



DISC INITIATIVE

The Joint Global Initiative on Diversity,
Inclusion and Social Cohesion

The Power of Digitalization in the Age of Physical Distancing: *Strengthening social connections and community cohesion through the digital inclusion and connectivity of migrants*

DISC Digest 4th Edition



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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of social connections for the wellbeing of migrants and the overall cohesion of the communities they live in.

Migrants have been a key part of countries' pandemic response, as both a population at risk and as frontline workers or volunteers. In the face of lockdowns and physical distancing measures, governments and organizations across the world have turned towards innovative digital solutions to address the social isolation, loneliness and anxiety that pandemic-related restrictions and measures can bring. Despite measures that limit mobility and physical interactions, the pandemic has stimulated digital innovation on a global scale, connecting millions of migrants with their families and communities around the world.

However, the pandemic has also brought to the fore the increased risk of excluding already marginalized groups. While digital innovation has enabled access to services for those who were previously hard to reach, the benefits of digital innovation are not equally distributed. Migrants who lack access to online connectivity, digital devices and skills have been further isolated.

Policies and interventions that do not take adequate measures to address 'digital poverty' run the risk of worsening social isolation and

broaden disparities within society. At the same time, physical distancing measures and the lack of moderating influence of face-to-face peer discussions have exposed a growing population to an echo chamber of targeted online campaigns of disinformation, hostility and out right hate speech against marginalized groups.

Migrants have been disproportionately impacted by both developments.

Recognizing these immediate challenges, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has developed and adapted its interventions in the field to harness the opportunities but also address the risks digitalization can bring to migrant inclusion and social cohesion.

In the framework of the [Joint Global Initiative on Diversity, Inclusion and Social Cohesion](#) (DISC), this fourth edition of the global DISC Digest highlights the various initiatives that both IOM and other organizations have taken, to provide resources and guidance for those looking to transition their activities online in the areas of migrant training, integration and social cohesion. It also presents some knowledge products and reports, and online campaigns that are particularly geared towards combatting hate speech towards migrants and misinformation on COVID-19.





Staff Voice

Insights and Experiences of IOM experts and practitioners

From fighting xenophobia to digitally supporting the mental health and well-being of migrants, IOM’s work is driven by the on the ground experience and knowledge of our experts and field staff globally.

This section features some key insights from IOM staff to highlight the impact of digital innovation in current projects, and their missions’ response to ensure digital inclusion and connectivity of migrants.

On combating xenophobia and misinformation through digital community mobilization

While the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted widespread expressions of solidarity and support from governments, civil society and individuals, it has also exacerbated misinformation, anxieties and fears against migrants, in the streets and especially throughout the internet.

Incidents of xenophobia and hate speech often happen against the backdrop of broader systemic inequalities and build upon, if not compound, longstanding misinformation about migrants. For instance, the global ‘Black Lives Matter’ protests are rooted in the deep seated and unresolved issues of social justice and racism the pandemic has exposed. Such acts of discrimination as well as the deliberate circulation of hate content online do not only harm those who targeted but also threaten social cohesion.

The [UN Secretary General](#) and the [IOM Director General](#) have both appealed for an all-out effort to counter xenophobia, hate speech and misinformation globally. The recently released [UN Guidance Note](#) calls for a multi-stakeholder response and the development of effective operational tools to counter and address harms related to hate speech. This includes not only the involvement of Member States and international organizations but also the involvement of tech and social media companies, mainstream media, civil society, as well as affected

communities. As the proliferation of fake news often circulates in news outlets and social media platforms, there is urgent need for equally innovative digital and community-driven solutions to address this challenge.

In response, the IOM DISC Initiative and the Media and Communications Team of RO San Jose are developing two key complementary tools: 1) [#XenophobiaZero](#), an online community where interested individuals and institutions can access counter narratives and facts to discriminatory messages 2) an experimental and research-oriented design of counter speech strategies with a strong community mobilization and M&E component. Both tools integrate public communications and research by mobilizing members of the community in leading the counter xenophobia response, while positioning IOM as a key actor in this area.

Stay tuned for the upcoming launch of the [#XenophobiaZero](#) online community!

[Jobst Koehler](#)

Senior Migrant Integration & Training Specialist
IOM LHD HQ / DISC Initiative

[Jorge Gallo](#)

Regional Media and Communications Officer
IOM RO San Jose / XenophobiaZero





Staff Voice

Importance of continued distance learning of migrant children and training of public school teachers

In Indonesia, coordinated prevention measures are being put in place nationally as the outbreak of the pandemic happened in the beginning of the school year. To this end, [IOM Indonesia](#) supports and implements the government's Ministerial Regulation on the Implementation of Education in Coronavirus Disease Emergencies on online learning and increasing students' understanding of the coronavirus. This includes providing internet allowance for the students to support the implementation of learning from home and coordination with the local education department to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers children have adequate quota to enroll in schools.

A total of 650 children and 250 adults have actively participated in the online programme through the Edmodo platform, studying Bahasa Indonesian, English, vocational classes and other school subjects.

The opportunity to study in school not only provides

children to learn and communicate in the Indonesian language, but also to learn from and play with their schoolmates. Some children also admit that being in school brings more confidence in them in participating in school events or activities, which makes them feel accepted regardless of their status.

Acknowledging that distance learning has become a challenge for the mental well-being of students due to a lack of social interaction, limited access to technology and other academic load issues, one of IOM Indonesia's offices in Makassar has conducted online trainings for public school teachers to address these challenges.

[Diah Zahara](#)

National Programme Officer, Migrant Assistance and Protection
IOM Indonesia

Virtual counseling for migrants' informed decision-making and ownership of their migration journey

Digital access to timely, unbiased and reliable information allows migrants to make an informed decision and take ownership of their migration journey in full respect of their human rights and regardless of their status.

IOM Germany's [Virtual Counselling \(VC\) project](#) has digitally supported the traditional counselling structure in Germany during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to ongoing pandemic related mobility and contact restrictions, face-to-face counselling can take place only in a limited capacity or at times, not at all. In these uncertain times, VC has proven to be a crucial tool for providing digital support by connecting migrants with counselling and other resources across all stages of the migration continuum.

In addition, digital counselling can enhance migrants' mental health and well-being by addressing anxieties that may be caused by the pandemic. VC also

provides migrants with crucial information on COVID-19 in their countries of origin, respective quarantine measures and adapted reintegration modalities. In doing so, VC is also able to digitally support public health initiatives by countering misinformation on COVID-19.

The online format of VC allows the project to serve as an accessible tool of communication, strengthening the link between pre-departure counselling, the return process, and reintegration. Despite physical distancing measures, digital innovation has enabled IOM to digitally provide accurate information and support across all stages of the migration continuum, tailored to the unique needs of each migrant.

[Welella Negussie](#)

Project Coordinator for Virtual Counselling
IOM Germany





Staff Voice

Engaging with local governments and empowering migrants towards digital inclusion and long term-integration solutions

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, IOM Greece has continuously supported its beneficiaries in using digitalized public services and worked closely with local governments to establish long-term migrant integration solutions.

HELIOS project staff have been remotely supporting beneficiaries on a one-on-one basis, on how to use digital services, such as the issuance and renewal of unemployment cards and e-registration to Vocational High Schools. This support is crucial, as Greece's digital services are primarily available only in Greek, and not easily accessed via smartphone.

During the months of April and May, when strict quarantine measures were applied in Greece, IOM Greece with the support of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, conducted a series of e-meetings to inform local actors about the involvement of beneficiaries of international protection in the local labour market.

The [HELIOS integration project](#), along with the competent authorities, initiated a series of teleconferences, inviting local governments and agricultural cooperatives to discuss the challenges of the pandemic on agricultural production. These teleconferences were mediated in local media of Greece, creating positive narratives on all aspects of social integration of refugees in the country.

This cycle of e-meetings were designed to establish stable linkages between host communities and refugees all over the country, smoothening the path for more sustainable and long-term solutions both in accommodation and employment opportunities.

[Milan Colic Humljan](#)

Project Manager, HELIOS
IOM Greece

Connecting and empowering diaspora communities through digital information platforms

The [iDiaspora](#) is digital venue designed to empower diaspora engagement. Since its initial launch, the Platform has received more than 389,000 visits and 507 registered users from 109 countries around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that information and communications technologies (ICTs) are key elements to galvanize effective responses to protect global diasporas. In the unprecedented context of the pandemic and restricted mobility, diasporas have used digital platforms to connect and organise initiatives to alleviate the immediate crisis.

To this end, iDiaspora has become a hub of information where diasporas have been able to: exchange their best practices, learn from the experiences of other migrant communities, and

interact with key stakeholders involved in the response to the pandemic such as international organisations, governments, and experts.

As a result of the global health crisis, iDiaspora has brought together over 300 members of multiple transnational communities who convened to share their experiences and effective practices in all contributing to address the effects of the pandemic in their countries of origin and destination and which will be shortly published in a report.

[Lara Larisa](#)

Transnational Communities and Digital
Communications Officer
IOM LHD HQ





Featured IOM Initiatives

As the world grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic, societies are witnessing first-hand how digitalization can help confront the crisis and keep migrants, their families and communities connected.

In June 2020, the UN Secretary General released their landmark report on a [“Roadmap for Digital Cooperation”](#), highlighting the importance of global connectivity, digital public goods and digital inclusion in achieving an inclusive digital economy and society. The roadmap acknowledges that migrants, refugees, internal displaced persons, persons with disabilities, women, etc. are among the groups that are particularly vulnerable to the risk of being left behind by digitization. Without prompt action, there is a risk of layering the current obstacles to digital inclusion on top of existing barriers they continuously face.

The recently released [IOM issue brief on xenophobia and stigma](#), on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of community-based approaches, such as digital social mixing interventions and online communication campaigns, in reducing prejudice and promoting social cohesion.

Even before the pandemic, IOM’s longstanding experience and existing evidence show that proper use of digital technology is instrumental

in providing migrants with more accessible avenues to cultural orientation and pre-departure activities, and the skills and literacy trainings needed to successfully integrate into their communities. To illustrate these, selected IOM initiatives are featured which focus on the following themes:



Digital social mixing strategies, including film screenings, at-home talent contents, virtual concerts and online platforms, to promote unity, solidarity and empathy by bringing migrants and host community members together with fun activities.



Community-driven campaigns on countering xenophobia and misinformation which comprise of platforms providing users with facts and resources to counter xenophobia, communication tools, and campaigns against the proliferation of fake news to ensure the dissemination of accurate information and address intolerance in all forms



Digital solutions for migrants’ equitable access to services such as the digitalization of education, virtual counselling, and training in linguistic skills and digital literacy. These initiatives assist in mitigating forms of digital exclusion and inaccessibility.



Social Mixing

Leveraging digitalization to strengthen social relations and cohesion between migrants and communities

Many traditional sites of social connection and mixing, such as leisure centres, public libraries, cafes and pubs, have been closed due to physical distancing measures. These closures have led many marginalized individuals to become even more isolated. Migrants may be vulnerable to social isolation, due to a lack of a strong social network and a limited capacity in the host community's language.

Additionally, social isolation can have long term mental health and psychosocial impacts. Recognizing this, IOM has launched several digital social mixing activities in order to strengthen social bonds between migrants and their communities, while mitigating the risk factors of COVID-19 and advancing migrants' psychological well-being.

IOM Peru launched ["#TuCausaEsMiCausa \('Your cause is my cause'\)"](#) to lead a social inclusion campaign for Venezuelan nationals in Peru, with UNHCR. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, [#TuCausaEsMiCausa](#) has continued to produce social mixing activities through [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Online activities included a home talent contest where Venezuelans and Peruvians were encouraged to vote online, a live-streamed cooking class, a live storytelling from a children's author and other similar activities.



IOM UK in partnership with Together Productions celebrated the UK's Refugee Week 2020 by launching a new online [global music video project](#). People around the world were invited to participate in the creation this video to celebrate the extraordinary contributions of refugees and migrants to our world. In the video, migrants and communities filmed themselves singing, dancing, playing instruments, and sharing important moments from their daily lives.

IOM Greece organized the online [HELIOS Film Festival](#) on World Refugee Day, in collaboration with the Municipalities of Ioannina, Livadia and Karditsa. The unique five-day long online Festival hosted 17 movies on migration from across the globe, attracting over 1000 viewers. The online delivery of the Festival allowed the films to have a greater impact to a wider range of audiences, while making the Festival more accessible to everyone. Open debate over the challenges, experiences and different aspects of migration was encouraged, thus creating bridges between the host and hosted communities.



Social Mixing

Leveraging digitalization to strengthen social relations and cohesion between migrants and communities

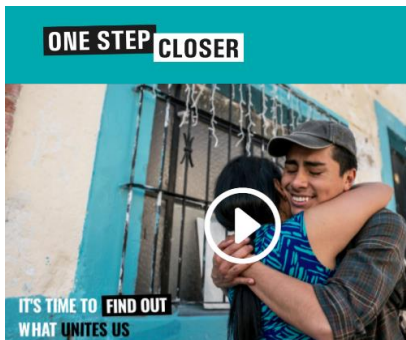
IOM Panama broadcasted [‘VenezolanIstmo: Music and Action in Times of Quarantine’](#) through Youtube Live. This virtual concert aimed to unite Panamanians and Venezuelans through music and art. 25 musicians and poets, as well as hundreds of virtual attendees, joined their voices to generate ties of empathy and trust.



As part of the celebration of Children's Day celebration, IOM Panama organized the [Virtual Camp "We are the Same"](#) for around 50 children aged 5 to 12 years old. This totally free and digital activity included storytelling, song learning, and a yoga session. It aimed to entertain, educate and share in an environment steeped in values such as peace, respect and solidarity.



These initiatives are part of IOM Panama's [#SomosLoMismo](#) campaign, a joint campaign with the UNHCR which aims to promote solidarity, respect and empathy between all migrants and refugees living in Panama.



In the framework of the IOM-UNHCR-coordinated [Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela \(R4V\)](#), the [‘One Step Closer’ campaign](#) was launched which produces audiovisual content to counter prejudice against migrants and refugees in 25 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean. Through its [web series](#), the campaign promotes messages of empathy, solidarity and tolerance through projects involving refugees and migrants from Venezuela, including original music scored in collaboration with the Latin Vox Machine orchestra.



Hate Speech and Misinformation

Addressing xenophobia and misinformation through community-driven media campaigns

Documented cases of COVID-related racist and xenophobic attacks towards migrants have proliferated throughout the internet, ranging from hate speech, racial slurs, fake information, derogatory and violent language.

While digital media platforms have created new opportunities for social connections and more accessible discussions, they have also catalyzed a great deal of hostility and misinformation towards migrants, including the vilification of migrants for the origin and spread of the virus.

Evidence shows that hate speech and xenophobia not only affects migrants' mental and psychosocial wellbeing but also

stigmatizes them from accessing services and assistance, that are otherwise available to general population. As such, this undermines meaningful participation of migrants in various aspects of community life.

As these persisting incidents and expressions of hate have both short- and long-term implications for society at large, IOM has developed targeted digital interventions and campaigns to effectively counter various forms of intolerance and disparaging expressions against migrants, through mobilizing migrants and their communities.

IOM San José launched their [#XenophobiaZero](#) online platform, a long-term initiative that advances an integrated and community-based approach to detecting xenophobia and disinformation about migrants. This initiative will become a go-to-hub where any institution or individual interested in raising its voice against xenophobia will find the tools to [share](#) positive content on migrants, [act](#) against hate-speech, and [analyze](#) xenophobic trends in the region.



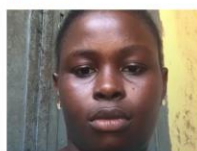
The Gambia: Thank You! 4 - (The Gambia) (Video, English)



The Gambia: Thank You! 3 (The Gambia) (Video, English)



The Gambia: Thank you! (Video, English)



Guinea: After Covid - Mariama (Guinea) (Video, French)

IOM RO Dakar has supported the development of an [online library](#) of culturally adapted and context specific online tools to fight misinformation and the spread of coronavirus in West and Central Africa. Through this platform developed by the Regional Working Group for Risk Communication and Community Engagement (CREC), migrants can share information by migrants, for migrants. IOM RO Dakar has also sustained their [Migrants as Messengers](#) program throughout COVID-19, mobilizing over 200 migrant volunteers to disseminate accurate information on COVID-19 through [social media and in person](#).



Hate Speech and Misinformation

Addressing xenophobia and misinformation through community-driven media campaigns

IOM Bangladesh has been collaborating with government and local actors to establish an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) mass communication tool in late April. Known as the “[Covid Info Line](#)”, the system uses pre-recorded information and messaging through phone networks to disseminate critical information, counter misinformation, and collect community feedback, in refugees’ local languages. As of June 02, this project has over 26,000 registered users and over 235,000 calls have been made to beneficiaries. IOM Bangladesh is actively working to expand the IVR system’s scope to host communities and activities beyond the pandemic response.



IOM Niger’s Community Cohesion Initiative (NCCI) partnered with the GeoAnalytics Center to launch “[Fake News](#)”, a nationwide online campaign that aims to reduce to proliferation of fake news across the country. Videos are in local languages with French subtitles – and made available in low resolution to ensure a wider dissemination, despite internet connectivity issues in some of Niger’s regions. These audiovisual materials are published via WhatsApp and Facebook, Niger’s most popular social networks.



Featured IOM Mobile Apps for migrant-friendly programming

IOM’s [Migration Translation App \(MiTA\)](#) for phones facilitates communication between migration management officials and migrants during border procedures and situations of first contact. This free, custom-built offline application can offer a greater help when migrants move across borders during the COVID-19 crisis. It contains 52 simple questions relating to the identity, mode of travel, health and immediate protection needs of the migrants available in 12 languages.

[Support For Migrants App](#) provides advice on all the nearest services and support for migrants and refugees in the Western Balkans. Messages specifically formulated for the COVID19 emergency are also available in English, Pashto, Urdu, Bengali, Farsi, and Arabic.

[MigApp](#) was designed to help migrants make informed decisions during their journeys by simplifying access to secure and reliable migration-related information and services. The app also contains select IOM programmes, allowing the Organization to reach more migrants by leveraging the latest mobile technology.

The app also provides information on travel risks and requirements and low-cost money transfer comparison. It is available in 8 different languages.



Migrant Inclusion

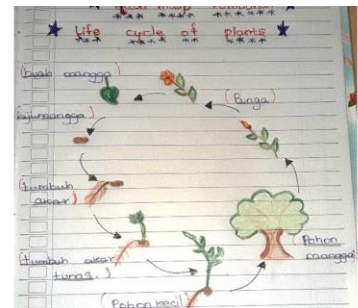
Digital solutions for migrants' equitable and continued access to services and capacity building

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the growing importance and value of digital technologies by moving many social interactions and social services online. However, this transition to digitalization is not without its caveats: there are large sections of society who are now unable to access essential services or interact with their friends, family and the rest of society due to a lack of digital access.

Digital inaccessibility can take two main forms: 1) a lack of digital literacy, or the skills required to navigate the internet, and 2) a lack of access to technology. Many migrants do not have access to wifi or data, or do not have/cannot afford the devices that are required to join the digital

community. Internet non-users are at particular risk of social isolation, due to their digital exclusion. Migrants may also face additional barriers to digital inclusion, due to a reliance on others to translate the websites of service providers and social media platforms to their native languages. While the pandemic has prompted more innovative approaches to service delivery, digital inclusion is of paramount importance. The pandemic has highlighted the potential that digitalization can bring but it is imperative to strengthen the bonds between people and service providers to ensure that the opportunities of digitalization are open to everyone.

IOM Indonesia continuously supports school children, refugees, and asylum seekers through [distance learning and informal education activities](#). To complement children's distance learning, IOM Indonesia conducted online trainings for public school teachers, in collaboration with UNICEF and other local NGOs. These trainings aim to build the awareness and capacities of counsellor teachers on supporting their students' mental and psychosocial well-being to address the challenges that distance learning can bring.



Sample student assignment

IOM Germany runs a [virtual counselling \(VC\) service](#) designed to assist migrants considering a voluntary return. Migrants in Germany can call and message IOM staff in 16 countries of origin to speak in their native language about what reintegration is going to look like in their individual case. The project was developed IOM Germany in 2019 and is funded by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. It aims at providing an easily accessible, culturally sensitive, and unbiased counselling service by establishing direct contact between the migrant communities in Germany and the counsellors in the countries of origin. The continuous contact with the counsellors even upon return supports a sustainable and smooth reintegration process.



Migrant Inclusion

Digital solutions for migrants' equitable and continued access to services and capacity building

IOM Greece developed asynchronous [e-learning courses](#), which featured 360 hours of integration material on subjects such as Greek Language and soft skills. These courses will support beneficiaries in their efforts to integrate into Greek society and constitute as an important step towards digital literacy. The digital literacy benefits of these courses will allow beneficiaries to access further e-learning opportunities available online worldwide. From June 2020 to date, 2447 beneficiaries have been supported by HELIOS staff, while 860 are already matriculated HELIOS e-students



IOM Brazil facilitated greater linguistic inclusion for migrant and refugee children undergoing remote education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Educational material, '[Learning Paths](#)', was translated from Portuguese to English, French, and Spanish to support migrant and refugee children. This material has reached almost four thousand refugee and migrant children. In Manaus and Boa Vista, IOM Brazil has organized [several taskforces](#) to help Venezuelan refugees and migrants who lack internet access to complete the registration required for emergency financial assistance offered by the Brazilian government. Through these taskforces, IOM Brazil has reached over 1500 people.

IOM Slovakia has been managing an IOM [Migrant Information Centre](#) which continuously provide advice and services for foreigners in the country. They provide online counselling services regarding visa, legal advice, residence, employment in line with COVID-19 official measures from the Slovakian government. This is done for example through organizing webinars on migrant [family benefits](#) and first steps for [foreign students](#).



IOM Azerbaijan launched a [four-week intensive online business and financial literacy training](#) for youth selected from different regions within the framework of the 'Public Action for Resilience (PAR) Activity. The training lasted from June 18 to July 18 and aimed at improving managerial skills and financial literacy. Most participants are those who had an affiliation with Youth Houses, and Career Development Centers in the regions out of the capital. The training covered basic theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of fundamentals of economics fundamentals, financial and management accounting, and business administration.





Migrants Voice

Shedding light on migrants' issues, resilience and concerns

Monitoring and evaluation is a crucial part of IOM's activities to ensure highest standard of service delivery and accountability to beneficiaries. This section draws from IOM's evaluation reports to highlight key findings and migrants' perspectives on the successes, challenges and the path ahead in IOM's work in digitalization, migrant inclusion and social cohesion.

Digital poverty, a key barrier, must be addressed to facilitate the meaningful inclusion of migrants into new and emerging digital spaces

IOM Greece's HELIOS programme conducted a [Distance Learning Feasibility Survey](#), which mapped out the availability of devices, internet access and technological literacy of HELIOS beneficiaries. This data is used to support the design of tailored distance learning platforms, used for the provision of HELIOS integration courses.

- Of the 537 respondents, 99% indicated that they own a smartphone and know how to use mobile applications, while only 15% owned laptops.
- Access to technical devices is no guarantee that beneficiaries would be able to utilize the distance learning platform. While 91% of respondents indicated they have the will and interest to participate in e-learning course, 66% indicated that they would require substantial technical support to be able to participate.
- Similarly, 38% of respondents reported a need for support for internet connectivity. Collecting data on the context specific needs of migrants and integrating them into programming is key in facilitating digital inclusion in service delivery.

IOM's ADMIN4ALL regional program is conducting an ongoing [online survey](#) with 33 municipalities across 7

EU Member States, to assess the impact of COVID-19 on migrants' access to local services.

- The survey revealed that majority of municipal services surveyed have transitioned to digital delivery (through avenues such as email, Skype, telephone, and other online platforms) but this was not always a smooth transition. Many municipalities also reported challenges in accessing appropriate equipment.
- While the transition to digitalization has enabled municipalities to continue providing beneficiaries with services, the survey revealed that primary challenges included migrants' lack of access to ICT devices, communication barriers and difficulties in reaching out to beneficiaries due to lack of specialized staff.

IOM Indonesia conducted a survey on their [Online Learning by On-Call Teacher programme](#), allowing migrant beneficiaries to continue their education and more engage in positive and meaningful activities. Indonesia released a report on this programme, which reached 328 people by July 2020.

- The survey revealed that respondents were more motivated to join online learning due to the programme's provision of a communication allowance, to support their learning. Allowances such as these ensure that migrants have the resources required to engage with digitalization.





Migrants Voice

The uncertainty of the pandemic has increased the propensity of migrants to accept deceiving or exploitative job opportunities. Connecting migrants with accurate and reliable online information sources and enhancing their capacity to recognize these is crucial in ensuring migrants' safety and allowing them to make informed choices.

IOM's Regional Program on Migration Mesoamerica and The Caribbean [conducted digital surveys](#) for the Communication for Development (C4D) campaign, with over 400 young people in northern Central America. The surveys aimed to determine how the pandemic has affected migrants' life plans and decision making.

- The results indicated that the uncertainty related to COVID has increased the risk of young people falling victim to face offers related to fraud, exploitation, human trafficking or smuggling.

IOM RO San Jose [conducted a digital survey](#) with 1600 migrants in Central America and Mexico to gather data on the impacts of COVID-19 on migrant populations in this region. This data can be used to guide the response of actors in health, migration management, and socioeconomic recovery strategies.

- The study revealed that COVID-19 exposed migrants to heightened risks of deception or exploitation when looking for job opportunities. Despite this, most participants indicated they would risk taking a job abroad, even without proper information.

Both surveys highlight the importance of connecting migrants with accurate information, digital literacy skills, and tools to recognize reliable information sources. Without these tools, migrants are at a higher risk of engaging with irregular migration, human trafficking and exploitation.

The pandemic has exacerbated the precarious position of migrants in the labour market, which can increase digital poverty and worsen the digital divide. Recovery strategies must ensure that migrants are not left behind in the COVID-19 response.

IOM RO San Jose's survey illustrates the impact of the pandemic on migrants' livelihoods. As governments grapple with the devastating economic effects of the pandemic, inclusive social protection measures and unemployment benefits must be taken to ensure that migrants are not left behind.

- Of the 1600 migrants surveyed, 51% lost their jobs due to pandemic related reasons. Similarly, of these 51% of migrants, only 20% are currently working. This means that only one third of migrants were able to find employment in the pandemic economy.
- The survey also revealed that 4 out of 10 migrants saw their working hours cut, or had their wages reduced, while 48% of participants indicated that their salaries and incomes had been reduced due to COVID-19 related reasons

While the loss of livelihood can be devastating in non-pandemic times, the increased reliance on digitization, compounded with the high costs of digital connectivity and technology, means that a loss of livelihood can potentially cut migrants out of the digital community.

Social mixing interventions are a powerful tool to inform and address negative perceptions about migration.

IOM DISC Initiative and GMDAC conducted [a global pilot evaluation](#) of how the films and public film screenings of the Global Migration Film Festival can influence public perceptions towards migrants and understanding of migration.

- Based on data from over 4000 respondents in over 40 countries, this study revealed that participation in such events can positively influence attendees' perceptions of migrants, change their attitudes towards diversity and bring different communities together.
- The data indicated that positive views about migration increased by around 11% after viewing, and 34% of participants responded that the film "definitely" changed their perceptions of migrants. 58% of respondents indicated that migrants enrich a country's cultural life and 49% responded that migrants can be trusted.





Migrants Voice

While the GMFF pilot study is only an initial step, it suggests that films and film screenings are a powerful advocacy tool to bring attention to social issues, counter prejudice and create a platform for meaningful interactions.

Similarly, IOM Peru released an [evaluation report on its “The Ball has No Flags” initiative](#), an intergroup contact activity that brought together children and youth in Peru through football. 337 Peruvian and Venezuelan girls, boys and teens benefitted directly from this project, strengthening community participation and networks between the two groups.

- Over 80% of participants indicated that they “have more friends from other countries” and “are able to connect with boys and girls from [other] countr[ies] after participating in the program.

The evaluation of these social mixing interventions through sports and film screenings suggest that they are fit for the purpose of bolstering COVID-19 related counter-hate speech and xenophobia strategies.

Digital inclusion is crucial to migrants’ mental health and well-being, as it can alleviate the pandemic-related isolation, fears, and anxiety of migrants.

IOM Indonesia’s [Online Learning by On-Call Teacher programme](#) has recognized the impact of physical distancing measures on not only IOM’s ability to provide services, but also on the mental health and well-being of migrants.

- The physical distancing requirements and

lockdowns in countries’ pandemic measures cause social isolation and anxiety for many migrants, at the detriment of their mental health.

- The On-Call Teacher programme allows migrants to continue their social interactions and provides psychosocial activities through online learning. Participating migrant students reported feeling less stressed, as the class distracted them from their worries, and that the programme provided them with meaningful activity during the stay at home time period.
- ***Migrants continue to demonstrate resilience and ingenuity, despite the crisis and their personal situations.***
- IOM RO San Jose’s [survey](#) revealed that 22% of migrants turned to entrepreneurship after being left unemployed due to the pandemic. Although the majority of these entrepreneurship were informal in nature, this illustrates the ingenuity and resilience of migrants, despite difficult times.
- IOM Peru’s evaluation report also revealed that in addition to intergroup contact, The Ball has No Flags provided leadership training to its participants. 10 Peruvian and Venezuelan youth were certified as youth leaders to co-execute social sporting classes, while 9 representatives were certified for their participation in the leadership school. Through sport, participants develop their leadership and cooperation skills, through the prism of equality and inclusion, to strengthen values such as resilience, integration and community cohesion.

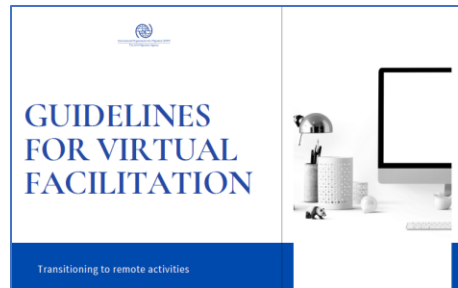




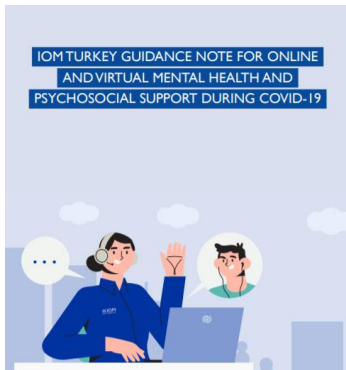
Featured Resources on Digitalization

Guidelines for Virtual Facilitation

IOM RO Vienna recently published [guidelines on online facilitation](#) to support IOM offices around the world in adapting activities to an online context. This resource outlines strategies in preparing, implementing and monitoring and evaluating virtual activities. IOM Netherlands released a complementary instructional video on virtual facilitation on [Youtube](#).



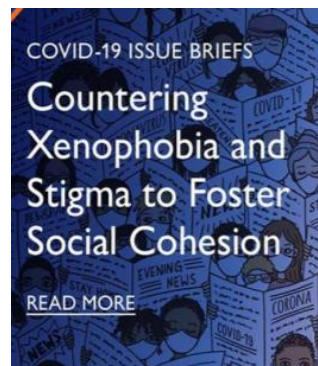
Guidance Note on Online and Virtual Mental Health and Psychosocial (MPSS) Support



IOM Turkey released a [guidance note](#) on online and virtual Mental Health and Psychosocial (MHPSS) support during Covid-19. Social distancing has had negative impacts on the mental health and coping mechanisms, which can lead to long-term consequences within communities, families and vulnerable individuals. This note highlights ways to ensure inclusion in social connection during COVID-19, by supporting the community to find ways to connect with each other during virtual activities.

IOM Brief on Countering Xenophobia and Stigma

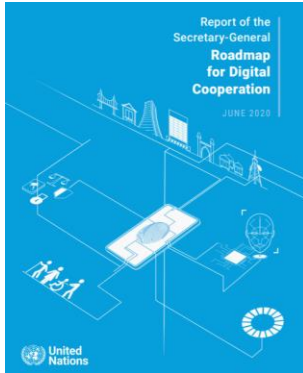
IOM has released an [issue brief](#) on countering xenophobia and stigma, which articulates how digital media has been an important lifeline for many during lockdown and physical restrictions, including migrants. At the same time, social media is a platform where fake news and misinformation related to the pandemic continuously proliferate. The brief notes that affected communities must be involved in the development of effective tools to address cases of online hate speech, as well as NGOs, tech companies, IOs, etc.





Resources on Digitalization

UN Roadmap for Digital Cooperation



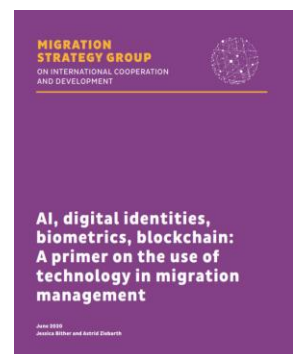
The UN Secretary-General released its [“Roadmap for Digital Cooperation”](#), highlighting that migrants, refugees, internal displaced persons, persons with disabilities, women, etc are among the groups that are particularly vulnerable to the risk of being left behind by digitization. This report serves as a practical roadmap to the implementation of the 2019 report’s recommendations and highlights challenges such as meaningful participation through ensuring equal to digital technology, digital capacity building, the creation and consolidation of digital public goods, and the protection of digital human rights.

Migrating in the Digital, Post-COVID World (Helvetas)

This [article](#) touches upon the multi-dimensional impacts and risks of digitalization to migrants and migration. In an interview, Marina Manke, LHD Head articulated that there was a pronounced trend towards digitalization in human mobility patterns even before COVID-19, and digitalization has its pros and cons. While it is impactful, digitalization requires investment into digital skills and therefore creates the potential for the so-called digital divide of communities. Development organizations must be mindful while offering digital literacy opportunities and ensure it is done in an equitable manner, allowing all communities to benefit.

AI, digital identities, biometrics, blockchain: A primer on the use of technology in migration management

This [primer](#) seeks to serve as a first orientation for stakeholders to tech tools and approaches in key migration policy areas, as well as areas where technology is advancing rapidly. It outlines the potential to better predict migration through AI-powered analysis of big data sources and the increasing use of digital identities, particularly in humanitarian settings. Biometric borders and automated decision making, and the employment of technologies in asylum processes, are other crucial areas covered.



Briefs on Emerging Immigration, Consular and Visa Needs & Recommendations

Supporting governments with digitalizing solutions for integrated border management and ID management is an IOM priority. These [briefs](#) present the most recent findings and recommendations from the ongoing Identification and Monitoring of Emerging Immigration, Consular and Visa Needs initiative launched as part of IOM’s COVID-19 Response.





Resources on Digitalization

How digitalization can help achieve fair migration (ILO)

[This op-ed](#) presents the potential of digital migration management platforms to make regular migration more attractive by reducing the cost and time of formal recruitment processes. It also addresses the challenges of the digital divide hidden behind the impressive levels of connectivity in Asia.

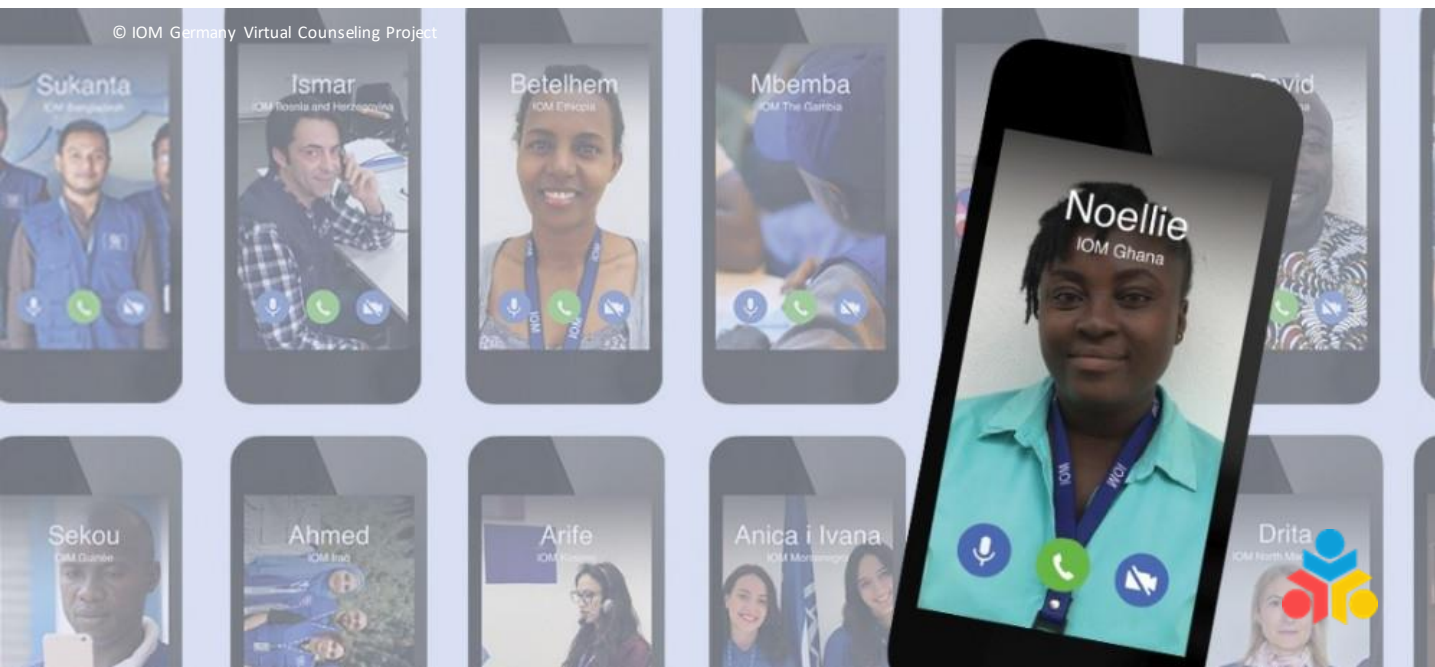
Guidance Note on Connectivity for Refugees

UNHCR released a [Guidance Note on Connectivity](#) which focuses on issues regarding communications and the delivery of remote programs and accordingly provides key considerations and advice that can be used to address them. Additionally, the document provides relevant UNHCR resources, such as a [Planning Checklist for Managers](#) and an [Operational Checklist for Practitioners](#), both of which help identify actions and steps to support forcibly displaced people's digital access and inclusion.

Global Network Resiliency Platform (#REG4COVID)

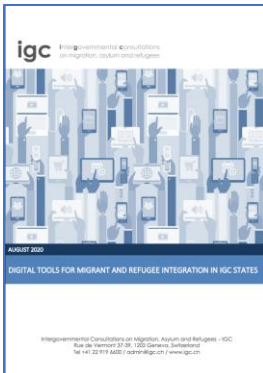
The International Telecommunications Union ITU has launched two platforms to positive potential of digital technologies during COVID-19. The [Global Network Resiliency Platform \(#REG4COVID\)](#) is a place where regulators, policy makers and other interested stakeholders can [share](#) initiatives and exchange information among peers to ensure communities remain connected, harness the full power and potential of ICTs during this crisis, and to prepare for the medium and long-term recovery from COVID19. [CYB4COVID](#) outlines a list of cybersecurity resources to allow communities, organizations and governments remain connected securely.

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Resources on Digitalization



Digital Tools for Migrant and Refugee Integration in IGC States

[This paper](#) aims to better understand how technology is being applied in the integration context by looking at how Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC) States have used digital tools to support the settlement and integration of migrants and refugees. This paper highlights the specific use of technology for integration purposes and offers insights on the best practices and considerations gained from research in this area.

The Digital Lives of Refugees: How Displaced Populations Use Mobile Phones and What Gets in the Way

[This study](#) conducted by GSMA, with support from the UNHCR, provides research to strengthen the evidence base for humanitarian organizations and MNOs and showcases methods through which humanitarian assistance can be digitalized. This report identifies the current state of mobile technology use and accessibility for refugees, as well as barriers to access. It examines the ways that mobile technology can improve access to financial services, utilities, identity services, food insecurity and gender and inclusivity in the refugee context.

Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2019

[This report by ITU](#) serves to offer a snapshot of the most important ICT indicators, highlighting key barriers and areas to address to increase digital inclusivity. This report highlights that the digital gender gap is growing as Internet use increases. It emphasizes that more effective action is needed to address the range of barriers (eg: cultural, financial, skills related) that are impeding internet uptake, especially among women.



Leveraging Technology to Support Refugee Youth in the Middle East and East Africa

[This report](#) by the Immigrant Services Society of BC provides recommendations and information on how technology can be used to safely provide additional support to refugee youth selected for resettlement under Canada's humanitarian immigration stream. This report's recommendation highlights ways that organizations can overcome barriers to inclusion for refugee youth being resettled to Canada through technology, though its findings can be generalized more broadly outside of the Canadian specific context



DISC Resources

Upcoming: The DISC Initiative, in partnership with IOM RO Vienna, will soon release a handbook with evidence-based recommendations and key principles that enable effective “social mixing” to strengthen migrant integration and social cohesion between migrants and communities.

The note will complement this digest, highlighting key factors that IOM staff and other key actors can draw from in developing social mixing interventions, in both online and offline formats. The note identifies underscores the

importance of building trust and mutual understanding between groups, carefully identifying and tailoring activities towards target groups, facilitating positive and sustained social relationships, and monitoring, evaluating and adjusting social mixing programmes as needed. Through meaningful social mixing in both the face-to-face and digital worlds, migrants and host communities can develop stronger positive social connections, and counter intolerance in all its forms.



[DISC Digest, 1st Edition](#)



[DISC Digest, 2nd Edition](#)



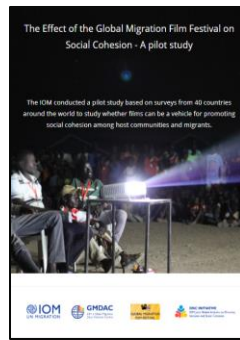
[DISC Digest, 3rd Edition](#)



[Resource Bank on COVID-19](#)



[IOM Initiatives on Countering Xenophobia](#)



[The Effect of the GMFF on Social Cohesion](#)



[IOM Initiatives on Countering Xenophobia](#)



[IOM's Response to Xenophobia & Discrimination](#)

The **DISC Initiative** is a flexible, demand-led and multi-phased initiative, which aims to elevate IOM’s capacity and programming to support Member States and relevant partners in the areas of social cohesion, migrant integration and inclusion. The DISC Initiative serves as a global platform to share,

learn, develop and implement innovative strategies and interventions in this area.

For more information about the DISC Initiative, please download our [infosheet](#) or visit our [SharePoint](#). Don’t forget to check the resources above!





The Power of Digitalization in the Age of Physical Distancing:

*Strengthening social connections and cohesion through
the digital inclusion and connectivity of migrants*



DISC Initiative

The Joint Global Initiative on Diversity,
Inclusion and Social Cohesion

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this digest are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).



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