

RUMOR BULLETIN #3

RUMOR TRACKING UPDATE FOR HUMANITARIANS
NOVEMBER 12-22, 2020



Internews

The Rooted in Trust project at Internews, funded by USAID, aims to respond to the “infodemic” (misinformation, fake news, rumors, and excess information) that exacerbates discrimination and affects access to basic services and assistance for vulnerable communities in Nariño. It is particularly focused on the migrant and LGBTQI+ population in Ipiales and Tumaco, Colombia.

The strategic collection of the rumors that circulate throughout the department of Nariño aims to provide humanitarian and public health organizations suggestions for integrating community perspectives and concerns into their communication activities.

The right to peaceful assembly should be guaranteed in all areas at all times, even in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is the duty of the state and the institutions that care for vulnerable populations to provide virtual channels to guarantee that all communities, including migrants, can claim assistance and demand accountability from the authorities without having to jump over hurdles.

HOW WE DO IT

The Venga le Cuenta Rumor Bulletin is produced through the analysis of rumors collected by the Colombian team as part of the Rooted in Trust project. In the period of October 31st-November 15th of this year, the team collected 89 rumors, 71 from social media sources and 18 from other sources. The rumors discussed here were selected through a risk analysis that brings to the forefront the disinformation with the highest risk and potential impact on the communities of Ipiales and Tumaco, which are the target communities of the Rooted in Trust Colombia project.

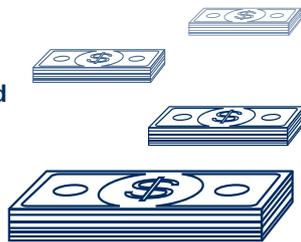
WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY SAY?

“Venezuelan associations are demanding 10% of the financial aid that migrants in Ipiales receive through humanitarian assistance.”

This comment has been spread by word of mouth between migrants who reside or have recently arrived in Ipiales, and has even been investigated by local journalists.

Word of mouth rumor circulating through Ipiales, November 2020

¿SCAMS BETWEEN MIGRANTS?



FACTS

- ✓ To date, the Attorney General's Office in Nariño has not received any claims of extortion against the Venezuelan population on behalf of the migrant associations in Ipiales.
- ✓ On August, 17 people who pertain to a network of human traffickers/smugglers and were charging migrants for crossing the Colombo-Ecuadorian border were captured. Among the people detained was the director of the Risk Management Office of the municipality of Ipiales and the manager of the Transit Terminal in the municipality. Both were later released without charges remain connected to the process. Another 8 people captured are going to jail, but none of those pertain to migrant organizations.
- ✓ At the beginning of November, Migración Colombia captured an immigration official in Ipiales for crimes of extortion and human trafficking/smuggling. The migrant population is a victim in his case, not the perpetrator.
- ✓ In the past week, several leaders of Venezuelan associations have denounced threats to the officials after these rumors were spread among the migrant population. The Interagency Group of Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM, platform that brings together humanitarian organizations in the department) began a public campaign to help migrants claim if they are victim to fraud or scams, but at present there are no concrete cases.

Sources:
Attorney General of Colombia
Direct interviews with organizations of migrants

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- The mistrust between grassroots organizations and members of the migrant population can create setbacks in their abilities to carry out their right to peaceful assembly and association and can also block their access to humanitarian aid, to demand their fundamental rights, and to coordinate efforts.
- This can also cause isolation of the migrant populations in a context of xenophobia and lack of trust in the local authorities and the humanitarian workers.
- The lack of organization and coordination in the migrant community exposes them to additional levels of vulnerability to recruitment to irregular armed groups, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation, among other things.
- Moreover, it impedes them from receiving adequate information about the services offered by humanitarian agencies in Nariño and the secure ways they can obtain help. This reality makes migrant populations a target for scams from fraudulent organizations.

HOW CAN HUMANITARIAN ACTORS HELP?

- ➔ Continued follow up, analysis and presentation of reports of the humanitarian organizations can provide notoriety to migrants affected by this type of rumor and help them express their issues.
- ➔ Positioning the concerns of the community (in this case, the migrant population) at the center of humanitarian action, addressing human rights violations that they suffer, and reinforcing routes of accountability toward the target population are all fundamental to guarantee equal access to aid and protection for these populations.
- ➔ Create alliances with known Venezuelan associations in Ipiales and strengthen the communication in the community between migrant populations can help to strengthen the trust between them and allow them to solve conflicts that arise during humanitarian crises, in addition to supporting the construction of a strong and sustainable social fabric among migrants.

The expectation of the discovery of a COVID-19 vaccine has exacerbated the fears of the vulnerable and poor populations regarding an eventual lack access to the vaccines when they are ready. Even though [the Ministry of Health](#) announced that when the vaccine is available it will be distributed through the social security system, initially to the people over the age of 60 or those with existing comorbidities, there continue to be doubts about costs, universality and effectiveness.

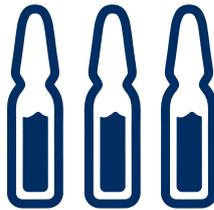
WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY SAY?

"This is truly the joke of the year, free vaccines, ha ha ha, they will be so expensive, almost inaccessible."

On Nariño's social media, worries from the citizens of the department have gone viral, including among migrants, about the access and universality of the eventual vaccine. The population is scared that, in the case where a vaccine is deemed successful, it won't reach the south of the country, and additionally, it will be arduous to obtain with restricted means of circulation.

Hombre,
Facebook, octubre 2020

¿VACCINE FOR COVID-19 FREE?



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- The spread of rumors about an eventual COVID-19 vaccine can dangerously undermine the trust that the most vulnerable communities, including migrant populations, have in the health organizations and institutions that provide aid and services for basic needs.
- In other cases during serious epidemics, there have even been [threats against health personnel](#) and [theft of medical supplies](#) because of the anxiety, fear, and fake news about the disease.
- The misinformation campaigns about vaccines and the erosion of trust in science and medicine can have serious consequences for the public health of the communities.

FACTS

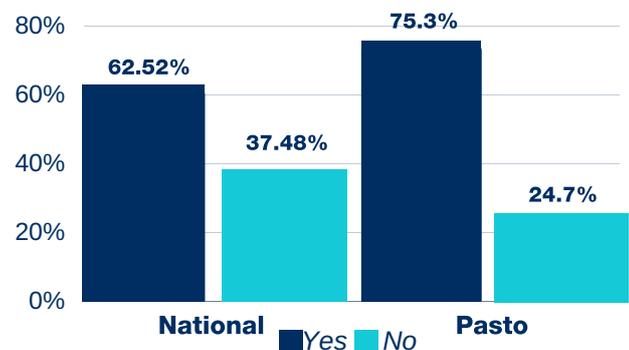
- [The COVAX Alliance](#) (collaboration for equal global access to the COVID-19 vaccine) is an global coordination initiative that aims to accelerate the development and production of tests, treatments and vaccines against the coronavirus and guarantee equal access for everyone in all countries.
- COVAX, co-directed by the Alliance for Vaccine Production (Gavi), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparation Innovations (CEPI) and the World Health Organization (WHO), aim to produce a total of 2 billion doses of the vaccine for the end of 2021, with which the most vulnerable populations in the world would be covered. [Colombia is one of the countries that has requested to be part of the COVAX Alliance.](#)
- The government has given their support and requested an urgent processing of the [law project](#) for universal immunization of Colombians against COVID-19 and orders that [all vaccines be free.](#)
- Currently, according to the Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) survey, 24.3% of the inhabitants of Nariño's capital have noted that they are unable to get vaccinated against COVID-19.
- Beliefs on the high costs of COVID-19 vaccines may prevent communities from seeking this preventive measure when the vaccines are finally available.

Sources: World Health Organization (WHO), Alliance for Vaccines (GAVI), Ministry of Health of Colombia, Senate of the Republic, DANE, Media

HOW CAN HUMANITARIANS HELP?

- Rumors should be countered with new approaches that allow health and humanitarian organizations to amplify their reach in the areas where misinformation is winning the battle.
- Maintain current information so that communities can be up to date about the development and studies about COVID-19 vaccine production. This can build, maintain and recover the trust in humanitarian institutions and health organizations and ensure that people follow the recommended guidelines to avoid another virus outbreak.
- Developing and supporting channels that allow communities to ask questions easily and receive comprehensive answers about COVID-19 can reinforce the credibility of humanitarian actors. Vaccine hesitancy is a complex phenomenon that reflects diverse anxieties. People have questions and concerns about the COVID-19 vaccines. Being open and promoting relations of trust is the most effective way to fill in knowledge gaps.
- Including leaders that understand the beliefs, culture and opinions of the community in communication strategies can incentivize the population to accept help and aid for their health. This can also have important repercussions and amplify the credibility of the institutions in Nariño.

Percentage of citizens who would get the COVID-19 vaccine if it were available



Source: Pulso Social Survey, DANE, September 2020



Any suggestions or information that might support or help government authorities and humanitarian agencies to manage disinformation are welcome. Please contact Rocío Lopez Íñigo: rlopezinigo@internews.org
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