

Consell de Formentera president Alejandra Ferrer discussed recent developments surrounding the coronavirus crisis in press conference today, streaming the event on the local government's YouTube channel. As the event wound down, Ferrer took questions from journalists and islanders, the former sending queries to the Department of Citizen Participation's WhatsApp account.

First, on behalf of the local cabinet and members of the opposition party, President Ferrer offered condolences to families who have lost loved ones to Covid-19. And she also highlighted some good news, updating islanders on the improved condition of a Formentera man who is now in a ward at Can Misses, along with the other pair of infected Formentera residents, after spending two weeks in the ICU.

"Unfortunately not all endings are happy, and while new infections may be down, the numbers and total death toll are still alarming", said Ferrer, who insisted the present moment was "no time to let our guard down", pointing to previsions of the devastating effects of a renewed spike in cases and imploring with islanders to "stay at home as long as possible".

Ferrer tempered her comments by telling islanders, "We know just how many of you—employees of businesses classified as 'non-essential'—have been called back to work. Our administration pleaded to have the emergency orders remain in effect, because this is still a health crisis. We also launched a separate appeal so all those unable to return to work could be officially furloughed".

"The request was unsuccessful, so today our message to you is this: if you must return to work, follow safety and hygiene measures and continue personal distancing. The idea as we fight this global pandemic is to keep transmissions to a minimum".

Social safety net

Efforts within the local government are now focused on tending to cases of social urgency, which explains why the administration is helping those most at risk during the Covid-19

pandemic by diverting some €200,000 —a full 20% of Formentera's 2019 budgetary surplus and the maximum allowed by law— to the FDSW. "We're working on directing the remaining €800,000 to responding to this emergency", said Ferrer, who indicated that Formentera and other local administrations had already articulated that very request.

With a caseload currently standing at 750, the FDSW has reported on a 166-point uptick in food voucher claims (as of today the total number is 383) and nearly 200 applicants for "guaranteed social income" (*renda social garantida*). "Our island government is doing absolutely everything we can to offer support those in need", said the president, holding up the recent creation of a new help service for seniors.

Channels of communication

According to Ferrer, another part of the work involves strengthening channels of communication. She pointed to a ramping up of the Consell's morning and afternoon switchboard service — a change which was geared towards expanding the reach of assistance and information to ensure everyone in need could benefit. The last month has seen FDSW extend its services in order to accommodate current demand. A new help service enables the department to check in with local seniors via telephone and keep tabs on over 300 individuals back on the island since the state of alarm was invoked. Improvements can also be observed at the Citizen's Information Office (OAC), with the bureau's virtual arm, the OVAC, reporting a full 100% of services are now online. "Meanwhile, local associations are receiving regular updates from our Department of Citizen Participation", noted Ferrer.

Continued confinement

"We've said it before and we repeat it today: your enormous efforts aren't going unnoticed", Ferrer told islanders as she confirmed the extension of confinement and social distancing orders alike. "And islanders aren't the only ones who've shut themselves off; Formentera has too. We asked as the crisis began for ferry connections to be brought down to the minimum needed for healthcare services and goods. Since 19 March our port handles three daily arrivals and departures, and that's how it will stay until at least 26 April", she said, referring to the predicted end of emergency orders, "though we've already been told of possible extensions".

An average of 19 individuals arrived on the island over the last week, while the week prior to the freeze on non-essential activity saw an average of 50 passengers disembarking every day. "Avoiding this flow was one of the main reasons we urged Madrid to keep non-essential enterprises on hold", said Ferrer. Construction is one area that does fall under the local government's remit, and

The Consell has blocked the return of crews to public works upgrades in Sant Ferran and delayed the scheduled start of activity on the old people's home, though the administration has indicated it will review lifting the moratorium next week if contractors can ensure compliance with safety protocol.

Studying Covid-19 immunity

The percent of coronavirus cases where patients displayed few symptoms or none at all is a data point that will make it possible for calculations to be made about local rates immunity and transmission — crucial for local officials to take decisions accordingly. Ferrer has urged the regional government to see to it that any immunology study account for the unique characteristics of Formentera.

Economic emergency

"To date, talk has focused on the health and social sides of the emergency, but the economic emergency isn't far off", said Ferrer, "indeed, for some of us, it's already here. It's an immensely concerning issue. If we want prosperity, we need social and environmental stability, but we need economic stability, too".

"Yesterday we were told that the tourist season would start in August, but the truth is that previsions are impossible. Our economy is based almost exclusively on tourism, and the islands must form a united front as we ask the central government to step up now and provide what we contributed during our years of plenty. The Balearic region needs a bespoke strategy, and it must take special account of the particularities of Formentera. And likewise, Formentera will need to ask the region for a special Formentera-specific strategy that accounts for the heavily seasonal nature of our economy, low employment in the winter months and the fragility of the tourism industry".

Formentera has asked the Govern balear for island-specific previsions so the island can offer tailor-made solutions to every issue. Ferrer said its petition included "targeted measures for the tourism industry, because we believe it will be the slowest in getting back on its feet" and "economic assistance for employees and employers that specifically takes into account the island's heavily seasonal economy".

Promoting tourism

According to the also chief of tourism, “we’re working with local businesses on a shock plan for tourism that takes into account the breadth of possible scenarios for the start of the tourist season. We need to be certain that both the Consell and private sector are prepared to hit the ground running promoting Formentera as a safe and close destination to travellers—whether they come from elsewhere in the Balearics, mainland Spain and, perhaps, the rest of the world”.

Children and youth

Ferrer directed the final part of her message at young people. “We know just how eager small children and teens are to get out of the house,” she said. “And they deserve to be able to. Unfortunately, emergency orders still in place mean that’s not possible. We’ve asked the authorities to consider the possibility of a relaxation of directives in that regard now that the figures offer reasons to be optimistic”.

To see the entire address, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WX0Vb8TyXbg .

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