

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic¹ on March 11, 2020. Stigmatization of certain groups during crisis situations is not new. Many diseases have been associated to “foreigners”, blaming migrants as responsible for cholera, HIV/AIDS and H1N1 influenza². To prevent stigmatization, the name of a disease should not refer to a geographical location (ex. Spanish Flew), an individual or group of people³.

MIGRANTS' STIGMATIZATION AND DISCRIMINATION

In the context of COVID-19 pandemics stigmatization and discrimination towards migrants compromises themselves as well as host societies. Stigma may drive people to hide the illness, prevent people from seeking health care immediately, and discourage them from the adoption of healthy behaviours⁴. Migrants may face obstacles in accessing health care, such as: language and cultural barriers, lack of inclusive health policies, discriminatory behaviours from health care personnel and the fear of getting arrested or deported by authorities. The United Nations Secretary General appealed for a major collective effort to end hate speech globally, asking political leaders to incorporate all members of their societies into their countries' responses to the pandemic and calling on all media, especially social media companies, to redouble their efforts in the communication field to remove content linked to racist, misogynist and other harmful content⁵.

The International Organization for Migration recognizes the danger to our societies posed by the misinformation feeding xenophobia and the stigmatization of migrants and other vulnerable groups. IOM has issued guidance (Public Communication Campaign Toolkit)⁶ on producing communication campaigns both during the pandemic and other migration contexts.

Considering the increase of discriminatory and xenophobic incidents since the onset of the COVID-19 ("The virus comes from abroad"⁷), some measures have been put in place to prevent and/or minimize discrimination against migrants, as well as disseminating the rights to which they are entitled. Illustration of a few examples:



Argentine Republic

The Observatory of the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI) elaborated a guide with the rights and guarantees that migrants and refugees have during the pandemic such as housing rights, health care access, work, legal advice and documentation⁸.



Plurinational State of Bolivia

The Ombudsman's Office stated⁹ that humanitarian aid should be guaranteed to ensure food, water and sanitation for the elderly and, that special attention should be given to those groups of old people who suffer multiple additional impacts from COVID-19, such as immigrants, women, indigenous people, people of African descent, members of the LGBTI community, among others.



Republic of Chile

The National Institute of Human Rights has held¹⁰ multiple forums to make human rights violations more visible in events such as the pandemic and for human rights advocacy in crisis contexts when thousands of people, especially those most vulnerable to the disease by their socio-economic status, age or other, are more exposed.



Republic of Peru

The Peruvian Ombudsman's Office outlined¹¹ the need to include the refugee and migrant population in the public policies to reduce gaps in the fulfillment of their rights and facilitate their economic and social integration.

THE MIGRANTS' CONTRIBUTION

Migrant's direct and indirect contributions to host communities must be acknowledged, as they are often not properly valued or are simply ignored¹². Thus, in the context of the pandemic, migrants play an essential role both in the response for mitigation and recovery. In South America, it is evident the positive contribution that foreign health care personnel - from nurses to specialist doctors - make to the countries' health systems in the fight against COVID-19¹³.

Also, other essential contributions must be mentioned: agricultural workers - vital for ensure the availability of food-, household personnel - cleaning, maintenance, assistance, non-therapeutic care, etc., personnel from supermarkets, warehouses and delivery platforms, etc. In addition to labour force, migrants provide a source of dynamism and innovation, creating new patents, start-ups and companies¹⁴, which will be key in the recovery plans where it will be necessary to adapt to the conditions of the "new normality".



These infosheets have been elaborated by the Migration Analysis Unit of the IOM Regional Office for South America. These documents are designed to capture the most recent information in a fast-moving environment.



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