JOINT SUMMIT WORKING GROUP OEA/Ser.E

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**IOM response to COVID-19**

Since January, and in line with WHO recommendations, IOM’s global workforce has been mobilized across the world, drawing down on decades of experience, most recently with the Ebola epidemic and working with dozens of governments to plan their responses and save lives as the global health crisis evolves into the most significant mobility crisis ever.

IOM’s strategic response focuses on reaching the vulnerable and building operational capacities to address the mobility dimensions of this pandemic. These actions include:

* **Risk communication and community engagement activities**, by leveraging community networks to ensure public health information is communicated in accessible and culturally appropriate ways to the most vulnerable, including migrants, regardless of status. IOM has conducted information sessions in mainland camps for migrants, translating government information, as well as distributing additional supplies.
* **Cross-border coordination** and capacity building to strengthen health surveillance at entry and exit points (airports, seaports and land border crossings) in dozens of states. IOM is providing a daily Global Mobility Restriction Overview, as well as Country-Level Restriction Mapping, outlining new and complex travel restriction measures to support colleagues across the organization.
* **Crisis coordination**to facilitate information exchange between stakeholders.
* **Trainings for government employees**; IOM has previously undertaken trainings on Standard Operating Procedures at point of entry during health emergencies in the context of Ebola response, in Guinea, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Senegal. This can be extended to address COVID-19 operational needs and be done virtually.
* **Population mobility mapping exercises** to anticipate needs and prioritize measures by layering information about travel restrictions, points of entry status, airlines and the status of stranded migrants, in collaboration with WHO. It is important that governments and frontline response teams have a solid understanding of population movements and mobility dynamics so vulnerable groups can be reached in a timely manner.
* **Enhanced surveillance, and WASH services** at entry points. IOM is increasing water access and hygiene measures at scale across its operations, to minimize the risk of contagion. In other locations, and across Asia, all US-bound migrants undergoing health checks at IOM centers receive information, hand sanitizer and tissues.

# IOM’s Response in the Americas

* **Through its Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform**, is coordinating the COVID-19 response for refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the region. Working with WHO/PAHO, Regional Sectors and members of the Regional Platform provide regional guidance on adapting modalities of work to ensure continuity of delivery of life-saving aid and cash assistance (available in a dedicated section of R4V.info), while identifying areas for priority interventions and providing crucial information to refugees and migrants from Venezuela.
* **In Central America and Mexico, partners are modifying the delivery of assistance (e.g. prioritizing cash and NFIs) to respond to the COVID-19 situation**. Activities supporting livelihoods or registration, counselling and cash distribution in the sub-region are adjusted and conducted in alignment with WHO/PAHO recommendations.
* **The Sub-regional Platform in the Southern Cone is conducting assessments of needs and capacities of partners.** Based thereon R4V partners have prioritized shelter solutions, NFIs, food assistance and cash-based interventions to the most vulnerable refugees and migrants in border areas and in urban centres, where the majority of them are located.

# Regional Sectors

* **The Regional Health Sector developed key recommendations on the COVID-19 response for refugees and migrants that were distributed to regional and national sectors.** The Sector is prioritizing its assistance to national levels, so that national and international organizations continue to maintain health needs atop their priorities.
* **The Regional Shelter/NFI and Humanitarian Transportation Sectors are prioritizing guidance on distributions and market- based interventions for NFIs, as well as measures to implement isolation and enhancing WASH facilities within shelters**, using CBIs for temporary accommodation solutions, e.g. in hotels. For transportation, where operations are still running, the Sectors are advising on enhanced WASH measures prior to and during journeys. The Sectors are also developing and disseminating sector-speciﬁc messages to platforms for use in camp-like settings, distribution sites and transport terminals.
* **The Regional Food Security Sector is advising on adapted response modalities** for partners to ensure vulnerable populations continue receiving assistance. Some partners are considering take-home rations instead of school meals, or cash instead of in-kind modalities. The Sector is also monitoring food prices to assess the impact on food security and adapt transfer values where needed. Advocacy with authorities and technical assistance are also ongoing to include vulnerable Venezuelans in national social protection systems. Levels of food insecurity are expected to increase due to the lack of income impacting disproportionately refugees and migrants.
* **The Reginal WASH Sector is prioritizing the communication of risks of COVID-19 and the promotion of hygiene practices among refugees and migrants.** Having observed an increased need for cleaning and hygiene products as well handwashing facilities in shelters and receiving hubs, the Sector is also coordinating the provision of hand sanitizers to households, communal spaces and handwashing facilities in public spaces. Access to water and hygiene supplies continues to be a critical gap for people on the move.
* **The Regional Education Sector is developing guidance to maintain continuity of education services** for refugees and migrants through alternative non-formal education programs. More than 400 million children in the region are aﬀected. The Sector is compiling good practices concerning ﬂexible home- based learning delivered through on-line platforms, radio and TV.
* **The Regional Protection Sector is working to activate virtual channels and hotlines to maintain assistance and legal orientation to refugees and migrants**. The Sector is developing a factsheet concerning the impact of the COVID-19 situation and related changes of activities, highlighting disruption of services and potential threats to the safety and dignity of refugees and migrants. Key protection messages and a collection of good institutional practices towards refuges and migrants have been produced and will be disseminated. The GBV and Child Protection Sub-Sectors are also monitoring the situation as many women are now conﬁned with abusive partners, vulnerable to sexual exploitation, assault and to other forms of GBV, with a direct impact on children. Negative coping mechanisms are rising due to social distancing and lack of income generating activities leading to increased homelessness. Human traﬃcking & smuggling is expected to increase as borders are closed and organized crime networks may take advantage of the situation. The Sub-Sector is preparing key messages for authorities and stakeholders about traﬃcking & smuggling risks linked to the implementation of COVID-19 measures.

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* **Employment opportunities for refugees and migrants, in both formal and informal sectors, are reducing due to movement restrictions.** The **Integration** Sector developed key messages on workers’ rights in the current context and is promoting good practices adopted by authorities in the region to facilitate the integration of foreign health professionals in the response.

In view of the impact of the pandemic on IOM’s daily operations, including the increasing number of travel restrictions, a thorough assessment is being undertaken to ensure the continued safety of the staff, partners and all beneficiaries of the organization. Across all of IOM’s activities, priority is given to mainstreaming protection concerns within the COVID-19 response to ensure that our efforts are people-centered, inclusive and do no harm to the populations we assist. For more information, visit <https://www.iom.int/covid19>.

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