski, 2020). The media have reinforced negative attitudes toward immigrants and spread fake news more than a few times. In the United States, the US administration's draconian measures on immigration and asylum (Luconi, 2021) have led to discriminatory treatment on entry and stay, exacerbated welfare racism, and resulted in arrests, deportations, and mass deportations of undocumented, temporary workers, asylum seekers, and immobilized not only at the US–Mexico border, but also in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador tens of thousands of people intending to seek asylum in the United States. Stranded at the borders or inside the states, this population has camped out in precarious housing and hygienic conditions. Vilches Hinojosa et al. (2021) point out that the discretionary interpretation and arbitrary application of the order from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (provision of US health law, section 265 of Title 42, which omits reference to immigration to avoid possible discrimination) by the US Department of Homeland Security closed the US–Mexico border and resulted in 204,000 removals in the first six months of 2020. However, mass deportations under the pandemic umbrella continued throughout 2021. Here, as elsewhere, borders and boundaries (but also within states) have been reinforced and given new functions in the name of fighting the virus so that the pandemic again highlights the repressive character of contemporary migration policies.

6 For Canada: Abu Alrob & Shields, 2022; Macklin, 2022; for Norway: Skrobanek & Jobst, 2021; for Italy: Ferrero & Roverso, 2021; Spada, 2021; for South Africa: Moyo et al. 2021.

THE IMPACT ON MIGRANT WORKERS AND FAMILIES: HEALTH, WORK, AND REMITTANCES

In *Dve Domovini / Two Homelands* volume 54, we pointed out that because of their employment, legal, and housing status, immigrants were particularly vulnerable to the pandemic that arrived in 2020. One year on, those trends have been confirmed, as we highlight in this section.

Regarding health, (low-skilled) migrant workers, refugees, and asylum seekers have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic everywhere, regardless of the political system in place.[7]

In addition to the "direct" effects of the contagion and the greater severity of the disease, greater mental distress also affected migrants (Chetia & Baruah, 2021; Semo & Frissa, 2020; MMC, 2020), especially laborers and wage earners. This was due, *inter alia*, to the worsening of already precarious living conditions, the concern for left-behind family members, and isolation, racism, and the stigma of disease-spreaders (Adamski, 2020; ENAR, 2020; Girardelli et al., 2021) in receiving countries and countries of origin for those who returned (Acharya & Patel, 2021; Chetia & Baruah, 2021; Parvez, 2021).

In 2021, there was an intense vaccination campaign around the world. However, it left out several countries in the Global South (especially Africa), and more than a few times, it discriminated against immigrants, especially asylum seekers and refugees. This vaccine inequality highlighted that even forms of pandemic containment treated population groups and countries differentially (Ferraro & Chapman, 2021; WHO, 2021).

As for work, in many contexts, a significant portion of immigrants have experienced worsening working conditions—increased workloads and work rhythms, increased injuries, and decreased wages.[8] More affected by unemployment than national workers (Bonifazi et al., 2020; Ekanayake & Amirthalingam, 2021; Reddy, 2021), a substantial portion of immigrant workers have been reduced to "work fodder," despite the risk of contagion in essential sectors such as agriculture (Dal Zotto et al., 2021; Kukreja, 2021; Martin, 2021; Rinaldi, 2021), nursing-health care (Ambrosini, 2020), and manufacturing (Asis, 2021). This occurred especially in the productive sectors characterized by a high level of informality and undeclared work,

7 In North America (the United States: Benfer et al., 2021; Despres, 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Luconi, 2021; Olayo-Méndez et al., 2021; Canada: Tuyisenge & Goldenberg, 2021); in South America (Brazil: Brigido et al., 2022; Parise et al., 2021); in Asia (Hiraiwa, 2021; Reddy, 2021); in Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent (Singapore: Hayward et al., 2021; Hintermeier et al., 2021; the Philippines: Asis, 2021; Ciceri & Prigol, 2021; India: Acharya & Patel, 2021; Saikia, 2021; Bangladesh: Parvez, 2021); in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia: Hayward et al., 2021; Hintermeier et al., 2021); in Europe (Italy: Della Puppa & Sanò. 2021; Quaranta et al., 2021; Sanfelici, 2021; the Netherlands: Coyer et al., 2021; France: Marin & Pelloquin, 2021; Spain: Rinaldi, 2021; Greece: Kukreja, 2021), in Africa (Ferraro & Chapman, 2021); in Australia (Ricatti, 2021).

8 For the Gulf area see Abella & Sasikumar, 2020.

which see a strong presence of immigrants such as domestic work (Rinaldi, 2021). In this sector, although not only in this one, female immigrant workers experienced an increase in harassment (Adamski, 2020; Reddy, 2021).

The worsening of working conditions has worsened the economic and living conditions of immigrant families, with a negative impact on children, for whom the risk of being forced into the labor market has greatly increased (Ferraro & Chapman, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020).

As for remittances, 37% of 2019 global remittances (about $714 billion) were received in the 20 countries with the highest number of COVID-19 cases, and 8 out of these 20 countries (the United States, Saudi Arabia, Germany, the Russian Federation, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, and India) were among those from which the highest amounts of remittances were sent—about 28% of all remittances, accounting for about 46% of remittances received in low- and middle-income countries. In 2020, remittances to sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia from Gulf countries fell by 23% and 22%, respectively (World Bank, 2020), sending tens of millions of people into hunger. For example, the Philippines received USD 35,167 million in 2019, ranking fourth worldwide, with remittances accounting for 8.8% of its GDP in 2020. However, this inflow was projected to decrease by 23–32%, and household spending per capita is projected to decline by 2.2–3.3% within a year because of the pandemic, with more serious effects on women (Murakami et al., 2021).

In the same vein, Ratha et al. (2020) estimated a decline of 20% of remittances to low- and middle-income countries in 2020. However, according to Migration Data Portal (2021), the "latest data show that instead, remittance flows fell by only 1.6 per cent to USD 540 billion." Remittances, indeed, show a contradictory and not always homogeneous trend in the various areas of the world. According to the World Bank (2020), Italy, for example, recorded an increase of almost 13% in remittances sent in 2020 compared to 2019 (Fondazione Leone Moressa, 2022). This increase is perhaps due to the effect of two elements: restrictions on international mobility, which have caused many immigrants to forgo temporary returns to their country of origin, opting for more frequent and larger remittances to their families; and the decrease in remittances sent through informal channels, also driven by the impossibility of travel. Similarly, according to the State Bank, Pakistan—where remittance inflows accounted for nearly 8% of the GDP in 2019—saw the historically highest monthly remittances in July 2020. Still, according to Migration Data Portal (2022), "in countries such as Mexico and Nepal, monthly remittances in the second, third, and fourth quarters of 2020 increased to amounts higher than the previous year for the same period."

Finally, we should note that, despite the difficulties produced by the pandemic, new forms of resistance, self-organization, solidarity, and mutualism have developed among migrants and toward migrants: to cope with unemployment (Thieme & Tibet, 2020) and impoverishment (May Black et al., 2020), to facilitate border crossing (Kynsilehto, 2020) and provide assistance along migration routes (Milan, 2020), to

oppose the imprisonment of asylum seekers and refugees in camps and detention centers (Perolini, 2020). They allow a glimpse of a ray of light on an increasingly dark horizon.

This special issue is not exhaustive. Several areas of the world (e.g., North America) and many dimensions of immigrant life remain unexplored. However, we hope it may contribute to the knowledge of this momentous phenomenon.

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