

In Europe, **data** collected until May 2021 show a total of close to 47 million documented COVID-19 infections and 1.2 million deaths.

In the food sector, the pandemic has been marked by two main dynamics. Firstly, on the production side, Europe's high dependence on migrant labor for its intensive production model became evident. In the first months of the pandemic, there were cases of migrant workers' rights being violated. The closure of borders meant that many were 'trapped' in the countries in which they were working. The high dependence of some countries on agricultural workers also led to the adoption of specific quotas for these workers, while ignoring the preventive measures that had been recommended during the pandemic. On many occasions agricultural workers were not even provided with masks or safety equipment for their work, placing them in a situation of particular vulnerability. **Italy** opted for a temporary regularization of undocumented migrants.

Already before the pandemic, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, Philip Alston, had denounced the **violation of the rights of women agricultural workers in Spain**, including their inhuman living conditions. Responding to this, the Spanish government carried out inspections on the farms and **ordered more than 12 million euros in fines for labor infractions** (until March 2021).

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In addition to the situation of agricultural workers, last year's restrictive measures by governments placed at the center of debate which activities should be considered essential. Despite the understanding of agriculture as an essential activity, it was mainly large-scale agriculture that was included, and not small-scale production or subsistence gardens. This initially resulted in measures such as the closure of farmers' markets arguing that these were unsafe. Similarly, access to urban and subsistence gardens was curtailed, despite the fact that many people – especially retired and low-income people – depend on these to supplement their diets. These measures placed important restrictions on people's access to fresh and seasonal food, while also seriously affecting many small-scale producers.

In this context, it is worth highlighting the situation faced by some women producers. At the time of lockdown, freedom of movement was limited: women farmers who wanted to go to their fields or plots had to show proof of land ownership. The reality, however, is that land ownership lies mostly in the hands of men, so even though women also work in food production, they found themselves with blocked access to their sites of production. The pandemic also shed light on the ageing of the peasant population. Most of those who work in food production **are also part of the most at-risk group**, further hindering their ability to engage in their usual activities.

The different periods of lockdown also limited children's access to schools and thereby to the food provided in school canteens. Families with fewer resources who were entitled to free school meals were offered food through different

channels. In some places, this was organized through the school itself, while in others, such as in Madrid (Spain), following an agreement with Telepizza (a fast-food pizza chain), thousands of children were fed daily for several months on ultra-processed food.

Over the past year, hunger has become more visible than ever in Europe, and the demand for food aid has increased significantly in all countries. In **France**, figures suggest that up to 8 million people may be in need of food aid, while in **Spain** the recorded demand has increased by more than 600,000 people in the last year, although this figure does not account for those who turn to other informal channels. Faced with these situations responses have been varied: many governments have opted for a welfare-based approach through the use of vouchers, as well as other channels that depend on volunteer labor in communities. In some countries, social services have been overwhelmed and have referred people in situations of poverty and food insecurity to charitable entities, or to spaces articulated by social movements. In most of these cases, the priority was to resolve the urgency of filling stomachs, without taking into account the human right to adequate food and nutrition (RtFN) of these people.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY RESPONSES

Organized civil society and support groups emerged in neighborhoods and towns and developed their own responses to help those who did not have the necessary resources to access food. Within these support groups, women producers and small businesses have formed networks to support their neighbors.

Community kitchen initiatives materialized. Meanwhile existing Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) groups proved resilient, saw increased demand for their produce, and also incorporated new solidarity formulas to reach out to those who do not have the monetary resources to pay for their food.



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