

COVID-19

Guidance, resources and content to support journalists responding to rumours and misinformation about COVID-19



Guidance: How to prevent stigma and discrimination of migrant workers



In Ethiopia, a social worker walks to a quarantine center where migrants returning from the middle east are checked for COVID-19. By UNICEFEthiopi/2020/NahomTefaye

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided an opportunity for some [right-wing and radical groups](#) to exploit existing prejudice in our communities. In some contexts, especially in South Asia, social media platforms are being used to inflame stigma and discrimination towards migrant workers.

Migrant workers are already among those most impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak, with economic activity severely disrupted and many migrants being hosted in countries where health systems are under-capacitated or unavailable to migrant populations. The situation for those migrant workers currently living in

cramped and unsanitary conditions, or being forced to return to their homes in the absence of a socio-economic safety net, is of great concern.

As journalists, how can we intervene early to unite, rather than divide our communities, neutralise stigma, and avoid fanning community bias and anxieties?

Reiterate – Migrant workers are not a health risk and migration does not cause COVID-19

As a journalist, you can counter the narrative that migrant workers are bringing COVID-19, and returnees are a risk to communities. Many have endured verbal and physical assaults, and at times, institutional exclusion from the receiving society. Even those who were fortunate enough to have been able to return to their own countries of origin still face stigma, discrimination, and exclusion even from their own countrymen and women.

In order not to worsen an already tenuous situation, you have a moral and social responsibility of doing no harm in your reporting.

You can advocate for their health to be protected. According to the [World Health Organization](#) all countries have an obligation to protect and promote the right to health for all people on their territory, without discrimination, and this includes migrants regardless of their status. According to the WHO, stigma can drive people to hide their illnesses to avoid discrimination, preventing them from seeking immediate health care.

Advocate for migrant workers' access to free screening and treatment for COVID-19 without the fear of arrest or detention

Journalists can also advocate for governments to provide all migrant workers and their families, regardless of their status, access to free screening, and treatment for COVID-19 without the fear of arrest and detention.

Migrant workers and their families are also media audiences and journalists can provide them with correct and up-to-date written, visual, and voice-messaged information on government policies and regulations to combat COVID-19 in languages understood by them.

Internews, with IOM – UN Migration and the WHO, has produced a [guide for migrant workers in Thailand](#) on how to access healthcare in the COVID-19 crisis.

The Internews guide includes what support is available for migrants living in Thailand; where to get testing and treatment and the costs involved; and the status of documented and undocumented workers if they lose their jobs due to COVID-19.

Showcase positive stories of migrant workers

Migrant workers have made enormous contributions both in their countries of origin and also in their host countries. Yet in a crisis, they are often the most vulnerable due to lack of access to health care, housing, and social protection. They are furthermore subject to rising levels of discrimination and xenophobia.

Journalists can reduce this stigma and discrimination by writing positive stories on how migrant workers not only fill gaps in the labour market and do work that local populations are unwilling or unable to do, they lower production costs and shore up entire sectors of the economy of some countries.

Stories can be done on how migrant workers provide much-needed foreign exchange and contribute significantly to the gross domestic product of many countries in the region. They also contribute to the transfer of knowledge and skills and are often innovators and entrepreneurs.

Support measures to protect the most vulnerable

As a journalist, you can pay attention to the framing of your messages in your stories.

For example, you can frame the risks for migrant workers as part of a broader narrative on the need to reach and protect the most vulnerable. It is imperative that rapid, accurate, and balanced information reaches those most in need to prevent an increase in anti-migrant rhetoric, in particular the scapegoating of migrant workers and other vulnerable groups in the public domain and online for the spread of COVID-19.