These COVID-19 Analytical Snapshots are designed to capture the latest information and analysis in a fast-moving environment. Topics will be repeated from time to time as analysis develops.
If you have an item to include, please email us at research@iom.int.

Misinformation, fake news and the instrumentalization of the COVID-19 pandemic

The stigmatization of migrants and instances of discrimination against them have been exacerbated by misinformation and fake news in the media, especially social media, and the politicization of the issue.

The pandemic has been exploited by anti-migrant, far-right and hate groups, with conspiracy theories circulating on the origin of the virus. While some have been claiming that COVID-19 is a bioweapon or is linked to 5G connectivity, others have pointed to migration and migrants as the cause of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The stigmatization of migrants is here symptomatic of the overload of information on social media over which there is little control and which is instrumentalized for political and other interests.

Misinformation and the "bots" who spread it

Some anti-migrant or xenophobic actors have created social media accounts that impersonate individuals but merely proliferate misinformation. Find out a few tips to distinguish real users from the "bots" here.

The COVID-19 "misinfo-demic"

The proliferation of misinformation about migrants and migration has only intensified with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. UN Secretary General António Guterres has called the parallel outbreak of falsehoods an "misinfo-demic" and called for care in the dissemination of information to prevent confusion during this public health crisis.

Click here to connect to the video.

IOM Social Media Campaign in Mexico

IOM's Office in Mexico City has begun a social media campaign directed to counteract misinformation and fear.

> ❝ *What is sought is to inform, train and sensitize citizens and public officials that any migrant is as vulnerable to COVID-19 as any other, and that it is necessary to promote public policies for the elimination of these specific vulnerabilities and stigmas that these people face.*

- Christopher Gascon, IOM Chief of Mission, Mexico

20 April 2020

Resources on COVID-19, misinformation and migration

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public: Myth busters by the World Health Organization. (Also available in Arabic, Mandarin, French, Russian and Spanish.)

Covid-19 Disinformation Briefings #1 and #2 by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue

When Facts Don't Matter: How to Communicate More Effectively about Immigration's Costs and Benefits by Natalie Banulescu-Bogdan

Here's how social media can combat the coronavirus "infodemic" by Joan Donavan

5 charts that bust myths about migration by Marie McAuliffe and Adrian Kitimbo

Distinguishing the real from the fake

Beyond the immediate public health concerns faced by migrants living in close quarters, there is also a concern that misinformation may exacerbate the spread of COVID-19 among migrants and refugees.

Erroneous information spread via messaging groups and social media sometimes promotes treatments that have no proven record of effect on COVID-19 symptoms. Some messaging app companies have tried to take action to prevent the transmission of falsehoods, but it remains an issue.

In other cases, rumors spread online can keep people fearful of accessing crucial essential goods, including food or health care. When trust in governmental institutions was low prior to the outbreak, the setup of emergency programs directly to service migrants can still be met with skepticism.

SIFT approach to migration & health news

Stop
Investigate the source
Find better coverage
Trace claims, quotes and media to the original context.

Source: Mike Caulfield; also available at Project Information Literacy

Misinformation data as migration data

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, public health experts have begun suggesting that misinformation must be tracked and classified with the same rigor as shown in the traditional corpus of public health data. In parallel, tracking misinformation and disinformation as integral parts of migration data may help future analyses.