

# COVID-19 and Migrant and Displaced Children – What Local Governments Can Do

## 1) **Include migrant and displaced children in preparedness, response, and mitigation efforts for COVID-19.**

Start with the following key questions:

- Are your local government's preparedness and response plans inclusive of displaced and migrant children? What steps are being taken to reach the hard-to-reach, "hidden," and "left-behind" populations?
- Are child protection authorities part of local COVID-19 preparedness and response plans?

Make relief measures available for migrant and displaced families.

*Chicago makes its COVID-19 relief programs – including the COVID-19 Housing Assistance Grant program – as well as online resources for Chicago public school students, available to all residents, including migrants and refugees.<sup>i</sup>*

*The City of **New York** confirms that many city services are available to all regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.<sup>ii</sup>*

*The Mayor of **Los Angeles** called for the state and federal government to do more to protect immigrants, particularly immigrant families, no matter their legal status.<sup>iii</sup>*

Partner with local organizations and initiatives that offer relief and aim to mitigate hardship faced by migrant and displaced families due to the pandemic.

*In **Mumbai's** neighborhood of Versova, local NGOs teamed up with the Civil Defense Department of the state government and set up a relief shelter on empty land owned by the Department, for migrant workers and their families, who have lost their housing in the nationwide lockdown, and others in need.<sup>iv</sup>*

*Migrants in need and their families benefit from food distributions run by a platform of local volunteers in **Rennes** who use local school buildings as collection and redistribution sites.<sup>v</sup>*

*In response to a sharp increase of COVID-19 infection among Somali-speakers in **Helsinki**, the city added health care professionals representing language minorities to its teams responsible for tracing infections and cooperates with stakeholders such as the Finnish Somali League to improve the situation.<sup>vi</sup>*

## 2) **Advocate proactively against xenophobia, stigma, and discrimination – the virus does not discriminate, and neither should we.**

Do not miss any opportunity to lead by example and call out all instance of discrimination or stigmatization against any person, including migrant and displaced children and youth.

*The **Coalition of Latin American and Caribbean Cities against Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia** spoke out against any discrimination, particularly of vulnerable persons, such as displaced persons and migrants, and to include these groups in COVID-19 responses.<sup>vii</sup>*

*The City of **Boulder** issued a statement on the importance of maintaining a welcoming and inclusive environment for all regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender or immigration status.<sup>viii</sup>*

Avoid singling out migrant and displaced children but include them along with other groups in vulnerable situations who need specific support.

Support returned migrant children to reintegrate into their communities (including by providing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and case management) and work with communities to prevent discrimination and stigma against returnees.

## 3) **Provide accessible, timely, culturally and linguistically appropriate, child-friendly and relevant information on COVID-19 to children and families on the move.**

Ensure translation and audio-visualization of materials and other information into languages and formats commonly spoken and easily understood by all migrant and displaced children and youth in your context, including those living with a disability.

*In **Vienna**, migrants have access to online information services on COVID-19 in 24 languages.<sup>ix</sup> **Berlin** has published multilingual text and audio information on quarantine policies for those in refugee accommodation on its website.<sup>x</sup> **Helsinki**,<sup>xi</sup> **Los Angeles**,<sup>xii</sup> **Nuremberg**,<sup>xiii</sup> **Turku**,<sup>xiv</sup> **Zurich**<sup>xv</sup> and many other cities have made information on COVID-19 and available services available for immigrants in multiple languages.*

Use migrant and displaced families' preferred channels of information and sources they trust (migrant peers, refugee networks, diaspora groups, volunteers, frontline workers).

Proactively reach out to migrant and displaced communities to build trust to ensure they are not scared to access services, even if undocumented.

*The City of **Leeds** has rolled out an online drop-in service and created a dedicated Facebook page to better reach migrant communities. Every week, migrant community networkers representing different groups are briefed by guest speakers from different services on COVID-19 related topics.<sup>xvi</sup>*

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- 4) **Ensure universal access to COVID-19 testing, healthcare, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and other essential services, for all those who need them, regardless of status.**

To keep everyone healthy, **no one should be denied access to health services and care** and no one should fear they will be penalized for accessing services, even if undocumented.

**Establish firewalls** between local service providers and immigration authorities, so undocumented families are not discouraged from using services for fear of being detected. **Remove identification requirements** that restrict access to services.

***San Diego** encourages migrants and refugees to access healthcare services, including COVID-19 testing. It is stressed that immigrants will not be asked for documents on their legal status.<sup>.xvii</sup>*

*Diagnostic and treatment of COVID-19 are free of charge in **Gdańsk**, regardless of country of origin, citizenship or insurance status.<sup>.xviii</sup> Health services and testing for COVID-19 are also open to all – including displaced populations – in **Gaziantep**.*

**Integrate and invest more resources into MHPSS** for migrant and displaced children and their families, wherever possible. Address mental health risks for adolescents and youth, and help them cope with the crisis, including by promoting and funding mentorship and peer-support initiatives.

- 5) **Ensure clean water, basic toilets and good hygiene practices are also available for migrant and displaced children and families, when transiting or for those living in camps and in urban areas.**

**Expand the availability and access to WASH services** in places where migrant and displaced children live.

***Mogadishu** set up portable hand-washing stations in public spaces and IDP camps across the city.<sup>.xix</sup> The City of **Sao Paulo** also installed sinks in public spaces to assist people in living in the streets to improve hand hygiene.<sup>.xx</sup>*

If WASH facilities are not readily available, **communicate clearly** (in languages understood by displaced or migrant children) **and often** that avoiding touching one's mouth, nose or eyes is another way to minimize the risk of infection.

**Do not overlook menstrual health and hygiene management** in COVID-19 response plans, with an emphasis on migrant and displaced women and adolescent girls.

- 6) **Support and advocate for safer living and housing conditions to allow for social distancing, including in shelters, refugee and IDP camps.**

*Regional authorities in **Brussels** are lodging unhoused migrants in two hotels in an effort to prevent public gathering and allow for social distancing amid the pandemic.<sup>.xxi</sup>*

If environments remain crowded, to the extent possible, **isolate the sick from the most high-risk** (the elderly, those with co-morbidities, co-infections, and other pre-existing conditions).

*Two new refugee accommodations with self-contained housing units have been put in place by the City of **Cologne** to allow for better implementation of quarantine and isolation measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.<sup>.xxii</sup>*

Quarantining forces families to stay at home or in shelters, but for many women and girls, home is a dangerous place, therefore **mitigating measures against gender-based violence** should be put in place.

**Join efforts** to relocate displaced children from crowded environments and lobby your national government to act.

*Calls to relocate children from the Greek islands have been supported by a number of cities. In a letter addressed to the presidents of the European Commission, European Council and European Parliament, the cities of **Amersfoort, Amsterdam, Arnhem, Barcelona, Ghent, Groningen, Leipzig, Nuremberg, Tilburg, and Utrecht** have offered to take in unaccompanied children.<sup>.xxiii</sup> Due to the worsening COVID-19 situation in Moria, the camp on the Greek island of Lesbos, **Berlin** has offered to host 500 to 1500 unaccompanied children.<sup>.xxiv</sup>*

- 7) **Pay special attention to children and families who are currently detained and continue advocating to end child immigration detention. During a pandemic, those in detention face a disproportionate risk, as social distancing/spacing becomes difficult to maintain and many facilities are inadequately equipped with WASH.**

*The **New York City Council** has called for a suspension of immigration enforcement and the release of detainees.<sup>.xxv</sup>*

**Place children in safe accommodation** and non-custodial alternatives to detention, especially in response to public health measures.

Where detention continues, **put WASH facilities in place and provide essential COVID supplies and referral services.**

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Promote alternatives to immigration detention at the local level through adequate reception and care models that keep families together, engage children and families through case management and ensure access to services regardless of status.

*The Mexican municipality of Villahermosa has created an ‘open-door’ longer-term shelter for migrant children and asylum seekers as an alternative to detention. Children receive psychosocial support, have access to education, health services, legal information and assistance.*

### 8) **Implement education strategies for continued learning for all children - including those who are migrants or displaced – and make schools safe, healthy, and inclusive environments.**

Provide inclusive remote learning strategies for migrant and displaced children and their parents/caregivers, use complementary high-tech and low-tech learning platforms to reach students with limited access to devices and connectivity and instructions in languages they can understand.

Provide access to internet in urban areas with high density of migrant and displaced populations, including by working with partners to invest in connectivity infrastructure and ensure affordable access for migrant and displaced populations.

*As part of the city’s COVID-19 response, Leeds funds charities helping vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers access the internet.<sup>xxvi</sup>*

While schools are an important platform to provide information to migrant and displaced children, **do not rely on schools only to reach them**. Migrant and displaced children are already disproportionately affected by learning disruptions and make up a large part of the out-of-school child population.

Often poor, many migrant or displaced children depend on school lunches and other services being provided at schools. As schools close, **provide alternative, safe options for hot meals and support** for the most vulnerable.

*The Independent School District of Arlington has launched a student meal plan during the school closure. No student ID or other form of identification is required to receive a packaged meal.<sup>xxvii</sup> Similar services run in New York City and other cities.<sup>xxviii</sup>*

Consider the need for **special childcare options** especially for children whose parents are living or working abroad or directly involved in the COVID-19 response (e.g. healthcare workers).

### 9) **Expand social protection to minimize the economic impact of COVID-19 on families.**

Include children of migrant workers in economic stimulus packages, response plans and mitigation measures.

*Washington D.C. promises to make assistance available to undocumented residents who often work in informal arrangements, have no social security number and are ineligible for unemployment insurance or other assistance.<sup>xxix</sup>*

*New York City and Open Society Foundations have partnered to provide direct, one-time emergency relief payments to migrant families who are excluded from the federal relief program, including undocumented migrant workers.<sup>xxx</sup>*

*To serve households that are not served by other COVID-19 related federal or state assistance, the City of Minneapolis has launched two programs for housing assistance that are open to households irrespective of immigration or documentation status, one specifically targeting families with children enrolled in elementary school.<sup>xxxi</sup>*

*3.8 million euros were allocated by the regional government to migrants living in informal settlements in the Italian region of Campania to support them economically and improve housing, access to transport, MHPSS and health services.<sup>xxxii</sup>*

### Additional Resources and Tools

- [UNICEF Training: Quick Guidance for Frontline workers helping children affected by migration in the current COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank & WFP: Framework for Reopening Schools](#)
- [UNICEF and IFRC Interim Guidance: Localization and the COVID-19 Response](#)
- [UNICEF and UN Habitat Interim Technical Note on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for COVID-19 Response in Slums and Informal Urban Settlements](#)
- [Practical Tips on Engaging Adolescents and Youth in the COVID-19 Response](#)
- [UN SG Policy Brief on COVID-19 and People on the Move](#)

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## Sources

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