



IOM Initiatives on Countering Xenophobia and Promoting Migrant Inclusion

Leaving No Migrants Behind in COVID-19 Response



Featured IOM Initiatives

Throughout the world, governments are taking decisive measures to counter the outbreak which range from physical distancing, imposing travel restrictions, and shutdown of economic activities, posing severe burden among migrants' health, socio-economic condition, physical security and mobility. While doing so,

efforts are made by IOM country missions around the world to mitigate COVID-19 related risks and impacts and ensure that such measures do not have unintended negative consequences to those already in vulnerable situations.

Digital media campaigns on countering xenophobia, stigma, and fake news



Stigma can undermine social cohesion within communities and prompt possible social exclusion of certain groups, including migrants. As migrants continue to bear the brunt of hate speech, racial slurs that have proliferated in various media platforms, some IOM missions have used the same platforms to counter fake news and promote positive stories on migration.

[IOM Mexico](#) launched a social media campaign, "[COVID 19 does not discriminate, why do you?](#)" through social networks with the aim of sensitizing citizens about the importance of avoiding xenophobia and hate speech towards migrants during the COVID-19 emergency.

[IOM Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) promotes "[Mi O Nama](#)" online campaign to promote positive stories of frontliners and [#StayAtHome campaign](#) where everyday, various children's audio books are read, targeting parents and

children to promote positive atmosphere and learning in the midst of quarantine.

[IOM Armenia](#) rolled out "[Sincere Talk](#)" campaign to raise awareness of health-related issues among migrants and the population at large. Originally designed to counter HIV-related stigma, the campaign creates a supportive virtual environment where all demographics can disclose their concerns and seek information.

[IOM iDiaspora](#) recently launched a [Joint Statement of Solidarity](#) to raise awareness on xenophobia, calling on diaspora organizations to support this campaign. This advocacy recognizes that migrants and diaspora organizations play a key role in promoting solidarity and safeguarding their communities by tackling xenophobia.





Targeted communications and awareness-raising initiatives for migrants and communities

To ensure that public health information and associated risks are communicated in a timely, accessible and culturally appropriate ways, IOM missions have recognized the imperative of investing in multilingual and targeted communications and awareness raising activities not just for migrants but also for host communities.

IOM Italy has developed targeted and multilingual messages for municipal actors and migrants to raise awareness about COVID-19 and accompany migrants' specific needs. Through the Admin4All project, they have provided municipalities materials on [support measures for housing, work and business](#) among migrant populations, [social implications](#) of COVID-19, [audio clips](#) and [informative videos](#) as well as [infosheets](#) translated in 38 languages.

IOM Brazil conducts [online courses](#) for public services' employees and [trainings for migrants and refugees](#) which include dedicated content

and case studies on COVID-19. Implemented within the framework of Project Oportunidades, these courses aim to prepare government actors and migrants to respond to diverse challenges on migrant integration, including social protection in crisis situations and mitigating the risks of public health emergencies like COVID-19, Ebola, etc.

IOM Thailand has produced several multilingual [practical guidance](#) for [employers of domestic workers](#) to address associated risks and [migrant workers](#) whose job has been affected as a result of imposed measures. An [animated video](#) has also been produced to orient migrants on COVID-19, border closure and travel restrictions.

IOM UK runs a [multilingual website](#) and a telephone service which provides information to migrants on 5 key topics: health, work, benefits, visas and immigration, housing and homelessness, as well as available support schemes from both governments and NGOs.

Virtual counseling and lessons for migrants

To ensure continuity of services and activities for migrant education and training, several IOM missions has set-up remote communication mechanisms such as virtual language classes, counseling and literacy programs on a range of topics for both young and adult migrants.

IOM Indonesia provides [reimbursement of Internet quotas](#) on top of monthly subsistence allowances to continue virtual education of refugees and asylum-seekers enrolled in standard schooling and adult literacy programs. IOM Indonesia serves as bridge for teacher-parent interaction and also as a helpdesk for parents and school children in need of guidance for completion of assignments, in view of language barriers. They also continue providing their psychological and clinical services through online counseling.



IOM Peru participates in the inter-agency [#TuCausaEsMiCausa Initiative](#) where refugees and migrants from Venezuela are offering [online classes](#) on how to produce masks, cultivate vegetables at home, on topics such as art history, marketing, technical vocations, or leading exercise classes. These courses are offered to host and migrant populations.

IOM Slovakia runs a Migrant Information Center which now delivers [online course on Slovak language and lessons on social and cultural orientation](#) for citizens of non-EU countries through the use of the [BlueJeans platform](#), complementing their other integration package services on legal advice, job counseling, etc.





Empowering migrant communities to contribute to the COVID-19 response

Migrants are often portrayed as vulnerable and in need of assistance, which often can downplay their skills and creativity to contribute to society. Several IOM missions have leveraged migrants' resourcefulness by involving them to contribute in the fight against COVID-19.

[IOM Azerbaijan](#) supported a group of victims of trafficking to produce home-made masks to essential service providers in their neighbourhood in the capital Baku. This helps to reduce the shortage of personal protection equipment in Azerbaijan, where the country encounter disruptions in medical supplies.

[IOM Indonesia](#) supported refugee and asylum seekers to produce cloth masks for refugee populations and local communities as part of the MHPSS program to maintain their psychosocial wellbeing.

[IOM Gambia](#), as part of their reintegration assistance, supported 20 migrant returnees produced up to 2,000 protective suits and shoe coverings for the use of frontline immigration and border officials.

[IOM Djibouti](#) supported the [set up of a digital training space](#) for young migrants to supply protective face shields to health workers. Digital machines – like 3D printers and laser cutters – are deployed to make medical face shields for the government at a time of critical shortage.

[Migrants as Messengers Project](#), engaged 248 volunteers from seven West African countries, who are returning migrants, in peer-to-peer communication trainings to spread the word about the pandemic in local languages or dialects in vulnerable communities.

Providing migrant assistance related to housing and eviction



Even before the pandemic, housing has already been an issue for migrants. As the pandemic rose, eviction of migrants and migrant households from their accommodations has even become a major concern, not only that it is inconsistent with the 'stay home' policies of governments but also because it exposes migrants to further health and physical risks.

[IOM Tunisia](#) provides legal assistance for migrant families who have been evicted as a result of COVID through dedicated help of lawyers in mediation. This complements their assistance to migrants which includes

offering food vouchers, medical and psychosocial assistance, as well as their advocacy efforts for migrant inclusion in social policies.

[IOM Greece](#) offers beneficiaries under the HELIOS Project [support in finding accommodation](#), providing rental subsidies and targeted assistance through specialized workshops and one-to-one sessions, and interpretation support. Multilingual Whatsapp helplines are also being run for booking appointments to seek support and counseling in response to mobility restrictions.





Featured IOM Rapid Assessment Reports

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Insights on the exclusionary impacts of COVID-19 among migrants in vulnerable conditions



IOM country offices have conducted rapid assessments with key stakeholders to improve understanding of COVID-19-related vulnerabilities among migrant populations. This section features key findings from key informant interviews conducted with stakeholders in Italy, Georgia and Thailand. While small-scale and non-representative, they nevertheless provide interesting insights into the struggles and concerns of migrants in both developing and developed countries.

- Pre-literate migrant populations are particularly in danger of being excluded from risk communications, even where such communications are translated in the language of migrants

In Thailand, key informants estimated that approximately half of the migrants in their communities have no or little awareness of hand-washing practices and it is believed that most migrants are not able to identify COVID-19 symptoms. Aside from the lack of information, education and communication materials in the language of the migrants, respondents also cited lack of literacy as an important reason for this limited awareness of crucial information among their migrant populations. In Georgia, nearly one fifth of respondents are not able to

understand either English or Georgian, experiencing language barriers.

- Even when migrants are aware of hygiene and sanitation practices to prevent the spread COVID-19, they do not always have the means to implement them

Most key informants in the Thai survey estimated that over three-quarters of migrants did not have access to hand sanitizers or masks. While most informants agreed that soap for handwashing is more widely available among migrants than other personal protective equipment, a number of them believed that only a minority of migrants in their communities had daily access to soap.





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- Certain myths and misinformation about COVID-19 exist among migrant communities that put them at increased risk

Almost half of the key informants in Thailand agreed that there is a widespread belief among migrant communities that COVID-19 can be avoided or cured by using herbal remedies or consuming certain kinds of food. In Italy, migrant associations indicated that they had to be active in countering rumours and misinformation about the virus in their communities (such as that it only affects those of Caucasian origin).

- Limited access to data, connectivity and technical equipment exacerbates existing social isolation among migrants and constrains access to timely risk communications and basic services

Access to data and internet connections is a basic need for populations in lockdown. The rapid assessment of migrant associations in Italy showed that they had to support members who were no longer able to pay internet bills and thus risked being cut off from both official communications on the virus and the emotional support of friends and family members. In addition, migrant families often lacked the technological equipment (e.g. computers and printers) required to apply online for benefits and other services.

- Quarantine measures affect migrants' mobility and economic and psychological situations

Afraid to leave their homes to shop basic supplies, because of increased police controls, migrants in Italy often lack food and medicines. In situations where people mostly rely on income generated through day-to-day and informal jobs, quarantine measures have also affected people's ability to leave their homes and to earn a living, increasing the feeling of social isolation and stress. In Georgia, most acute needs identified result from loss of income (direct or indirect).

- Reaching the invisible through migrant associations is key

Migrant associations in Italy are the first trusted contact for help for undocumented members of their communities. Through associations, large numbers of undocumented migrants could be reached and assisted, a category of people otherwise very difficult to intercept and for whom life-saving services are almost impossible to access.

Download the reports below:

- IOM Thailand's [Rapid Assessment: COVID-19 Related Vulnerabilities and Perceptions of Non-Thai Population in Thailand](#)
- IOM Georgia's [Rapid needs assessment: COVID-19 related vulnerabilities, risks and needs among third country migrants in Georgia](#)
- IOM Italy's [COVID-19 Rapid Assessment with Migrant Associations in Italy](#) and [Summary](#)



DISC Initiative

The Joint Global Initiative on Diversity,
Inclusion and Social Cohesion

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this digest are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

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