SITUATION AND CONDITIONS OF INTERNATIONAL REFUGEES IN THE PANDEMIC OF COVID-19 (LAW REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL REFUGEES)

IIN KARITA SAKHARINA Faculty of Law, Hasanuddin University Email: ik.sakharina@gmail.com

Received 22 January 2020 - Revised 7 April 2020 - Accepted 10 Mei 2020

Abstract

Refugees are people who leave their countries and go to other countries to ask for protection. During the Covid-19 pandemic, refugees also became one of the groups affected by the spread of the virus that has claimed many lives almost throughout the country and became a global disaster. Countries that are affected by the spread of this virus are very vulnerable, both susceptible to disease, exposed to the virus are also vulnerable to eviction, especially for a number of countries that apply lockdown. Therefore there needs to be a study that examines the protection and efforts that can be made by countries that are currently accommodating refugees as well as UNHCR as a UN organization that deals with this refugee problem, so that refugees remain protected during this pandemic.

Keywords: Refugees, Protection, Human Rights, State Policy, UNHCR

INTRODUCTION

The problem of refugees is still a global problem today. Every day the number of people leaving their country and going to other countries to ask for help to be protected is increasing. They go both individually and in groups. On average for the same reason because they are in extreme fear, because the country or region where they are located is in a state of prolonged conflict. So, they feel the need to leave their country and go to seek help in another country solely for the safety of themselves and their families.

In international law, there are international instruments issued by the United Nations through the UN General Assembly known as the 1951 Convention on Relating Status Of Refugees.¹ This convention is based on Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 which recognizes the right for people to seek asylum from persecution in other countries. Article 14 of UDHR it self mentioned as the following;

- 1. Everyone has right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from presecution.
- 2. This right may not be invoked in the case of presecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles othe the United Nations.

Based on Article 14 of the UDHR 1948, the basis for the 1951 Convention on the status of Refugees was made, that it is the right of every person to seek and request protection from another State if in his country he feels his life and safety are threatened. The UDHR 1948 itself was the first general human rights declaration issued by the UN General Assembly, to protect and respect the human rights of every human being. This UDHR is soft law, is not legally binding for States, does not need to be ratified but the countries in the world agree to respect this UDHR as part of the international community.

While the Refugee Definition according to the 1951 Convention that refugees are people who due to reasonable fear will receive persecution for reasons of taste, religion, nationality, membership in certain social groups or political opinions, are outside their country and cannot, because of such fear; or do not want to obtain protection from that country; or someone who has no citizenship and is outside the country where he lives as a result of certain events, cannot, or because of fear, does not want to

¹ This convention was adopted by the Conference of UN members on the Status of Refugees and Citizenship in Geneva on July 25, 1951. Through 24 votes and none abstained, open for signature from 28 July to 31 August 1951. See at Ian Brownle, Guys.S. Goodwin-Gill.Basic Documents on Human Rights, 4th edition. 2002.OXFORD University Press. New York.hlm112

return to his country.2

Efforts to protect refugees have recently again encountered obstacles due to the phenomenon of the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), which makes it difficult for refugees to access asylum / protection. The negative impact of the spread of COVID-19 on the accessibility of refugees to destination countries in the context of seeking asylum.

During this pandemic, refugees became one of the most vulnerable groups given the many factors that influenced it. In terms of numbers, refugees in Indonesia are actually only around 14 thousand, compared to a global total of 70.8 million.

The United Nations and aid organizations are now faced with the task of trying to protect 70 million refugees in the world from the new corona virus that has destroyed some of the world's best health care systems.³ Refugees are one of the most vulnerable groups affected by the Covid-19 virus given the many factors that influence it starting from the increasing population of refugees, the dense population of residents and dirty camp conditions make health advice aimed at stopping the spread of the Covid-19 virus to be of no use to refugees, the government's call for keeping a safe distance and frequent hand washing is not practical for refugees. Concern continues to increase that when the virus reaches the camps spread across the world, major disasters will arise. Often, not because the refugee camp has a weak health system, which experts warn will be overrun by Covid-19, but because they have no health system at all. According to Foreign Policy records, throughout the region, aid groups are working to improve the distribution of soap, water, and information about the virus.⁴

Refugees will face unprecedented competition for emergency medical resources because organizations such as the Transboundary Doctors (DWB), which usually help the most vulnerable groups in the world, have sent teams to Covid-19 pandemic centers such as Italy. In the midst of competition for global health resources, refugees are likely to be defeated and neglected. Even with aid and medical supplies donated to several countries, it is not clear how much will flow to the refugees. The British non-profit organization Oxfam described the situation in one of the camps in the state of Rakhine that has difficulty getting health care even in its current state. If someone is sick and needs treatment from a specialist, they must ask for official permission which can take several days. Then they have to pay security escorts to go to the hospital. IOM said if there were cases of the Covid-19 virus among refugees, it could remain undetected and therefore pose a risk to migrants living with them and the local population. Local residents have access to medical care that is not available for those who live in informal accommodation. IOM is working to build as many medical facilities as possible. The World Health Organization says it is working with various governments and agencies of the United Nations to provide assistance to vulnerable people. The United Nations Agency said so far it has not received information about the Covid-19 virus epidemic in refugee camps. However, if and when Covid-19 arrives, each country must largely cope with the condition itself. However, countries which have the most refugees often have the fewest resources to help them.

The International Committee of the Red Cross also said it was "almost impossible" to fight the spread of disease in countries such as Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Afghanistan and Northeastern Nigeria without mutual assistance by the state and humanitarian organizations. Based on this argument, the situation and condition of refugees during this pandemic is very worrying because most countries only focus on their citizens and ignore the refugees even though refugees also need to provide adequate facilities for humans.

Seeing from the explanation about the condition of international refugees who most still have to live in refugee tents with a large number and dense, of course the problems faced by refugees during the Covid-19 Pandemic will increase, because these refugees will be very vulnerable exposed to Covid In addition, with the existence of a pandemic that has swept the world for almost the past 6 months, it will certainly have an impact on refugees, especially where they are located, or access to the destination country. Moreover, some countries which are usually the destination countries for these refugees take a lock down policy or close access in and out for anyone to their country.

For this reason, this paper will examine how the situation and conditions of refugees in several countries in the world amid the Covid-19 Pandemic and how the efforts made by each country as well as UNHCR in spreading the virus deal with Covid-19 in the neighborhoods of refugees?

² article 1 1951 Convention on Satus Relating of Refugees, also see at Iin Karita Sakharina, Pengungsi dan HAM, Jurnal Hukum Internasional, No.2, Nopember 2013, pg.198

³Mata-mata Politik. Nasib Miris Pengungsi Ditengah Wabah Corona https://www.matamatapolitik.com/nasib-miris-pengungsi-di-tengah-wabah-corona-timur-tengah-in-depth/

⁴ ibid, mata-mata Politik

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The method of the study will be data from literatures, cases, journals and reports which conducted by using the qualitative description which through selecting the correct data in order to explain, states the fact clearly in addition to avoid using irrelevant data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Situation and Condition of refugees in several Countries Conditions of Refugees in Indonesia

If we look at Indonesia today, the condition of these refugees has escaped the news of Indonesian media. Yet according to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) Indonesia, in the Jakarta-Bogor-Depok-Tangerang-Bekasi region (Jabodetabek) there are more than 7 thousand refugees from 45 countries. Various reports about COVID-19 are concentrated on the main things or which are entertainment in a period of independent isolation. In terms of refugee issues, there are only 3 writings in two online media. It only appeared on 7 and 12 April 2020, one of which quotes from foreign media and the other from UNHCR. The refugees cannot formally work in Indonesia, but so far there are still those who can do informal activities, such as becoming a teacher for refugee children or translators for fellow nationals who are not fluent in Indonesian. However, when there is a policy of prohibition to go out of the house also study at home, the schools where they work informally are closed, so that they become non-income. This condition is still far better compared to refugees who live nomadically on the streets. They are resigned to not having access to social assistance or food or health because the requirement for obtaining such assistance is ownership of an Identity Card⁶.

This is different from the coverage of COVID-19 efforts to address refugee groups in various regions in other parts of the world that have been covered several months ago. The handling of refugees in Indonesia cannot be compared to other countries. But at the very least, such depictions and information can help find ways to reduce their vulnerability. As happened in Germany, refugees who have the qualifications as medical personnel are involved in helping to treat patients with COVID-19.⁷

Indonesia has not yet become a State of ratification of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, so the Indonesian Government actually has no obligation to accept refugees coming to Indonesia. But that is not the case, because since how many years ago, the number of refugees who came to Indonesia has been many and is increasingly growing, although the purpose of the refugees is only for a while and make Indonesia a transit country. For that by respecting the principle of non-refoulement, Indonesia continue to accept the arrival of these refugees, even since 2016, the Government has issued Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 which shows the form of Indonesian political negotiations regarding the handling of refugees.

Indonesia is also one of the countries that provides support and commitment to the New York Declaration on refugees and migrants. This means that Indonesian support is also given to the WHO agreement on Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants in 2019, one of which is to encourage international organizations and non-governmental organizations to take care of refugee health.⁸ UNHCR has indeed claimed that refugees in the shelter received assistance through collaboration with local authorities and with UNHCR partners, such as Church World Service (CWS), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Dompet Dhuafa, IOM, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Justice and Human Initiative Care Post (PKPU-HI), and Selasih. However, this cannot be felt by almost one third of the total refugees in Indonesia because they are not included in the shelter.⁹

In early April 2020, Indonesia received praise from the IMF for its policy of handling COVID-19. The Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Kristalina Georgieva, appreciated the Indonesian government's policy to deal with the economic and social impacts of COVID-19. In particular, the IMF praised the good coordination between Bank Indonesia and the Ministry of Finance in handling the pandemic and providing protection by the government to Micro, Small and Medium

⁷ MacGregor, Marion. "Germany: Migrants and Refuges May Fill Labor Gaps." Info Migrants. 26 Maret 2020. https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/23690/germany-migrants-and-refugees-may-fill-labor-gaps.

⁵Politik Internasional http://www.politik.lipi.go.id/kolom/kolom-1/politik-internasional/1384-kerentanan-pengungsi-pada-masa-pandemi-covid-19-di-indonesia,

⁶ ibid

⁸ World Health Organization. *Promoting the health of refugees and migrants: Draft global action plan 2019–2023.* Seventh-Second World Health Assembly: A72/25. 25 April 2019. https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA72/A72_25-en.pdf.

⁹ Politik Internasional, loc cit

Enterprises (MSMEs). This is extraordinary in the midst of stuttering at the central and regional levels and in the provision of health infrastructure. Unfortunately in the case of refugees, commitment as a humane state and the management of existing funding does not touch refugees, who are indeed not residents of Indonesia.

When reflecting on global commitments and agreements, although not the direct responsibility of the Indonesian government, the government should also continue to implement its humanitarian policy to refugees, especially those not in shelters. All refugees should have the same right to health protection. It is inconceivable, if they turn out to be carriers of COVID-19 disease, an independent isolation policy will be in vain because on the streets there is widespread distribution. In addition, Indonesia needs to firmly collect UNHCR and IOM which have a mandate from the United Nations 10

Condition of Refugees in Netherland

All migrant residents who have just entered the Netherlands must register at a refugee center in Ter Apel Village, located about 200 kilometers northeast of Amsterdam. There are at least 1,900 migrant workers who have sought refuge in the refugee center bordering Germany. Some of them stayed in the camp for only a few days, others took refuge there until the decision to apply for asylum came out. Altekrete is an asylum seeker from Iran who lives in the largest refugee camp in the Netherlands. The man who worked as an electrician was on guard with a number of refugees and other migrant workers in front of the Jumbo supermarket near Ter Apel to carry out disinfection to prevent transmission of the virus in the Netherlands. Altekrete cleans items belonging to supermarket visitors in an effort to fight the spread of the Covid-19 virus¹¹.

The 34-year-old man said the action was done voluntarily in the hope of increasing the impression of both refugees and migrants in Ter Apple. He also did it as an expression of gratitude to the villagers around the supermarket who had accommodated him. While Altekrete and other migrant residents stand guard at shopping centers, Dutch citizens in Ter Apel entertain refugee children amid restrictions on access to suppress the spread of Covid-19.12

A teacher who is a local resident, Karina Zuidinga welcomed the initiative of the refugees and said she was happy they showed her kindness to the whole village, although initially the shop owners and local residents had complained about the disrespect and even theft of the immigrants. In this case it shows that the Netherlands as a recipient country, openly accepts refugees and its citizens are open to refugees as well so that it can establish good communication and relations.¹³

He Netherlands is one of the countries in Europe which is the country with the most number of international refugees coming to their country. Data from 2015 alone show that the Netherlands became one of the most populous countries in Europe by accepting 23,085 asylum seekers¹⁴.

Conditions of Refugees in Turkey

As each country grapples with the spread of Covid-19, the situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey, whose life has been chaotic for the past nine years, demands attention. Being in a precarious condition, now their number has reached nearly 4 million people. Thousands of refugees have spent the past few weeks making dangerous trips along the Turkish-Greek border. There are camps that house around 10,000 to 15,000 refugees at the border, where social distancing rules cannot be applied. 15

High concentration of population and lack of access to water, increase the risk of transmission at refugee locations. Syrian refugees are said to need effective and easily accessible protection in Turkey to fight the virus which is more deadly than before. In handling refugees for health protection, the Turkish state provides assistance to refugees as if Syrian refugees have symptoms, they should call the Turkish

¹⁰ Suryono, Mitra. "Bersama Pemerintah Indonesia, Mitra Kerja/ Organisasi dan Badan PBB Lainnya, UNHCR Pastikan Pengungsi Tidak Tertingal Dalam Respon COVID-19." 4 April 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/id/12357bersama-pemerintah-indonesia-mitra-kerja-organisasi-dan-badan-pbb-lainnya-unher-pastikan-pengungsi-tidaktertingal-dalam-respon-covid-19.html

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¹² ibid

¹³ Ibid. 10

see News. https://republika.co.id/berita/internasional/global/15/10/21/nwkgwl366-rekor-pencari-suakaterbanyak-belanda-terjadi-september

¹⁵ Zahrotul Oktaviani dan Muhammad Fakhruddin, "Pengungsi Suriah di Turki hadapi ancaman corona" (https://republika.co.id/berita/q7dujb327/pengungsi-suriah-di-turki-hadapi-ancaman-corona

Ministry of Health's hotline and ask for an Arabic translator, after waiting for a long queue. However, the ministry has recently published guidelines in Arabic on its website, so that citizens can take personal steps that might break the chain of transmission of Covid-19. A migration policy analyst at the Ankarabased TEPAV think tank, Omar Kadkoy said, it was important to raise awareness among asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey about the necessary precautions against Covid-19. Omar Kadkoy said to reduce the vulnerability of the Covid-19 virus transmission, requiring equal access to public health services. There are undocumented asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey, who do not have identity denied access to tests and treatment, according to him, this is not the time to refer to books or rules because fighting Covid-19 is a collective act that is not relevant to anyone's legal status.¹⁶

Condition of Refugees in Africa

In Africa, 25.2 million African refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons are some of the most vulnerable groups to COVID-19. They are accommodated in areas with weak health systems and limited access to services such as water, sanitation and hygiene. People in urban areas often live in crowded environments, where physical distance is a luxury.¹⁷

Violent conflicts exacerbate problems because they damage or destroy the social service infrastructure needed to overcome a pandemic. Closing borders also increases the risk for asylum seekers. All this is complicated by the economic slowdown which is affecting the economies of host countries.

The African Union (AU) and its various organs play an important role in coordinating responses to continental threats. They responded quickly to COVID-19, including issues relating to refugees and internally displaced persons. But more needs to be done. The AU has provided policy guidance to member countries through a continental coronavirus strategy aimed at supporting the national response, calling for the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons. In a communique on migration and mobility amid a pandemic, he also called on member states to respect the rights of Displaced Persons¹⁸.

Condition of Refugees in Iraq

In Iraq, where 1.5 million people have become refugees, camps continue to be sprayed with disinfectants. Iraqis in the camps make the best effort they can to follow health guidelines. Foreign Policy reports, the UN refugee agency has launched a request worth US \$ 33 million to deal with the crisis, but so many countries that normally donate are now struggling to contain the plague in their own territory. ¹⁹

Rozhan, 28, fled Iraq with her husband and three children and has been living in the Bihac refugee camp for the past six months. The family is trying to reach Finland, where Rozhan's sister and several friends live. "We ran away from home to "saved our lives, escaped from war, and now we are faced with a corona virus," Rozhan told the BBC.²⁰

If you see from the conditions of refugees in several countries as described above, then it is certain that the condition of refugees today is very sad and alarming. Especially since most refugees only occupy camps with a very crowded number of camps, hygiene and health facilities are of less concern so it must be during the covid-19 pandemic, refugees are the most vulnerable people exposed to and exposed to the Covid-19 Virus. Although there have been no reports from UNHCR or from the State Government where refugees are reporting these camps that have been exposed to Covid-19.

The Effort and Protection for Refugees in the Covid-19 Pandemic Period

Protection of refugees is basically the responsibility of every country and has been an international issue for a long time. For centuries the state or nation has accepted and provided protection for foreign citizens who are victims of oppression or violence in the area where they live.²¹

¹⁶ Ihid ¹⁵

 $^{^{17}}$ Institute For Security Studies (2020) How Africa can reduce COVID-19's impact on displaced persons. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/how-africa-can-reduce-covid-19s-impact-on-displaced-persons

¹⁸ Institute For Security Studies.ibid

¹⁹mata-mata Politik, op cit

²⁰BBC News Indonesia . Virus Corona : bagaimana kesiapan kamp-kamp pengungsi menghadapi virus corona https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/dunia-52088037

²¹ Sigit Riyanto, "Urgensi Legislasi Hukum Pengungsi dan Kendalanya di Indonesia". *Jurnal Hukum Internasional*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pg 68. [5]

Especially for some States where when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, it was accommodating refugees who sought protection in their countries, whether the country was a transit country like Indonesia or as a country that had been a party to the 1951 Convention on Refugees status, all must take steps measures and policies that must be taken in protecting refugees during this pandemic.

Humanitarian solutions are currently being discussed at the European level on a coalition that is willing to accommodate Syrian refugee children. The German government itself is ready to accept a reasonable amount. Other European countries have been contacted to take part of these refugee children. This effort was made because Greece came under intense pressure after Turkey could no longer prevent refugees from leaving the European Union. During the previous week, refugees had repeatedly invaded the Greek border and clashes broke out when Greek police used tear gas and water cannons to push them back. 22 More than 5,000 doctors from all over Europe supported the #SOSMoria initiative to evacuate about 20,000 refugees from the overcrowded Moria camp in the midst of the Covid-19 virus pandemic crisis. Moria Camp, located on the island of Lesvos, Greece, has drawn criticism because it is considered inhumane in dealing with refugees. More than 20 thousand refugees live in the Moria camp. In fact, the camp was designed to accommodate 3,000 refugees. The doctors warned that the camp was an ideal place for the virus to multiply. The demand was later strengthened by demands made by Florian Westphal, Managing Director of the German Cross-border Physician in an interview with DW. He mentioned, rubbish was scattered everywhere, families were living in tight spaces in a very narrow space, thousands of people shared toilets and no soap and very limited supply of clean water. The life situation in the Moria holding camp is fertile ground for the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus. The doctor stated that Europeans should not ignore the situation in refugee camps in Greece. Meanwhile, German activists have worked together to raise funds to evacuate refugees and migrant workers living in refugee camps in Greece. The plan is for them to evacuate refugees and migrant workers to Berlin. After input from doctors and insistence from countries, the European Union ordered Greece to carry out an immediate evacuation process for asylum seekers in refugee camps throughout Greece. The policy was issued as an effort to prevent the transmission of the Covid-19 virus more widely among the camp refugees. Suggestions for evacuation were also voiced by the Committee on civil liberties, justice and welfare in the European Parliament which called it an emergency measure. Moreover, asylum seekers also have the risk of becoming victims of death due to this corona pandemic outbreak. The risk of the spread became apparent after the discovery of a positive case of Covid-19 on Lesbos Island, one of the most densely populated migrant refugee camps in Greece. Patients who tested positive were known to be a Greek woman, as well as being the first finding in the Lesbos

Responding to the COVID-19 phenomenon, UNHCR has taken a number of steps in efforts to protect refugees in the midst of a plague crisis. One form of the response is by issuing a 'key protection message²⁴ which is based on International Refugee Law and Human Rights. This message consists of 5 key message points that guide the country in taking action to protect refugees in situations of the spread of COVID-19. These points are:

- Key message 1 : States can and must ensure access to asylum while still protecting public health
- Key message 2: Even if a country has closed its borders, acceptance of asylum seekers and asylum claim processing must continue, with priority for the most vulnerable.
- Key message 3: Restrictions on freedom of movement must not be done carelessly or discriminatively.
- Key message 4 : Restrictions on the exercise of rights must be made within a time frame that is not more than necessary.
- Key message 5 : Public health and other responses must include refugees, internally displaced persons, and other marginalized groups, and address certain risks that affect them.

Protection of refugees is a general principle of human rights. The 1951 Convention regulates the protection and provision of assistance to refugees. The guaranteed collateral of the 1951 Convention

²² Miranti kencana wirawan, "Uni Eropa pertimbangkan terima 1.500 lebih anak pengungsi Yunani" (https://www.kompas.com/global/read/2020/03/09/120925270/uni-eropa-pertimbangkan-terima-1500-lebih-anak-pengungsi-di-yunani?page=all)

²³ Medikantyo, "Pandemi corona, Yunani di sarankan evakuasi pencari suaka dari kamp pengungsian" (https://news.okezone.com/read/2020/03/26/18/2189558/pandemi-corona-yunani-disarankan-evakuasi-pencari-suaka-dari-kamp-pengungsian,

²⁴ UNHCR, "Advisory Opinion on the Extraterritorial Application of Non-Refoulement Obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol". https://www.unhcr.org/4d9486929.pdf

are:25

- 1. Refugees must not be discriminated against, whether in race, religion of the country of origin, or skin color. Refugees are also given the freedom to practice their religious practices.
- 2. The personal status of refugees is regulated according to the law of the location of the refugees' domicile. If it does not have domicile, it will be regulated based on the country's law occupied by refugees.
- 3. Refugees have the same right to own movable and immovable property and can keep them. And can bring assets to the country where they will settle.
- 4. States parties to the convention must recognize the freedom of refugees to gather and associate, and to establish an association. Such associations are permissible as long as they are non-profit and non-political.
- 5. A refugee has the freedom to file a case in court
- 6. Refugees are entitled to get work that has recognized expertise, can be proven with certificates or the like so that their expertise can be adjusted to the work given to refugees.
- 7. Every refugee has the right to education.
- 8. Every refugee has the right to obtain rights to social welfare.
- 9. Every refugee has the right to identity documents and travel documents out of the territory of the country where he lives, except for reasons of security and public interest.

Looking at the main points of the Convention provisions of the 1951 Convention on the status of Refugees, basically refugees are the same as other humans, have the same rights, so they must be given good protection in normal times especially when the world is experiencing a pandemic of this disease, because refugees are people the most vulnerable other than violence, exploitation, expulsion as well as diseases so that the protection provided must be as much as possible.

CONCLUSION

In this pandemic, everyone is vulnerable to the spread of the Covid-19 Virus, so a number of countries are taking policies and steps to close access to and out of their country's territory. At present not only citizens are inside the territory of a country, but there are also immigrants who are commonly referred to as refugees who enter into the territory of a country to ask for protection. This refugee situation is very vulnerable and apprehensive, coupled with the situation and conditions like this, certainly have a big impact on refugees. Therefore, various protection measures must also be made to protect refugees from various vulnerabilities, including vulnerability to exposure to Covid-19 and also the vulnerability of being expelled from a State territory during this pandemic.

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