

## Tuberculosis, human rights and ethics

LOOKING AT THE SITUATION of migrants from the perspective of a major public health issue such as tuberculosis shows that the main problem for migrants is not of a medical nature. As Wild et al. demonstrate in their case study in this issue of the *Journal*,<sup>1</sup> the essence of the problem is the denial of migrants' rights throughout their route from their country of origin to their destination. Health problems among migrants are the result of a series of breaches in respect of human rights and international laws. The contrast between the list of international treaties that should ensure protection of migrants and the reality of their situation gives the measure of the reluctance of states to meet their obligations.

It is important to remember the scale of the problem: between January and July 2017, an estimated 114 865 migrants reached the European coasts; 2398 died in the Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, 181 436 reached Italy and 4578 drowned (1 for every 40 individuals crossing); 90% of these migrants departed from Libya.<sup>3</sup> Health care and rescue activities by non-governmental actors are merely filling the vacuum of responsibility left by states.

There are rarely any signs of hospitality—commonly defined as showing respect for guests, providing for their needs and treating them as equals—for migrants in Europe. As shown in the case study, the perception of being unwelcome and the fear of being deported result in delays in seeking care and deterioration of the migrants' mental and physical health. In addition, access to health care services is limited for undocumented migrants in many European Union countries.<sup>4</sup>

The situation of migrants in Libya is a human rights crisis. Migrants are subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, unlawful killings, sexual exploitation and other human rights abuses. Women are the most exposed, with frequent reports of rape and sexual violence.<sup>5</sup>

Undocumented migrants may come to our clinic

and be diagnosed with tuberculosis. It goes without saying that our duty is to take care of these patients. Though essential, this is merely an ambulance at the bottom of a cliff. Real remedies to the unacceptable suffering of migrants are in the hands of the states, and their moral and legal obligation. As an absolute minimum, solutions such as 'firewalls' should be in place and international treaties respected. In this era of global communication, no-one can pretend they did not know about this tragedy at our door.

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### References

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