



COVID-19

Including migrants and displaced people in preparedness and response activities

Guidance for Asia Pacific National Societies

Key Recommendations for Asia Pacific National Societies

- **Include strong migration and displacement analysis in National Society plans.** Strengthen analysis with specific national and community-level migration and displacement assessments where possible.
- **Include (be sure to not exclude) migrants and displaced people at risk in all general National Society preparedness and response activities.** Ensure that such support is accessible and appropriate for migrants and displaced people.
- **Take targeted measures to support migrants and displaced people at risk, e.g.**
 - **Provide accessible information** in formats and languages understood by migrants
 - Support migrants, displaced people and their families, and host communities with **PSS**
 - Undertake **humanitarian diplomacy** to ensure that migrants (including undocumented migrants) are not left behind or de-prioritised
 - **Address stigma** against migrants and their family and community members
- **Coordinate with authorities and other actors** (UN, NGOs, CSOs), particularly those seeking to reach migrant and displaced people at risk.
- **Share experiences, challenges and lessons learned** with IFRC and sister National Societies in the region (e.g. through the APMN) and globally (e.g. through the Global Migration Task Force).

Background: Migration & Displacement in Asia Pacific

- There are millions of migrants living, working and moving across the Asia Pacific region. People are on the move for a variety of reasons including work, travel, transit, education and to be with loved ones.
- Millions of migrants from the Asia Pacific region are also living in and on the move to other regions, including large numbers in the Middle East, the Gulf and Africa.
- The latest estimate is that there are 88 million migrants in the region, and that nearly 40% of all migrants across the globe come from countries in the Asia Pacific region.
- Best available data show that almost half (49.4%) of all international migrants in the Asia Pacific region are women.¹
- There are also millions of people who have been forcibly displaced – by conflict, persecution, disasters and the effects of climate change – within their own countries as IDPs, or across border as refugees.

¹ [UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific \(2017\), *Towards Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Asia Pacific Region: Challenges and Opportunities*.](#)

- The latest estimate is that there are 8 million refugees and IDPs in the Asia Pacific region, with nearly 1 million displaced people in camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh alone.
- Many migrants and refugees are undocumented and/or stateless.

Risk factors for migrants and displaced people

- Migrants and displaced people may be at an increased risk from the current outbreak of COVID-19.
- Risk factors include:
 - **Discrimination and exclusion:** Migrants and displaced populations may be de-prioritised in healthcare efforts and may increasingly face stigma and blame for spreading COVID-19
 - **Lost family and community support network and links:** Migrants who are quarantined and/or affected by border closures may be unable to return home, feel anxiety due to isolation, and may lose contact with family members.
 - **Informal and formal barriers to accessing basic services** including healthcare, protection services and psychological support.
 - **Communication barriers** to understanding and accessing information, health care, and reporting on health conditions.
 - Health care officials may not know where and how to reach migrants and displaced people.
 - Migrants and displaced people may simply not know how and where to access trustworthy information and help.
 - **Financial barriers** to accessing health systems and support, including lack of health insurance
 - **Social, religious and cultural obstacles** to accessing health care; Lack of familiarity and awareness of health procedures and available support
 - **Poor living and working environment**, including overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and hygiene conditions
 - **Gendered dimensions:** Female domestic workers are often employed in isolated workplaces.
 - Some governments and employers have imposed restrictions on employees leaving their workplace, even on their day off, in order to safeguard their health and reduce the risk of contamination. Such measures remove precious social time from women living far away from their own families and loved ones and puts them at risk of exploitation and depression.
 - **Undocumented or irregular legal status** may create formal barriers to accessing care or lead to reluctance to access care due to fear of arrest or deportation.
 - Undocumented or irregular migrants may be more at risk by considering or accepting offers of work which are exploitative or abusive in order to pay for social services including healthcare, that may otherwise be prohibitively expensive.
 - Government data collection may not include undocumented and/or stateless migrants. Because of this, their vulnerabilities and humanitarian needs may not be considered in the design and implementation of policies and practices related to public health, social welfare and protection.
 - **Human trafficking:** Epidemics and pandemics can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and put people at a greater risk of exploitation by traffickers.²

How can National Societies support migrants, displaced people and their families, and host communities?

“The approach of the Movement to migration is strictly humanitarian and focuses on the needs, vulnerabilities and potentials of migrants, irrespective of their legal status, type, or category.”

IFRC Policy on Migration (2009)

² [IFRC \(2018\) Addressing the Humanitarian Consequences of Labour Migration and Trafficking: The role of Asia Pacific National Societies](#)

- National Societies' plans for preparedness and response must be grounded in **strong migration and displacement analysis**, considering the dynamics and risks faced by migrants and displaced populations. Such analysis can be complemented with specific community and national level needs assessments.
 - **National Societies** can support migrants – irrespective of their legal status – at any point during their migration experience, i.e. before departure, in transit, at their destination, and upon return.
 - **National Societies** can support the families and communities of migrants who have stayed behind in countries of origin and may also have humanitarian needs. Such family members may be concerned about the fate and needs of their relatives in other countries.
 - **National Societies** can support communities who host migrants and refugees in countries of transit and destination.
- Based on this analysis, **National Societies should include at risk migrants and displaced populations in all general preparedness and response activities**. This also means ensuring that such activities are accessible and appropriate.
 - To the extent possible, National Societies should integrate **migrants and displaced people as staff and volunteers**.³
 - National Societies should ensure that **general activities are accessible and relevant** for migrant and displaced communities.
- Beyond inclusion in general activities, **National Societies can also take targeted measures to reach migrant and displaced communities**.
 - Specific activities (detailed below) and support should consider **age, gender, disability, socio-cultural customs and languages** (including levels of literacy) of migrants and displaced people.
- National Societies can ensure **coordination with relevant authorities and actors** (UN, NGO and CSOs).
- National Societies can **share experiences, challenges and lessons learned** with IFRC and sister National Societies in the region (e.g. through the APMN) and globally (e.g. through the Global Migration Task Force).

Key Activity: Accessible and Reliable Information for Migrants

- The provision of reliable, trustworthy and accessible information for migrants is a vital activity that many National Societies can undertake to reduce the risks of COVID-19.
- This information may be delivered via digital and social media platforms, or through targeted distribution using community-based mechanisms like community or religious places and community safe spaces.
- To cater for language barriers and or literacy levels, more pictorial (infographics or cartoons) or audio messages may be provided.

³ [IFRC \(2009\) Policy on Migration](#)

National Societies in Action

The **Philippine Red Cross** is helping migrant workers reduce the risks of COVID-19 through the 'Virtual Volunteer' web-based application. The Virtual Volunteer is designed to provide information to migrants and their families, whether before departure or while migrants are overseas. The web-based platform has been updated with the latest information on COVID-19 [here](#). This has been complemented with in-person support to migrants prior to departure, with **Philippine Red Cross** providing support and advice to migrants at international airports. More information is available [here](#).

[IFRC resources: information on COVID-19](#)

- The IFRC has produced key messages on reducing the risk of coronavirus infection. These include messages on reducing the risk of infection, as well as specific messages on “**when to wear a mask**”, “**how to stay healthy while travelling**” and “**how to practice food safety**”.
- To help reach migrant populations, these messages are available in many different languages, including:
 - Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, Bangla, Chinese, Dari, English, Farsi, French, Japanese, Korean, Marshallese (Marshall Islands), Mongolian, Myanmar, Nepali, Sinhala (Sri Lanka), Spanish, Tagalog (Philippines), Tamil, Tetun (Timor Leste), Thai, and Urdu.
- These messages are available [here](#) via 'guest access'.
- These resources will be continuously updated as more translations are produced
- Please note that these are generic messages, so they may not fit specific country contexts.
- National Societies should check the official messages from their Ministry of Health before sharing these messages.

National Societies in Action

The **Maldivian Red Crescent** is providing information on the risks of COVID-19 through face-to-face outreach with migrants and host communities. This includes dissemination of key messages in languages understood by migrant groups via printed materials, social media and in person information sessions delivered by the National Society's Maldivian and migrant staff and volunteers. More information is available [here](#).

Through a partnership with the Migrant Workers' Centre and the Centre for Domestic Employees, the **Singapore Red Cross** is distributing awareness materials on reducing the risk of COVID-19 in languages commonly spoken by migrant groups in Singapore, including disseminating information on how migrant domestic workers can protect themselves and the households in which they are living and working. Together with the Migrant Workers' Centre, Singapore Red Cross will be providing support to a migrant worker who has been infected.

[National Ministry of Health Resources: information on COVID-19](#)

- In some cases, the Ministry of Health or other national authorities may also have developed messaging in languages used by migrants.

National Society in Action

The Myanmar Ministry of Health and Sports translated COVID-19 information materials in [Shan](#), [Kachin](#) and [Chinese](#) languages, and also produced radio broadcasts on COVID-19) into [17 minority languages](#). **Myanmar Red Cross Society** is using these materials to reach Shan, Kachin and Chinese communities at the national,

regional and township levels. **Myanmar Red Cross Society** is also actively seeking to reach internally displaced people (IDP) with support and advice on COVID-19. More information available [here](#).

Key Activity: Addressing Social Stigma associated with COVID-19

- Awareness of the risks that migrants and displaced people may face must be balanced with ensuring that xenophobic attitudes and social stigma of people from certain nationalities being associated with COVID-19 are not promoted.
- People may be labelled, stereotyped, separated, and/or experience loss of status and discrimination because of an affiliation with COVID-19.
- This can negatively affect those with a disease themselves, as well as their caregivers, family, friends and communities.
- Guidance on addressing social stigma associated with COVID-19 is available [here](#).

Key Activity: Focusing activities in areas of high migration

- Areas of high population movement, for example land border crossings, seaports and airports may warrant particular attention and focused activities.

National Society in Action

At request of the Health Department in Balochistan province, the **Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS)** has deployed health teams and ambulances at border crossing points with Iran and Afghanistan, where screening of people entering Pakistan is conducted. PRCS ambulances with First Aiders and volunteers have been deployed to Lahore, Quetta and Islamabad International Airports and to the National Institute of Health in Islamabad to assist with transportation of confirmed or suspected cases. More information is available [here](#).

Key Activity: Coping with stress associated with COVID-19 and rebuilding hope

- Provide migrants and displaced people with psycho-social support (PSS) to help them to cope with stress related to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Provide robust facts about COVID-19 to reduce fear and panic.
- Listen to and support migrants and displaced people who may be quarantined, isolated or hospitalised.
- Mobilise people who have recovered from COVID-19 to act as community ambassadors in risk communication and to build social trust and hope.
- Promote community-led awareness activities through social, cultural and religious systems.
- Provide practical information on how to access essential services (i.e. where to get food, treatment, whom to call etc.) for individuals affected by COVID-19
- Promote IFRC Guidance on Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) for people affected by COVID-19, available [here](#)

National Societies in Action

The **Indonesian Red Cross (Palang Merah Indonesia - PMI)** is conducting community outreach and awareness activities, including with a local community hosting a group of Indonesians who were evacuated from Wuhan and were under quarantine.

The **Nepal Red Cross**, in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Population and other organisations, is disseminating key risk awareness and safety messages to communities through face-to-face. **Nepal Red Cross**

volunteers have been conducting counselling sessions and distributing leaflets and masks in the locality where Nepali students evacuated from China are being quarantined, after the local community expressed concerns about spread of the virus. More information is available [here](#).

Key Activity: Humanitarian Diplomacy

- National Societies may notice barriers that migrants and displaced people face which prevent them from receiving the help they need. These could include:
 - Reluctance from authorities to share information on COVID-19, for fear of creating panic.
 - Lack of willingness (or legal barriers) to helping undocumented or irregular migrants.
- In such cases, National Societies may engage in humanitarian diplomacy to “*persuade decision makers and opinion leaders to act, at all times, in the interests of vulnerable people, and with full respect for fundamental humanitarian principles*”.
- More guidance is available here: [IFRC Humanitarian Diplomacy Policy \(2009\)](#)

Key Approach: Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)

- In any communication and engagement with migrants and displaced people, National Societies should document any questions and concerns that arise.
- National Societies can use this feedback to tailor communication and activities.
- CEA and COVID-19 guidance is available here: [Risk communication, Community Engagement and Accountability](#).
- Further Guidance for Social Mobiliser Volunteers (2020) is available [here](#).

For further general guidance:

- [IFRC Policy on Migration \(2009\)](#)
- [IFRC Asia Pacific Framework on Migration and Displacement \(2017\)](#)
- [Guidelines to Protect Migrants in Countries Experiencing Conflict or Natural Disaster \(MICIC\) \(2016\)](#)

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