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## COVID-19 Personal Reflection

David Valls Manclus

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My name is David Valls and I am originally from Valencia, Spain, and currently a second-year graduate student in the School of Policy and International Affairs at the University of Maine.

When the COVID19 crisis strongly emerged in Spain, my brother, Alvaro who lives in Maine as well, and I decided to go home to spend the self-isolation time with our family being close to them in case of the worse had to happen as we still have loving living grandmothers.

On March 15th we purchased a flight back to Valencia for as soon as we could find, the next day. On March 16th we took the bus from Bangor to Boston Logan Airport, and when we arrived at the airline counter, we were told that our connecting flight from Lisbon to Valencia was canceled due to COVID19. As it turned out, all flights arriving in Spain were canceled after 11:00 PM on that day. Our connecting flight was just a few hours after the lockdown time. No previous notice. No email alert. No call. Nothing.

The airline gave no solution besides purchase another flight with a different airline and no refund option until months after opening an online dispute. Also, not guaranteed refund since this is "not the airline's fault, but the national government's fault".

We called the Spanish embassy and several Spanish consulates throughout the U.S. since we were without a place to go, not much money since we spent a lot in a last-minute flight, and scared to not be able to make it back home with our families.

The Spanish embassy and consulates advised different solutions like using London or Amsterdam as possible layover cities. Neither of them guaranteed they would take any responsibility if we had any issue getting home and got stuck in a foreign city in a layover. One of the consulates even advised getting to Spain with a layover in Portugal, which was our initial flight, the one that got canceled. It seems that they had been advising people to return stopping in Portugal.

Embassies and consulates provide any information in writing and did not offer any direct support besides "personal advise - if I were you" from the person on the phone that was not guaranteed to work, and the most in writing they would give was guiding us to their website to read their recent posts.

Both my brother and I have spent many years in the U.S., therefore, it does not feel very foreign here and we decided to stay since it would be better than taking the chance to be stuck in another country that we don't know.

We both have a mutual friend, a former UMaine alumni, that offered both of us a place to stay in Colorado and we decided to go to a different airline and take the first flight we could find to Colorado where we were able to stay until we are able to go back with our families to Spain.