

*These COVID-19 Analytical Snapshots are designed to capture the latest research, information and analysis in a fast-moving environment. Topics will be repeated from time to time as analysis develops. If you have an item to include, please email us at [research@iom.int](mailto:research@iom.int).*



### What is Regularization ?

Regularization is defined as any process or programme by which the authorities of a State allow non-nationals in an irregular situation to stay lawfully in the country, by granting them a regular status. ([IOM Glossary](#), 2019)

The [Global Compact for Migration](#) calls upon States to “build on existing practices to facilitate access for migrants in an irregular status to an individual assessment that may lead to regular status, on a case by case basis and with clear and transparent criteria, especially in cases where children, youth and families are involved, as an option to reduce vulnerabilities...”

The benefits of regularizations [include](#):

- ⇒ The stabilization of a migrant’s status within a country;
- ⇒ Decreases the likelihood of migrant exploitation;
- ⇒ Increases tax and social security revenues for the State;
- ⇒ Improves the availability of more accurate data on labour market and irregular migration;
- ⇒ Weakens the underground economy.

### New research & analysis on regularization & COVID



[COVID-19 and rethinking the need for legal pathways to mobility: Taking human security seriously](#) by Luisa Feline Freier

[Regularizing Migrant Workers in Response to COVID-19](#) by Gonzala Fanjul & Helen Dempster

[Legalisation of undocumented immigrants in the USA](#) by Nieblas Bedolla

[The Corona Virus and Migration Governance in South Africa: Business As Usual?](#) Zanker & Moyo

[Towards an EU Toolbox for Migrant Workers: Labour Mobility and Regularisation in Germany, Italy, and Spain in 2020](#) by Open Society Foundations

[Irregularity vs Regularity: The Perception of Sub-Saharan Migrants of the Impact of Regularization](#) by Nadia El Amri.

*“The regularization of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia through the provision of a generous temporary protection status is a key to facilitating their socio-economic integration and access to the national health system and COVID-19 vaccination campaigns. The Government of Colombia has once again shown both great solidarity and leadership. Its decision serves as an example to the world.”*

[IOM Director General António Vitorino.](#)



## Lessons from past regularizations

Over the years, several countries have [conducted](#) regularizations of undocumented migrants with a view to address issues related to irregularity. Some countries, such as [Morocco](#) have relied on a series of programs to tackle issues arising from irregularity, while others such as Spain and Italy have used a mixture of programs and mechanism to address [labor migration governance](#). Regularizations also happen at a local and regional level, such as Geneva's [Operation Papyrus](#) or France's policy of decision-making at [prefectural](#) level. Learning from the [successes and failures](#) of these practices is key to improve policy design and implementation. Ensuring wide accessibility and outreach to the concerned populations is central to surmount some of the [challenges](#) identified and overcome apprehensions from irregular migrants.

### A migrants' perspective

*"With the documents, I can get my family here without risking their life. I have always opposed letting them do the same journey that I did from Ghana".*

[24-year-old man from Ghana, in Italy since 2013](#)

### Recent trends in regularization

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in some countries taking exceptional measures to respond to the heightened needs of irregular migrants. Early in 2020, [Portugal](#) acted quickly by temporarily regularizing the status of all migrants. This was followed last summer by [Italy](#) who implemented a targeted regularization for migrant workers in key sectors of the economy. In February 2021, [Colombia](#) announced that it will regularize more than 1.7 million Venezuelans in its territory. The decision was [welcomed](#) by the UN Secretary General and other humanitarian organizations. Other countries which introduced regularizations as a response to Covid-19 include: [the Dominican Republic](#), [Malaysia](#) and [Thailand](#).

### Irregularity and Covid-19

Undocumented migrants are one of the most marginalized communities, and the health crisis has [exacerbated](#) pre-existing vulnerabilities. While many countries and cities have [responded](#) to their immediate needs, more needs to be done to bring them into [social protection](#) systems. One key area of concern is their inclusion in [vaccination programs](#) as they are often at [heightened risk](#) of COVID-19.

### Future prospects

In June 2020, the new Irish Government [committed](#) to introducing a regularization scheme within eighteen months of its formation. Elsewhere, the new US Administration is [sending](#) a new bill to Congress which some experts [estimated](#) that could regularize up to 11 million undocumented migrants. Among the countries that will consider calls for introducing regularizations in 2021 are [South Africa](#), [Brazil](#) and [Chile](#).

This COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot has been produced by [IOM Research](#) ([research@iom.int](mailto:research@iom.int)).

*Important disclaimer:* The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IOM. The inclusion or presentation of material does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM, or of any of its members or partners.