



# How best to communicate on migration and integration in the context of COVID-19?

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In the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, effective communication on migration and integration has helped governments achieve crucial policy objectives: First, in order to limit the spread of the virus, governments need to provide all parts of the population, including migrants, with timely and accurate information on the pandemic, public health measures taken, as well as access to medical services. Second, in order to ensure the continuation of migration and integration processes, governments need to effectively communicate on policy changes affecting migrants' rights and obligations. Third, communication campaigns addressing the general public can be useful to counter prejudice against migrants in relation to the spread of the virus. This Policy Brief reviews current challenges and good practices of communication on migration and integration in response to the pandemic, drawing from examples of communication campaigns implemented in OECD Member countries in 2020.

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## Key findings

Managing the timely, accessible and easy-to-read official information on COVID-19 in multiple languages.

- The adaptation of communication materials in languages and formats for all parts of the population, including persons with disabilities, children or older persons, is essential for equal access to official information related to COVID-19 and an efficient measure against the spread of the virus. Most OECD Governments use online websites coupled with social media communication channels to provide and promote translated content related to COVID-19
- Pre-established partnerships with NGOs, journalists or local authorities improved governments' capacities to adapt their communication approach/ strategy towards immigrants

Targeting specific migrant audiences.

- Due to confinement measures and temporary breaks in public services, including integration programmes, governments had limited opportunities to communicate specific information to migrants on their rights and obligations via personal interaction during the pandemic
- Targeted communication via social media, hotlines or radio has helped in some countries to overcome this challenge

Tackling misinformation on social media related to COVID-19.

- Misinformation related to COVID-19 can jeopardise both public health safety and the acceptance of migrants in host societies
- Several OECD Governments, local authorities and international organisations have implemented dedicated online campaigns in order to prevent prejudice against migrants and support victims of discrimination

Other.

- Limited access to connectivity or equipment and limited knowledge of media usage by migrants remains a general challenge for effective targeting of different migrant groups

## Ensuring easy access to information with timely translation of key information material on the virus

Equal access to official information related to the pandemic for all parts of the population is essential for governments' ability to limit the spread of COVID-19. It is thus in the best interest of governments to ensure the timely translation of communication materials on the pandemic as well as on public health measures and the access to medical services and treatment.

At the same time, the crisis context poses specific challenges, as countries may not have the resources and procedures for timely translation in place. Communication content also needs to be continuously adapted both to rapid changes in the development of the pandemic and to evolving policy responses.

In order to ensure access to relevant information for migrants in host countries, stable channels of communication and accurate audience targeting are crucial, so that translated content reaches all migrants, including relatively isolated and vulnerable groups. The information also needs to be culturally appropriate and conveyed in formats that are adapted to specific needs, such as for persons with disabilities, children or older persons. Taking into account different levels of literacy, easy-to-read texts



and other visual communication such as photos or infographics can increase the accessibility of information.

The majority of OECD countries provide translated content related to COVID-19 on their official websites: At least five OECD countries communicate in more than 20 languages, at least eight countries translate into 5-12 languages, while most other countries at least translated relevant content into one other language.

Dedicated multilingual websites allow governments to provide one single source of reliable and up-to-date information for all of the resident population. The campaign ["Unite against COVID-19"](#) launched by the government of New Zealand is an example of an extensive effort to provide equal access to information to the general public and specific migrant communities alike. It includes information on the national COVID-19 alert system, border restrictions, medical services and employment. The website provides all official information in 22 languages in addition to English, Maori and New Zealand sign language.

In Sweden, the [National Public Health Agency](#) follows a similar approach by providing official information on COVID-19 on its multilingual website to both the general public and migrants, complemented by a dedicated telephone hotline operating in 13 languages.

While in New Zealand and Sweden, governments decided to bring together health-related information on COVID-19 in one common website, other governments have chosen to use different platforms, reaching out to migrants separately.

In France, information on COVID-19, including medical issues, is available to migrants in nine languages on the [Ministry of Interior's website](#), while this information has separately been provided to the general public on other websites. Similarly, the [German Ministry of Interior](#) has established a dedicated website for migrants in 20 languages. It is complemented by a second website dedicated to migrants ran by the [Ethno-Medical Center e.V. and the Federal Ministry of Health](#), providing health information related to COVID-19 in 34 languages. In Portugal, the [High Commission for Migration \(ACM\)](#) created a dedicated page on its website providing information on COVID-19 to migrants in Portuguese and English. Additionally, it provides translations of official documents from different public and non-governmental entities in nine different languages, giving migrants access to information on legislative measures, public services, social support measures, lockdown measures and sanitary rules.

Providing health information related to COVID-19 on several different platforms can potentially increase their overall visibility and accessibility. At the same time, multiple sources and approaches to information gathering may require more proactive communication and guidance on where to go to find certain information.

Social media play a central role in advertising translated website content as they allow to target specific groups of migrants in their native languages and can enable direct interaction and responses to migrants' questions. An example of a digital campaign combining both web and social media platforms is the dedicated online platform ["Handbook Germany"](#), run by the Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration of the German Government in cooperation with a network of journalists. It presents official information in short and easy-to-read articles and videos in seven languages. *Handbook Germany* was promoted to migrants living in Germany on a [Facebook page](#) with over 200 000 followers, on which the platform answers questions by users and responds in all languages to comments containing misleading information on the topics concerned.

In Finland, the online platform [infoFinland.fi](#) follows a similar approach, providing translations of official information on COVID-19 in 12 different languages and posting shareable video content in the respective languages on its [social media channels](#). Sweden uses its national public radio to convey key information on COVID-19 through [regular programmes in seven languages](#).



Partnerships between governments and NGOs to manage the timely translation of communication material has worked well in some countries. An example is the collaboration of Danish public authorities with the Danish Refugee Council in establishing a [website and phone hotline](#) dedicated to answering COVID-19-related questions in 25 languages. In France, the Inter-ministerial delegation in charge of the reception and integration of refugees (Diair) has built its communication on the pre-existing collaborative online platform [Refugies.info](#). The website makes use of a community of translators, consisting of refugees themselves, universities and NGOs. In Portugal, the ACM cooperated with Doctors of the World Portugal to provide a [guide on COVID-19](#) available in more than 20 languages. These examples show that pre-established partnerships help governments to react quickly to sudden change in demand for translation.

## Enhancing opportunities to communicate with migrants via personal interaction during the pandemic

Public services, private service providers (e.g. language course) and NGOs play an important role in channelling information to recently arrived migrants on a day-to-day basis. In the context of the pandemic, opportunities for personal interaction with migrants have been quite limited due to confinement measures.

One additional level of complexity relates to the fact that information is migrant specific or even specific to certain migrant groups (e.g. beneficiaries of settlement plans, international students, asylum seekers or migrants in an irregular situation). The limitations of actors on the ground to relay the relevant information to members of each group in face-to-face communication makes it even more difficult to target specific audiences.

This also applies to potential immigrants abroad who were either planning to migrate or already in the midst of their application process for study, work or family reunification. For them, the temporary closure of consulates and entry bans made it more difficult to receive relevant information in personal interaction.

A successful example of a government initiative addressing one specific migrant group is the website [“Study in Melbourne”](#) created by the city of Melbourne, Australia, with international students being one of the largest migrant groups in the country. The initiative uses a wide range of different communication channels to reach out to the targeted audience based on the website: a newsletter, social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube, as well as a live chat in multiple languages. While *Study in Melbourne* usually provides general information, both for current and prospective international students, such as on degrees available or public services provided to students, it has recently adapted its content to the current crisis context. It provides extensive information on both policy measures taken to contain the virus in Australia as well as government support provided to students in response to COVID-19. Given its young target audience, the initiative’s promotion strategy is mostly implemented via its social media channels: With over 543 500 likes on Facebook and more than 15 000 followers on Twitter and Instagram combined, the platform reaches a significant share of the targeted audience.

Similarly, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada adapted the content provided on its [website](#) and social media channels to the COVID-19 crisis. In addition to resources of the country’s Public Health Agency translated in multiple languages, the service provides information on changes in travel restrictions and application processes for each specific group of migrants, such as workers, students and asylum claimants. The website also hosts a live chat to answer individual questions, allowing users to easily access the information relevant to their personal situation.

In [Korea](#), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made its existing website more accessible in the course of the pandemic. A section of frequently asked questions related to COVID-19 and subsequent policy changes with regards to residence and work permits for migrants was included. The website has been promoted in both Korean and English on the official Twitter and Facebook accounts of the Ministry.



During the pandemic, local authorities remained open and are actively communicating with their constituencies. Their outreach to migrants that do not have sufficient access to the internet or are not used to consulting official websites and social media channels for information is important and complements information strategies of national governments.

In Portugal, ACM maintained face-to-face service at the National Support Centers for the Integration of Migrants (CNAIM) for urgent situations. It also guaranteed in-person support by translators, as well as the reinforcement of its STT service (Telephone Translation Service) and the extension of opening hours, as well as STT's collaboration to directly support translations of *Linha Saúde 24*, the telephone and digital service of the National Health Service.

In Italy, in the scope of a national action plan to tackle labour exploitation in agriculture coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, NGO's workers and mediators met asylum seekers, refugees and migrants living in informal settlements in the countryside. They promoted health literacy about the COVID-19 pandemic and gave information about a regularization scheme issued by the government.

In contrast to national governments, local intermediaries can reach out directly to immigrants living in their communities, including to those who are particularly isolated, hard to reach online or in need of initial support in order to use online channels. They are also better able to respond to local needs and inform about specific policy measures as well as public services offered locally.

For example, in collaboration with national and local authorities, an NGO and local volunteers, Migration Yorkshire (hosted by the Leeds City Council) developed a "Migrant Information Hub" for migrants from the Yorkshire and Humber regions. The platform informs migrants about the most relevant issues related to health, access to services and visa status. Furthermore, the Migrant Information Hub includes links to multilingual YouTube videos and organises free workshops for refugees via Zoom. The platform provides workshops on topics such as "How to access health services in the UK" to inform about free services, including mental health facilities. In addition, the Migration Information Hub has established an alliance with Doctors of the World in order to translate information, as well as an open call to recruit translation volunteers.

In the United States, the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs launched the social media campaign "Support, not fear". Supported by its official Facebook and Twitter accounts, the main website of the Mayor opened a new, special section with a variety of information resources for migrants, such as health care access, food, housing, work rights and immigration services. The information, including infographics and videos, is provided in ten languages, making the content more accessible. Additionally, the Mayor's Office shares its statements and relevant COVID-19 information in multiple languages via Twitter.

In Portugal, the local authorities in the country's Algarve region implemented a co-operative initiative together with local NGOs and academia in order to reach out to local migrant communities living in the region and to distribute protection kits as well as leaflets on COVID-19 in six different languages.

The portal "[ChileAtiende](#)", which is connected to a network of offices all around the country, gives migrants access to information on COVID-19 and supports them in filling digital administrative requests.

Likewise, the Colombian Government implemented a [hotline service](#) to answer migrants' questions related to COVID-19. The hotline is based on a network organised by region and is complemented by a WhatsApp chat. On its dedicated website, the government provides information about policy measures related to COVID-19 specifically affecting migrants.





## Tackling misinformation on social media

In the context of COVID-19, many OECD countries have launched communication campaigns targeting the general public in order to reduce the risks of pandemic misinformation circulated on social media. Misinformation can pose a risk to public health when it consists of false information about the virus and individual health measures. Misinformation can also convey prejudice against migrants in the spread of the virus, leading to scapegoating and lower mutual trust.

For national campaigns tackling misinformation online, social media channels and online websites dedicated to COVID-19 provide governments with the opportunity to directly respond to false information.

The German Federal Antidiscrimination Agency created a [webpage](#) to inform about cases of racist and anti-Semitic discrimination related to COVID-19 reported to the agency since the beginning of the pandemic, with the number of overall cases having increased in past months. The page also provides information on how victims can get help and shares its content on social media.

Another example of a communication campaign aiming to tackle misinformation on social media is the digital campaign [“We stop this virus together”](#), launched by the Spanish Government in May 2020. The campaign uses the official Twitter account of the Ministry of Social Inclusion and Migration to publish short videos and tweets informing about the important positive contributions that migrants make to the Spanish economy and society. The social media file contains concrete stories of the integration processes of immigrants who have been living in Spain for several years and who contributed to the crisis response efforts in Spain in different roles, such as workers in key sectors, volunteers or intercultural mediators and translators.

A comparable effort was made by the Italian Government through the portal [“Integrazione migranti”](#), which aims to fight misinformation and negative stereotypes on migrants by publishing official data and testimonials that highlight the positive contributions of migrants to the Italian society. This portal also informs and supports migrants and refugees in the country by providing online multilingual tools and content, such as a map showing available migration and integration services in all regions of the country, and quarantine procedures.

The mayors of various urban metropolises in OECD Member countries are also using communication campaigns to tackle misinformation on the internet. The city of Barcelona for example, launched the campaign [“StopRacism”](#) in late March, which looked at how racism and xenophobia have been widespread during the current pandemic. In New York, the city government has implemented a campaign on [“COVID-19 and Human Rights”](#), affirming the rights and protections of New Yorkers facing discrimination and harassment related to the pandemic and providing contact information for services that can provide help and support to victims of harassment related to COVID-19.

Various international organisations have developed campaigns in order to help governments counteract misinformation on social media.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for example has launched several [national initiatives](#) aiming to counter xenophobia and promote migrant integration in the context of COVID-19. In May 2020, it launched a [campaign in collaboration with the Mexican authorities](#), an initiative that aims at fighting discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic and is targeted both at the general public and civil servants. The campaign titled “COVID-19 does not discriminate, why do you?” showcases incidents of misinformation that spread fear and specifically tries to reach out to local communities with migrant shelters, safe houses, or temporary camps for people on the move.

Similarly, the United Nations created the campaign [“Verified”](#), a global effort aimed at delivering accurate information on the pandemic and advice regarding individual safety measures. The initiative also invites the public to help counter the spread of COVID-19 misinformation by sharing fact-based information with



their own communities online. Against this background, the campaign fights against false information and xenophobic stereotypes against migrants by fostering collective propagation of accurate information online.

In the EU, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has published [guidance](#) on infection prevention and control of COVID-19 in migrant and refugee reception and detention centres with a special focus on communications.

Furthermore, various country offices of the UNHCR have implemented [targeted campaigns](#) in order to engage with communities in which incidents of discrimination or xenophobia related to COVID-19 were reported, such as the online campaign [“Somos Panas”](#) launched by UNHCR Colombia.

## Conclusion

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, many governments in OECD Member countries have been adapting their communication strategies towards immigrants and host societies in order to help limit the spread of the virus, while at the same time avoiding the negative impact of the health crisis on immigrant integration. The implementation of extensive online campaigns, new increased efforts to provide official information in multiple languages and the co-operation between national governments, local actors and communities themselves in the context of COVID-19 may have a long-lasting impact on the ways in which governments will communicate about migration and integration even beyond the current crisis.

While the use of digital media has been an important component of these communication efforts, common communication challenges remain, such as limited internet access of certain groups of immigrants, as well as limited knowledge and data regarding the media usage, information needs and communication preferences of migrants.

Looking ahead, national governments could benefit from collecting further data and information in consultation with the relevant communities and exchanging good practices about how to best reach specific groups of migrants in order to convey crucial information in the context of the pandemic. Two-way communication is essential to enable persons of concern to share their feedback, ideas, and proposed solutions to be part of the COVID response. This would contribute to improve preparedness for crisis communication with migrants and their families.

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## Useful links

<https://www.oecd.org/migration/netcom/>

[www.oecd.org/migration](http://www.oecd.org/migration)

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## Annex 1.A. Translation

**Annex Table 1.A.1. Official government websites providing information on COVID-19 in multiple languages**

Country	Ministry / Local Authority	Link
Australia	Department of Home Affairs	<a href="https://COVID-19.homeaffairs.gov.au/">https://COVID-19.homeaffairs.gov.au/</a>
	City of Melbourne	<a href="https://www.studymelbourne.vic.gov.au/">https://www.studymelbourne.vic.gov.au/</a>
Canada	Immigration and Citizenship Service	<a href="https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/coronavirus-COVID-19.html">https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/coronavirus-COVID-19.html</a>
Czech Republic	Ministry of Interior	<a href="https://www.mvcr.cz/mvcren/article/coronavirus-information-of-moi.aspx">https://www.mvcr.cz/mvcren/article/coronavirus-information-of-moi.aspx</a>
	Ministry of Health	<a href="https://koronavirus.mzcr.cz/en/">https://koronavirus.mzcr.cz/en/</a>
Denmark	Danish Health Authority	<a href="https://www.sst.dk/en/English/Corona-eng/COVID-19-and-novel-coronavirus">https://www.sst.dk/en/English/Corona-eng/COVID-19-and-novel-coronavirus</a>
	Danish Immigration Service	<a href="https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Words-and-concepts/FpercentageC3%A6lles/Corona-(COVID-19)-information">https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Words-and-concepts/FpercentageC3%A6lles/Corona-(COVID-19)-information</a>
Estonia	Government Initiative	<a href="https://www.kriis.ee/en">https://www.kriis.ee/en</a>
Finland	Ministry of Social Affairs and Health	<a href="https://stm.fi/en/frontpage">https://stm.fi/en/frontpage</a>
	Finnish Border Guard	<a href="https://www.raja.fi/en">https://www.raja.fi/en</a>
	City of Helsinki	<a href="https://www.infofinland.fi/en/frontpage">https://www.infofinland.fi/en/frontpage</a>
France	Ministry of Interior	<a href="https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Accueil-et-accompagnement/COVID-19-Informations-traduites-pour-les-etrangers/COVID-19-Informations-traduites-pour-les-etrangers">https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Accueil-et-accompagnement/COVID-19-Informations-traduites-pour-les-etrangers/COVID-19-Informations-traduites-pour-les-etrangers</a>
Germany	Ministry of Interior	<a href="https://www.integrationsbeauftragte.de/ib-de/amt-und-person/informationen-zum-coronavirus">https://www.integrationsbeauftragte.de/ib-de/amt-und-person/informationen-zum-coronavirus</a>
	Handbook Germany	<a href="https://handbookgermany.de/en.html">https://handbookgermany.de/en.html</a>
Japan	Ministry of Justice	<a href="http://www.moj.go.jp/EN/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/m_nyuukokukanri01_00003.html">http://www.moj.go.jp/EN/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/m_nyuukokukanri01_00003.html</a>
Korea	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	<a href="http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_22595/view.do?seq=1&amp;srchFr=&amp;srchTo=&amp;srchWord=&amp;srchTp=&amp;multiitm_seq=0&amp;itm_seq_1=0&amp;itm_seq_2=0&amp;company_cd=&amp;company_nm=&amp;page=1&amp;titleNm=">http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_22595/view.do?seq=1&amp;srchFr=&amp;srchTo=&amp;srchWord=&amp;srchTp=&amp;multiitm_seq=0&amp;itm_seq_1=0&amp;itm_seq_2=0&amp;company_cd=&amp;company_nm=&amp;page=1&amp;titleNm=</a>
Latvia	Ministry of Health	<a href="https://www.vm.gov.lv/en/ministry/novel_coronavirus_COVID-19_advice_for_the_public1/">https://www.vm.gov.lv/en/ministry/novel_coronavirus_COVID-19_advice_for_the_public1/</a>
	Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs	<a href="https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en">https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en</a>
Lithuania	Government Initiative	<a href="https://koronastop.lrv.lt/en/">https://koronastop.lrv.lt/en/</a>
New Zealand	Government Initiative	<a href="https://COVID-19.govt.nz/">https://COVID-19.govt.nz/</a>
Portugal	Government Initiative	<a href="https://COVID-19.min-saude.pt/#">https://COVID-19.min-saude.pt/#</a>
	High Commission for Migration	<a href="https://www.acm.gov.pt/-/COVID-19-medidas-orientacoes-e-recomendacoes?">https://www.acm.gov.pt/-/COVID-19-medidas-orientacoes-e-recomendacoes?</a>
Spain	Ministry of Health	<a href="https://www.mscbs.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/ccayes/alertasActual/nCov/home.htm">https://www.mscbs.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/ccayes/alertasActual/nCov/home.htm</a>
Sweden	National Public Health Agency	<a href="https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/smittskydd-beredskap/utbrott/aktuella-utbrott/COVID-19/">https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/smittskydd-beredskap/utbrott/aktuella-utbrott/COVID-19/</a>
	National Public Radio	<a href="https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&amp;artikel=7428495">https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&amp;artikel=7428495</a>

