Media Toolkit
to prevent and address stigma associated with the migrant population in Malaysia in response to COVID-19
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In this toolkit, you will find a summary of the current challenges that migrants and non-citizens face in the context of COVID-19 in Malaysia, and ways that you can take an active role in supporting the response efforts while reducing the risks and stigma faced by these vulnerable groups.

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KEY CHALLENGES THAT MIGRANTS FACE

Language barriers may limit migrants’ and non-citizens’ access to otherwise publicly available health information and guidance on how to protect themselves and others.

Stigma and fear of arrest and detention can drive migrants to hide symptoms and avoid seeking health care or treatment to prevent discrimination or legal repercussions.

Many migrants live and work in places that are often hard to reach.

Migrants may use irregular channels and inadvertently circumvent health screening and services at border points.

Since the onset of COVID-19, many migrant workers have lost their jobs, with no alternate source of income to support themselves or remit money to their families.

Lack of documentation, issues with legal status, as well as limited financial resources further hinder non-citizens’ access to essential services.

Other challenges include limited public knowledge about (a) who is considered a migrant, (b) how they are helping citizens, and (c) gender considerations and how the domestic burden can fall more on girls/women.

TAKE ACTION

How we communicate about COVID-19 is critical in supporting people to take effective actions to protect their health, combat the disease and avoid fuelling fear and stigma. Media play an important role in shaping public perceptions and knowledge of these issues by providing facts, insight and balanced information. Below are the main recommendations to consider when reporting about migrants and non-citizens in Malaysia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

OVERVIEW OF THE MIGRANT SITUATION IN MALAYSIA

COVID-19 does not discriminate - neither should we.

Migrants and other marginalized populations often face challenges accessing health and social services. In times of emergencies, these challenges become even greater. In Malaysia, migrants (especially those who are undocumented), are particularly vulnerable. There are reports of 2 million documented migrants and about 2 to 4 million undocumented/irregular migrants in Malaysia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documented migrants</th>
<th>2 million</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented migrants</td>
<td>2-4 million</td>
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They often reside in overcrowded and cramped living spaces with few resources and typically lack access to essential services. Many are not literate in the standard language of the country to which they have moved. Public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the awareness and scrutiny of migrants and refugees not only in Malaysia but also globally.

Evidence shows that stigma related to COVID-19 can lead to a reduction in people seeking medical care or testing as well as a reduction in people adhering to interventions (including self-isolation) due to a variety of reasons. For non-citizens, especially those who are undocumented, this may be due to a fear of arrest, detention and deportation. As a result, people may be reluctant to present for testing or treatment, which can result in more people being exposed to the virus, which makes responding to the outbreak more difficult.

Anyone can get COVID-19 during a global pandemic. Viruses do not discriminate, and neither should our response. People suffering from COVID-19 have done nothing wrong and should not be treated differently. Collectively, all parts of society need to work together to prevent and address stigma.
Promote ethical journalism

Report on the content developed by the Malaysian authorities, United Nations agencies, civil society organizations and humanitarian organizations on preventative measures, symptoms of COVID-19 and when and where to seek health care and medical advice. The words and phrasing used in the media will shape the language and communication on COVID-19 and the perceptions of the public and various communities. Reporting needs to be balanced, with a variety of sources and perspectives, including those of migrants themselves.

Address rumours and the spread of misinformation

Reference verified and trusted sources such as the Ministry of Health Malaysia, other relevant government ministries, as well as United Nations agencies, international and local organizations and nongovernmental organizations and stay up to date with the latest public announcements and recommendations on the COVID-19 pandemic. Collect, consolidate and share accurate country- and community-specific information about COVID-19, including where to access health care. Use familiar language and avoid clinical terms and acronyms.

Help reduce stigma

What you say and how you say it matters. It is important to avoid the use of stereotypical, negative expressions that can create or increase stigma, and focus on inclusive language. Insufficient knowledge about COVID-19, or false associations, increase social stigma and can hamper the response, potentially driving people away from presenting for screening, quarantine or treatment. Correct misconceptions, using both facts and empathy, and encourage a unified response.

Amplify the voices of migrants and non-citizens

Share sympathetic narratives and stories that humanize the experiences and struggles that non-citizens face. Consider including articles that offer human angles (e.g. the need for safe housing, employment and access to essential services, how they are contributing to society, how migrants and citizens work together and help each other), and not just sensational stories about deportation and legal status.

Maintain two-way communication

Take the opportunity to listen, learn and document the experiences of both migrants and citizens, and share your knowledge and available information to address the fears or concerns of those you interview. Journalists are in a unique position to share life-saving information and help stop the spread of COVID-19.

**KEY MESSAGES**

- We are all in this together, in the fight against COVID-19.
- Contracting COVID-19 does not mean someone has less value than anyone else.
- Stigma and discrimination towards any single population group pose a risk to all people.
- Migrants and stateless people have human rights too!
- Let’s support our family, friends, neighbours and front-line responders in the fight against COVID-19.
- Anyone can get COVID-19 during a global pandemic, regardless of race, gender, age or other personal qualities.
- People who are suffering from COVID-19 have done nothing wrong. We must not treat them differently. Remember, it could happen to anyone (including you and your loved ones).
- Employers and businesses play a vital role in protecting migrant workers and their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring them a safe workplace and meeting essential needs.
- Let’s be kind to each other and help stop the spread of rumours and misinformation about COVID-19 and migrants.
- Stigma and fear can stop people from coming forward for testing or treatment for COVID-19. If they are scared of testing, it might cause a further spread of the virus.

Contracting COVID-19 does not mean someone has less value than anyone else.

Migrants and stateless people have human rights too!

Anyone can get COVID-19 during a global pandemic, regardless of race, gender, age or other personal qualities.

Employers and businesses play a vital role in protecting migrant workers and their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring them a safe workplace and meeting essential needs.

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ACCOUNTS TO FOLLOW

Websites:
- WHO Country Office in Malaysia website
- IOM Malaysia website
- IOM CREST (Corporate Responsibility in Eliminating Slavery Trafficking) website
- UNICEF Malaysia website
- UNHCR website

Facebook pages
- IOM Malaysia
- Malaysian Red Crescent Society
- UNHCR
- UNICEF

Twitter
- WHO Country Office in Malaysia
- IFRCAsiaPacific
- Malaysian Red Crescent Society

RESOURCES

Connect COVID
A guide to preventing and addressing social stigma associated with COVID-19

World Migration Report 2020
Media Coverage on Migration: Promoting A Balanced Reporting
Updated Glossary on Migration
COVID-19: IOM Public Communication Toolkit
COVID-19 Asia Pacific Government Response Overview
COVID-19 Places Migrant Workers in Highly Vulnerable Situations
Migration Policy in the Age of Immobility
Media-Friendly Glossary on Migration
How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement
Update #1 How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement
Handbook for media: the new coronavirus and COVID-19 BBC Media Action

INFOGRAPHICS

HOTLINES

03-8881 0200
03-8881 0600
03-8881 0700
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