

COUNTERING XENOPHOBIA AND STIGMA TO FOSTER SOCIAL COHESION IN THE COVID 19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted widespread expressions of mutual solidarity and support from States, civil society and individuals that transcended socioeconomic status and backgrounds. However, it also created generalized fears and worries that have fed off an existing culture of distrust and discrimination against migrants. For example, what begins as personal disagreements over the observance of social distancing rules can quickly turn into racial slander or outright violence against migrants or persons of perceived foreign nationality or origin.

Such incidents of stigmatization and discrimination often happen against the backdrop of broader systemic inequalities that have serious impacts on public health, as well as in other domains, including education, employment, social services and access to justice. Social movements such as ‘Black Lives Matter’ are rooted in the deep-seated and unresolved issues of social justice that the pandemic has helped expose. Such protests, prompted by the death of George Floyd, shows that racism and acts of discrimination based on national or ethnic origin have detrimental effects not only on the safety and human dignity of those who are targeted but also on public health and, more so, on social cohesion.

Government data¹ show that people of minority background, including those of migrant origin, are more likely to die from the disease. While some scientists may seek an explanation of this higher death rate in terms of genetic factors,² others attribute the higher mortality to the systemic inequalities related to social determinants of health such as access to appropriate housing, diet or education.³ The pandemic has brought to the surface these pre-existing inequalities, which put migrants at greater risk of xenophobia and hate crimes, further impacting their mental and physical wellbeing and excluding them from accessing services that are otherwise available to the general population.

As these persisting incidents and expressions of xenophobia have both short and long-term implications for society-at-large, there is an urgent need to explore new ways to address this and identify targeted interventions to effectively counter various forms of intolerance and disparaging expressions towards migrants or people of perceived migrant origin.

¹ UK Office of National Statistics, Coronavirus-related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales methodology, 7 May 2020. Available [here](#) US Center for disease control and prevention, COVID-19 in Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups. Available [here](#)

² Ana Valdes, Coronavirus: BAME deaths urgently need to be understood, including any potential genetic component, The Conversation, 21 May 2020. Available [here](#)

³ Winston Morgan, Genetics is not why more BAME people die of coronavirus: structural racism is, The Guardian 4 June 2020. Available [here](#)

This issue brief first explores the various forms of xenophobic attacks to which migrants have been and continue to be victims during the pandemic and outlines how these attacks undermine social cohesion. It then proposes a number of solutions that States and other relevant actors may consider, ranging from measures aimed at strengthening the legal and policy response to xenophobia and racism, to community-based models to address prejudices and promote social mixing.

1. THE ISSUE: THE ANXIETY AND FEAR GENERATED BY THE PANDEMIC EXACERBATE XENOPHOBIC ATTITUDES AND STIGMATIZATION OF MIGRANTS

Hate and discrimination against migrants in many countries globally is currently exacerbated due to misinformation and fears associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic numerous xenophobic incidents, hate speeches and crimes against persons, on the basis of their real or perceived national origin, have been reported.⁴ On 8 May 2020, the Secretary General of the UN referred to “a tsunami of hate and xenophobia”.⁵ The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance expressed concern about these acts and underlined that they are inconsistent with States’ international human rights law obligations.⁶

Documented cases of racist and xenophobic attacks towards migrants range from hate speech, racial slurs, brutal acts of violence, to discriminating public policies, laws and measures. Recorded incidents include a long list of various and widespread human rights abuses in virtually all regions of the world, as set out below:

- Adopting alternative names for the COVID-19 coronavirus: instead of using the internationally recognized name of the virus, officials have adopted names with geographic references, typically referring to its emergence in China. Yet, as stressed by WHO already in 2015, names of diseases really do matter, as they can stigmatize certain communities and provoke a backlash.⁷
- Sensationalized media reports blaming particular communities for the origin and spread of COVID-19.⁸
- Refusal to sit next to passengers of a certain or perceived ethnic origin on public transports metros and buses.⁹
- Verbal attacks and insults in the streets and in social media.¹⁰
- Violent physical attacks, assaults, throwing stones at people, including towards returning migrants.¹¹

⁴ See for example Human Rights Watch, “[Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide](#)” (12 May 2020).

⁵ [UN Press Note](#).

⁶ OHCHR, “[States should take action against COVID-19-related expressions of xenophobia, says UN expert](#)” (21 March 2020).

⁷ WHO, [World Health Organization Best Practices for the Naming of New Human Infectious Diseases](#) (May 2015).

⁸ *The Guardian*, “[Sensationalist media is exacerbating racist coronavirus fears. We need to combat it](#)” (25 February 2020).

⁹ *The Atlantic*, “[The Other Problematic Outbreak: As the coronavirus spreads across the globe, so too does racism](#)” (13 March 2020).

¹⁰ Euronews, “[COVID-19 and xenophobia: Why outbreaks are often accompanied by racism](#)” (6 March 2020).

[FRA, Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU: Fundamental Rights Implications: Poland](#) (24 March 2020). Page 9.

¹¹ BBC, “[Coronavirus: Student from Singapore hurt in Oxford Street attack](#)” (3 March 2020); *Le Figaro*, “[Coronavirus : quand l'Afrique dénonce la «maladie des blancs»](#)” (28 March 2020). VOA, “[COVID-19 Spread Provokes Anti-Foreigner, Anti-Diaspora Sentiment in Cameroon](#)” (23 March 2020).

- Signs forbidding people of a certain origin from entering restaurants and shops.¹²
- Refusal to rent apartments to persons of a certain or perceived national origin.¹³
- Discriminatory evictions.¹⁴
- Bullying at work and in schools against migrants.
- Termination of employment on the basis of perceived national origin.
- Closing of businesses according to national origin – or permitting shops and businesses to open according to the nationality of its owners.
- Discriminatory mobility restrictions particularly in relation to migrants, including refugees and internally displaced persons or against certain minority groups.¹⁵
- Excessive use of force by law enforcement authorities against migrants to enforce curfews, lockdowns and other measures against COVID-19.¹⁶
- Verbal, political attacks against free movement regimes, such as within the EU.
- Suspending access to education and health care for persons with a certain or perceived national origin.
- Mandatory COVID 19 testing before returning to work applied only to migrants.¹⁷

Xenophobia and hate speeches have also proliferated in the media. Online petitions and social media posts have been maliciously circulated, attracting derogatory comments and violent threats towards migrants.² The new wave of hate incidents has been particularly evident on mainstream media including digital news outlets and social media where fake news and/or ‘misinformation’ related to COVID-19 continuously proliferate.

¹² *Al Jazeera*, “[Complaints of racism mar China's coronavirus response](#)” (26 April 2020).

The New York Times, “[As Coronavirus Spreads, So Does Anti-Chinese Sentiment](#)” (30 January 2020);

Los Angeles Times, “[‘No Chinese’: In petitions, signs and tweets, fear is spreading faster than the coronavirus](#)” (31 January 2020);

Euronews, “[COVID-19 and xenophobia: Why outbreaks are often accompanied by racism](#)” (6 March 2020).

¹³ *UN News*, “[Entretien: Au temps du coronavirus, les “entrepreneurs de l’intolérance” sont à la manœuvre](#)” (16 April 2020);

France24, “[If you're black you can't go out: Africans in China face racism in Covid-19 crackdown](#)” (11 April 2020).

¹⁴ *Quartz Africa*.

¹⁵ Such as Roma and Sinti in some States; see also African migrants in China, Quartz Africa, “[How discrimination towards Africans and China's surveillance state will reset a migration trend](#)” (24 April 2020).

¹⁶ *Amnesty International*, [Americas: Authorities must protect people from COVID-19 instead of resorting to repressive measures](#). See also [Policing the pandemic: Human Rights Violations in the enforcement of COVID-19 measures in Europe](#), Amnesty international 2020.

¹⁷ *The New Humanitarian*, “[Fear and uncertainty for refugees in Malaysia as xenophobia escalates](#)” (25 May 2020).

Too often, migrants are vilified, and the pandemic used as a pretext to spread anti-foreigner narratives that in many cases pre-existed COVID-19 in place of a more balanced perspective taking into consideration also the critical role assumed by migrants as essential workers. Migrants face manifestation of xenophobia along the full arc of their migratory journey -- in countries of transit, where they may be stranded, in countries destination, as well as upon return.¹⁸

Stigmatization is dangerous from a public health perspective. Stigma prompts social isolation of groups and a fear of seeking medical attention, which in turn can undermine the effective inclusion of migrants in the public health response. This situation contributes to increased risk of virus spread and to difficulties in tracking and controlling any new disease outbreak. To effectively fight the spread of the virus, individuals must have access to accurate health advice and adequate healthcare without fear of discrimination or reprisals.

Furthermore, migrants can contribute critically to societal resilience against the outbreak and to recovery, often working in frontline jobs, guaranteeing continuity of production of food, other goods, of distribution and delivery of goods, of care and other essential services.¹⁹ Yet, migrants face disproportionately vulnerabilities and health risks in these essential jobs,²⁰ in addition to the xenophobia and discrimination that may drive them out or prevent them from entering countries where their services are needed.

As many countries have taken the first steps towards easing the lockdown measures and people return to streets, schools, shops, and workplaces, there is a renewed risk of a spike in xenophobic attitudes and discrimination against migrants to which States authorities need to pay due attention, including by raising awareness about migrant contributions to our common safety.

2. KEY SOLUTIONS

Solutions to xenophobic attacks and hate speeches in the context of a pandemic should develop along two lines of interventions: the adoption of solid legal and policy frameworks aimed at preventing xenophobia and hate crimes against migrants and at sanctioning those responsible, while promoting peaceful living in our societies (a); and community-based approaches to reduce prejudice and facilitate social cohesion (b).

a. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS TO PREVENT XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION, AND PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY

With the adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), States condemned racial discrimination and assumed obligations to eliminate any forms of xenophobic attitudes or stigma and promote social cohesion.

¹⁸ OCHA, "[UN supports Myanmar nationals returning from abroad](#)" (17 April 2020).

¹⁹ For example, nearly 37 per cent of all services and sales workers in Switzerland and 17 per cent of skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers in the United Kingdom in 2015/16 were foreign-born. See OECD, [Recent Trends in International Migration of Doctors, Nurses and Medical Students](#) (25 July 2019); see also [Global Migration Data Portal](#) (accessed 9 June 2020).

²⁰ As an illustration, among the 15 countries most affected by COVID-19, available international data show that at least 10 countries – the United States, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Canada and Switzerland -- depend on foreign-born workers in the critical sector of healthcare services. On the higher end, 47 per cent of doctors and 32 per cent of nurses in Switzerland in 2015/6 were foreign-born. On the lower end, four per cent of doctors in Italy and four per cent of nurses in Spain were foreign-born ([ibid.](#)). Taken from [Global Migration Data Portal](#), available at <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-data-relevant-covid-19-pandemic> (accessed 9 June 2020).

Pursuant to ICERD, States are obliged to criminalize [acts of racial discrimination or hate crimes](#) and ensure that such acts are duly investigated, and that those responsible are held accountable in conformity with national law and international obligations.²¹ States parties are also encouraged to consider in their legislation the commission of an offence for racial reasons as an aggravating circumstance.²² Legislative guarantees against racial discrimination should also apply to non-citizens, irrespective of their migration status.²³

Victims of discrimination or xenophobic attacks should have access to effective remedies.²⁴ This can be achieved if information and support, including legal advice, are made available to migrants to report xenophobic attacks as well as other acts of discrimination or abuse, and that protection measures from reprisals, including by immigration enforcement, are in place.

In countries in lockdown, the increased number of police officers patrolling the streets created situations in which migrants in an irregular situation were often afraid to leave their homes even to shop basic supplies. As a consequence, migrants experienced increased feelings of social isolation and anxiety.²⁵ In some instances, police used excessive force towards migrants negatively impacting the State efforts to countering the spread of xenophobia.²⁶ States need to respond to these situations with great resolution by promptly investigating cases where public officials are involved and sanctioning those responsible.

It is essential to also criminalize extreme forms of [hate speech](#),²⁷ including incitement to discrimination and violence, and to hold perpetrators accountable, in order to deter such conducts and promote compliance with the rule of law.

Easy and widespread access to the internet means that online reporting mechanisms have great potential. However, in order for migrants to be able to use these mechanisms, internet access needs to be inclusive. Firstly, migrants need to be digitally included – they need to possess the appropriate skills, equipment and connectivity. Secondly, migrants with irregular status should not be penalized for reporting hate speeches or other hate crimes (e.g. they should not fear deportation if they do so).

Selected example:

- The Anti-Discrimination Office of Styria (Austria) set up an app “Ban Hate”, which allows to report online hate speech, and has noted an increase of incidents reported against migrants/refugees since COVID-19.²⁸

²¹ Article 4 and General Recommendation no. 31 (2005), p. 3.

²² CERD, General Recommendation no. 31 (2005), p. 3.

²³ CERD, General Recommendation no. 30 (2005), p. 2.

²⁴ Article 6 ICERD

²⁵ See for example the summary of the COVID 19 rapid assessment with migrant association in Italy referred to in IOM, DISC Digest Special Edition, [“No Social Exclusion in ‘Social’ Distancing: Leaving No Migrants Behind in COVID-19 Response”](#). P.13.

²⁶ In Croatia for instance while the Ministry of Interior, contributed to disseminate facts when he responded to allegations about asylum seekers being perceived as spreading COVID-19 by clarifying that asylum seekers residing in Croatian shelters were not infected, there have been allegations about police brutalities against migrants and refugees. See L. Tondo, [Crosses on our heads to 'cure' Covid-19: refugees report abuse by Croatian police](#), The Guardian, 28 May 2020.

²⁷ Article 4 ICERD.

²⁸ FRA, [Coronavirus Pandemic in the EU: Fundamental Rights Implications](#) (April 2020) Page 33.

In the specific context of the COVID 19 pandemic, States - national and local authorities – should strive to ensure that any [communication to the public](#) about the disease and its spread is based on facts and scientific data and does not contribute to xenophobia, racial discrimination or hate crimes. It is essential to curb fears and build trust by, for instance, adhering to official key lexicon and only using the official name of the disease, instead of stigma-creating alternatives.²⁹ Rather than referring to specific nationalities or their “citizens”, the use of inclusive language by States addressing all people on their territory can be conducive to greater social cohesion.³⁰ All public officials, from law enforcement to service providers, should be sensitized about the importance of using correct terminology when communicating to the public about the disease to avoid any intended or unintended discrimination.

Selected example:

- The Spanish government expressly condemned in a press statement any manifestation of xenophobia linked to COVID-19.³¹

With respect to hateful content spread online, some States have adopted laws that require companies to remove unlawful content from their platform. It is important that such laws are clear about the prohibited content and strike a fair balance between the public interest in curbing hate speeches and the right to freedom of expression.³²

Selected example:

- The UN has issued guidelines and developed its own online campaign, [Verified](#), to respond to COVID-19-related hate speech and misinformation by delivering curated and verified content for wide dissemination through a network of digital responders.³³

b. COMMUNITY-BASED MODELS TO ADDRESS PREJUDICE AND XENOPHOBIA

A framework of clearly defined and comprehensive anti-hate crime policies and legislation, based on the norms and standards of international human rights law, is an integral part of any effective response to rising xenophobic attacks and violence.

²⁹ WHO, “[Director-General's remarks at the media briefing on 2019-nCoV on 11 February 2020](#)” (11 February 2020); WHO, [Social Stigma associated with COVID-19: A guide to preventing and addressing social stigma](#) (24 February 2020).

³⁰ Jo Vearey, “[Why xenophobia is bad for the health of all in South Africa](#)” (4 March 2020).

³¹ FRA, [Coronavirus Pandemic in the EU: Fundamental Rights Implications](#) (April 2020) Page 35.

³² For a discussion about what can be considered as proportionate in light of human rights standards see Special Rapporteur on Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Report to the General Assembly, UN Doc. A/74/486 (9 October 2019), from para. 29.

³³ <https://news.un.org>

However, the legislative and policy efforts aimed at curbing hate crimes and speeches have to be complemented by interventions that take into consideration the ordinariness of everyday prejudice in terms of verbal abuse and incivility; pity and sympathy; or unwittingly derogatory language, including when they do not amount to crimes. As a result of this ordinariness, many individuals fail to recognize their own beliefs and actions as a form of prejudice.³⁴

Prejudice-reduction strategies face the challenge of a broad spectrum of these ‘everyday’ prejudices, ranging from overt – sometimes violent – action, which may be punishable by law, to much more subtle, sometimes even unconscious, forms. The generalized fear and worries caused by a pandemic – i.e. a perceived or real ‘threat’ – can bring out the worst in all of us and transform implicit bias into more blatant forms of discrimination.³⁵

Social mixing

The range of possible interventions is as broad as the spectrum of prejudices, but the most widespread approach is that of ‘social mixing’. It is dictated by the premise that if prejudice is the result of false beliefs, misconceptions and stereotypes, discovering their inaccuracy through contact with different groups of people will result in improved attitudes and greater inter-group inclusivity.³⁶

Social mixing strategies are an important part of community-led migrant inclusion initiatives in towns and cities (particularly more deprived areas) in Europe and elsewhere. Neighbourhood associations, local charities and NGOs, sometimes in collaboration with or with explicit support from local authorities, enable low-threshold encounters between local populations and newly arrived migrants. These encounters can take a number of forms, including language cafés, gardening, arts projects and other leisure activities.³⁷

Local and national authorities – concerned about growing local resentment towards support provided to newcomers - have also started to integrate social mixing strategies in their activities. These include traditional migrant inclusion activities (e.g. employment, vocational training or housing initiatives) and broader national youth engagement or educational strategies, relying on non-traditional actors, such as sports associations, arts councils, public libraries, philanthropic foundations and the private sector.³⁸

³⁴ The Scottish Government, [What works to reduce prejudice and discrimination: A review of the evidence](https://www.gov.scot/publications/works-reduce-prejudice-discrimination-review-evidence/) (October 2015). Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/works-reduce-prejudice-discrimination-review-evidence/> p.10

³⁵ Ibid. p. 11.

³⁶ Ibid, p.14

³⁷ IOM/MPI (forthcoming). [Social Innovation in times of crisis: Lessons learned from large-scale migration flows for cities under the pandemic.](#)

³⁸ Patuzzi, Liam. 2020. [European Cities on the Front Line: New and emerging governance models for migrant inclusion.](#) Brussels and Geneva: Migration Policy Institute Europe and International Organization for Migration.

Social connection and COVID-19

In the present context in which COVID-19-related measures led to the closure of public spaces and leisure centres where face-to-face social mixing can take place, digital solutions have been explored.

Selected example prior to the pandemic, the *#TuCausaEsMiCausa* campaign in Peru (supported by IOM, UNHCR and local NGOs) facilitated a diverse set of activities, ranging from cultural and sporting activities to public meetups between the local population and Venezuelan migrants.³⁹ During the COVID-19 response, social mixing activities were moved online: a live-streamed cooking class, an at-home talent contest for both Venezuelans and Peruvians, and live storytelling from a children's author.

Other groups have used non-digital forms of communication, such as letters, phone calls or even in-person contact: the UK's All Parliamentary Group recommended that maintaining social connections be integrated into the daily activities of organizations delivering food and medicines to isolated individuals.⁴⁰

Migrant volunteering has also shown great potential. Traditional volunteer programmes foresee local (non-migrant) populations voluntarily supporting newly arrived migrants in need – but the spontaneous outpouring of support and 'mutual aid' has led some migrants to reverse the logic of volunteering. Such migrant-led volunteering has not only exposed local populations to people they have not met before, but media coverage of these and other initiatives has widened exposure and shown a different face of the pandemic: diverse groups of people are united in solidarity to respond.

Selected examples include the Vietnamese community in Poland producing and donating medical supplies to local hospitals;⁴¹ Syrian refugees in the UK signing up as volunteers to help the elderly and vulnerable;⁴² and migrants in Djibouti producing hospital equipment with 3-D technology in 'fab labs'.⁴³

Impacts

The impacts of social mixing activities are often difficult to gauge. Due to their largely small scales and budget and time constraints evidence from evaluations of events or initiatives is limited and there are few opportunities to learn from practice.

However, the available findings from both academic studies and initiatives on the ground strongly suggest that social mixing has particularly positive impacts on those who previously had little or no association with other groups of people.⁴⁴

³⁹ IOM, DISC Digest Special Edition, "No Social Exclusion in 'Social' Distancing: Leaving No Migrants Behind in COVID-19 Response" Page 13.

⁴⁰ All Parliamentary Group on Social Integration (2020), *Social Connection in the COVID 19 Crisis*.

⁴¹ European Website on Integration, 'The Vietnamese Community in Poland Supports Fight Against COVID-19', updated 30 March 2020.

⁴² Diarmuid MacDonagh, 'Coronavirus: Syrian Refugees in Dorset to Help the Vulnerable', Dorset Echo, 1 April 2020.

⁴³ UN Story

⁴⁴ Pettigree and Tropp (2008). How does inter-group contact reduce prejudice?, *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.* 38, 922–934 (2008)

Selected example:

An exploratory evaluation of the IOM Global Migration Film Festival, based on a pre- and post-event questionnaire with 4,000 respondents in 40 different countries, confirmed these findings. The evaluation found that change towards a more positive perception of migrants following the event was most significant among those who had no previous interactions with migrants. At the same time, the evaluation revealed persistent 'implicit bias' within the festival's audience. The overwhelmingly well-educated, wealthy and relatively young audience had a very positive perception of migrants after the screening (74%). However, only half of attendees reported that migrants can be trusted and slightly under 60% believed that they enrich cultural life.⁴⁵

Communication

The impacts of social mixing interventions are often limited to the group directly exposed to the event or initiative. Media-based 'anti-prejudice campaigns' and public education initiatives are intended to correct negative stereotypes that persist in public discourse. An underlying assumption of these initiatives is that repeated exposure to information about other groups, which challenge and alter the way people think about those other groups, will lead to a shift in attitudes.

Such media campaigns tend to fall into a few categories: general awareness-raising; encouraging the reporting of discrimination and abuse; and campaigns targeting certain groups or particular settings (e.g. sports or schools).⁴⁶

Selected example:

A number of campaigns have been launched to counter stigmatization of particular groups, in particular migrants. The campaign "hashtag lamnovirus" started in France (#Jenesuispasunvirus),⁴⁷ but similar initiatives followed in many other countries, such as Austria, Italy, Germany and Spain.⁴⁸

Conveying information about the pandemic in real time and through digital media has been an important lifeline for many during lockdown and physical restrictions, including migrants. However, such media are also the main dissemination channel for misinformation, rumours and outright hatred. Governments, NGOs and other civil society actors had already been tracking, monitoring and encouraging the reporting of online hate speech, but COVID-19 has given these activities new urgency. In addition to general awareness-raising campaigns in social media, innovative initiatives have sought to involve the communities most affected by hate speech in the development of effective tools to address harms caused through digital channels, particularly social media platforms.

⁴⁵ See 'United We Watch: a pilot study of the effect of the Global Migration Film Festival on social cohesion.' At: <https://www.iom.int/xenophobia>.

⁴⁶ The Scottish Government, What works to reduce prejudice and discrimination: A review of the evidence (October 2015). Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/works-reduce-prejudice-discrimination-review-evidence/>

⁴⁷ BBC, "Coronavirus: French Asians hit back at racism with 'I'm not a virus'" (29 January 2020).

⁴⁸ FRA, [Coronavirus Pandemic in the EU: Fundamental Rights Implications](#) (April 2020), Page 36.

Selected example:

In response to an increase in online hate speech against women during COVID-19, alliance F, a Swiss women's rights organization, developed an online mechanism to track instances of hate speech against women of different backgrounds and organize and evaluate the effectiveness of targeted messages in response.⁴⁹ Volunteer communities have been involved at every stage of the development and implementation of the tool.⁵⁰

c. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS ON COUNTERING XENOPHOBIA AND STIGMATIZATION IN ALL THE PHASES OF THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Enhance legislative and policy frameworks against hate crime and its implementation, including improved access to remedies

- Adopt adequate legislative measures to criminalize xenophobic violence, racist attacks and hate crimes, hold those responsible accountable, including for acts against non-citizens.
- Grant access to remedies to the victims of hate crimes, irrespective of their nationality and status.
- Address cases where public officials are involved in excessive use of force due to racial motives with particular resolution, by conduct a prompt investigation and sanction those responsible in compliance with international human rights law.

Proactively address xenophobia and hate speech in online fora

- Ensure that rules on social media content and moderation are clear about which specific content is prohibited and strike a fair balance between the public interest in curbing hate speeches against migrants and the right to freedom of expression.
- Enhance monitoring and reporting on the nature, scale and impacts of COVID-19- related xenophobia and hate speech. NGOs and international organizations, in collaboration with public equality bodies, tech companies and research institutions, should develop relevant tools for more effective monitoring of online hate speech.
- Involve communities most affected by online hate speech in the development of effective tools to address harms caused through digital channels, especially social media platform. NGOs, in collaboration with tech companies, online media, research institutions, should co-design relevant tools with affected communities and evaluate their effectiveness through the use of big data.
- Take active measures to address digital exclusions of particularly vulnerable groups, including supporting digital literacy, access to internet and digital equipment. Tech companies, NGOs, governments and international organization should ensure equitable access to online resources

⁴⁹ <https://fr.alliancef.ch/projets>

⁵⁰ <https://stophatespeech.ch/>

against xenophobia and mechanism of reporting against hate crime.

Promote an evidence-based and stigma-free language in all communication channels that respects and empowers people.

- Ensure that any communication to the public about the disease and its spread is based on facts and scientific data.
- Adhere to official key lexicon and only using the official name of the disease, instead of stigma-creating alternatives and use inclusive language
- All public officials, from law enforcement to service providers, should be sensitized about the importance of using correct terminology when communicating to the public about the disease.

Strengthen 'whole of community' approaches to reducing prejudice and promoting social cohesion

- Embed considerations of social connections and community cohesion into the government's overall response to the crisis and the work of NGOs and community-based organizations involved in targeted outreach to vulnerable migrant and non-migrant groups within the community. Social connection activities can reduce anxieties related isolation and encourage empathy Targeted activities to facilitate social interaction between migrants and local communities has been credited with reducing anxiety and encouraging mutual empathy between those groups.
- Promote evaluation and sharing of good practices to maintain social connections between migrants and non-migrant local population during lockdowns and mobility restrictions. International Organizations, local governments, NGOs, and research institutions should support evaluations and share good practices of online and offline activities for broader replication.
- Support volunteering activities that show diverse groups of people are united in solidarity to respond the pandemic. COVID-19 has thrown into sharp relief the key role of migrant associations in ensuring a coordinated, whole-of-community response to crisis. Local government should strategically invest into this spontaneous volunteering through strengthening networks of migrant associations with other local actors, facilitating their access to decision-making and co-creation of interventions concerning inter-communal relation
- Establish strong consultative mechanisms involving NGOs, migrant associations, businesses and other civil society organisations, who can voice the specific concerns of their constituencies related to any increase in xenophobic sentiment and hatred.

Develop and strengthen prejudice-reduction and anti-discrimination measures within recovery plans

- Integrate and strengthen prejudice-reduction and anti-discrimination measures within mainstream policies such as housing, employment, healthcare and policing that are relevant for effective prevention of COVID.
- Establish mechanisms for collecting data disaggregated by migration status and other relevant characteristics in order to improve the understanding of the socio-economic impact of COVID and inform future policies.

Watch the related video [HERE](#).

For additional information on this Brief please contact: iml@iom.int or jkoehler@iom.int

To receive more Issue Briefs, please sign-up [HERE](#).

The opinions expressed in this Issue Brief do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.