Beat: Health

Living with COVID-19

European Union Agency-Fundamental Rights

Brussels , 30.07.2020, 13:03 Time

USPA NEWS - COVID-19 “˜new normal´ should also safeguard fundamental rights.

Living with COVID-19 continues to constrain our daily lives, as a new Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) report shows. Moving forward, governments need to ensure existing fundamental rights challenges do not worsen and vulnerable members of society do not suffer disproportionately.

“Wholesale constraints on our lives are easing as we better learn to live with COVID-19,“ says FRA Director Michael O´Flaherty. “We must acknowledge how frontline workers, courts, national bodies, civil society worked tirelessly to promote and protect fundamental rights during the pandemic. This work should not stop here. We need to continue to build on their efforts in the “˜new normal´ to respect and advance fundamental rights for all.“

This fourth FRA Bulletin on the Coronavirus pandemic in the EU: fundamental rights implications looks at how EU Member States tackle the pandemic and the impact on fundamental rights:

1. States of emergency: Many governments continue to lift states of emergency or equivalent to manage the pandemic but they often extend or impose other crisis measures. Courts, national human rights bodies and civil society organisations continue to question the legality of fundamental rights restrictions.

2. Daily life: Although governments gradually eased restrictions, all EU governments maintain physical distancing measures. These include wearing of masks in some places and stay-at-home orders for COVID-19 sufferers.
As Member States reopen schools and plan for the next school year, various assessments underline how children from disadvantaged backgrounds lack equipment and support for distance learning.

With many people working again, studies point to the pandemic´s disproportionate impact on women when it comes to work-life balance and caring responsibilities.

Judicial systems also continue to return to normal. They tried to clear case backlogs through longer hours or more staff. Many still use video hearings for some cases.

Member States continue to ease temporary controls at their internal borders and restrict travel to the EU in line with EU recommendations.

3. Vulnerable groups: COVID-19 measures continue to affect some groups more.
Restrictions eased for older people and people with disabilities in institutions. But sometimes visiting guidelines are too complex or restrictions are over-implemented or disproportionate leading to greater stress and loneliness.

Some Member States run initiatives to counter the impact on Roma communities, such as educational programmes or access to information and healthcare.

Some also support victims of rising domestic violence, by opening new shelters, support networks and more funding to better protect victims.

4. Digital concerns: Many Member States work on contact-tracing apps and other technological tools, including the use of drones and other forms of surveillance to combat the pandemic. Data protection bodies continue to call for legal clarity on the use of such tools.
Governments continue to fight disinformation by enhancing transparency on virus statistics, creating dedicated platforms and media funding.

5. Racism: The pandemic is further stoking intolerance towards minorities. In several Member States, politicians reportedly used racist and xenophobic language. Some countries also reported racial profiling and disproportionate enforcement of COVID-19 related restrictions towards ethnic minority groups.

This report covers measures in place in the 27 EU Member States from 1 to 30 June 2020.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-17327/living-with-covid-19.html

Editorial office and responsibility:
V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Daren Frankish - European Union

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619