

COVID-19 has significantly threatened the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and thereby also the potential to end poverty in all its forms. The positive contributions migration can make to eradicate poverty and advance inclusive growth and sustainable development have also been set back. Travel restrictions and lockdowns, unemployment, and unequal access to social protection have increased the number of migrants and their families in situations of vulnerability, stranded in transit countries or forced to return to their home countries. Reduced pathways for regular migration have also pushed many migrants into irregular situations and poverty, making them more susceptible to exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking and forced labour.

Extreme poverty and food insecurity have also driven humanitarian needs to new levels and further intensified on-going crises. The majority of the world's 50.8 million internally displaced persons live in countries that already before 2020 reported high levels of multidimensional and extreme poverty, including acute food insecurity and malnutrition. The pandemic is deepening the dependence of IDPs on external food assistance, increasing protection risks and reducing opportunities to achieve durable solutions. As of the start of 2021, more people than ever before are at risk of being left behind, with 235 million people requiring humanitarian assistance.¹

Conscious of the importance of migration for achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty, in 2020 IOM worked closely with its partners across the UN System to contribute to poverty reduction approaches, advocating for a migrant- and displaced populations-inclusive response to COVID-19 in order to recover better.

IOM's key activities and assessment of result in support of the action plan in 2020²

1. STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION, PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK

With over 164 million migrant workers around the world³, migrants are an important part of the global workforce. In support of productive employment and decent work and in the face of increasing unemployment of migrants due to the effect of COVID-19, IOM continued expanding its work in the area of migrant worker rights protection through mobilizing governmental and non-state stakeholders towards achieving ethical recruitment standards through its International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS). A significant milestone became the launch of the Global Policy Network in December 2020 which adopted a set of non-binding recommendations fully compatible with all existing international norms and standards.

In support of the Global Skills Partnership for Migration, and in line with the [policy brief on labour mobility and skills in response, recovery and post COVID-19](#), IOM also worked to strengthen human mobility regulations within broader contexts of changing world of work, focusing on labour migration corridors, and linking migration policies with skills development, training, recognition and transfer.

¹ UNOCHA – [Global Humanitarian Overview 2021](#)

² For further information related to IOM's work in response to COVID-19, please consult *IOM's COVID-19 Preparedness and Response – Achievements Report 2020*

³ ILO – [Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers 2018](#)

In response to COVID-19 IOM also supported over 1,050 border points of entry globally with COVID-19 preparedness and response measures and ensure the continuation of safe and regular migration.⁴

2. EXPANDING SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS TO UNDERPIN INCLUSIVE POVERTY-REDUCING DEVELOPMENT

Recognizing the scale and depth of COVID-19's socioeconomic impact, IOM has advocated for the importance of including migrants, displaced populations, and communities into all socioeconomic impact response strategies, to ensure a better and more equitable recovery. Throughout its 2020 Response, IOM has also focused on the protection of migrants, displaced persons, and communities, as well as vulnerable populations such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, women and girls, children, and LGBTQ+ individuals, reaching a total of at least 1,972,393 individuals with protection assistance and services.

At the policy level, IOM published a toolkit for development partners on Integrating Migration into the COVID-19 Socio-economic Response. Furthermore, IOM engaged in advocacy and policy work within regional integration blocks, highlighting emerging issues such as the impact of lockdowns and mobility restrictions on cross-border trade and its importance for livelihoods in communities in Africa or the inclusion of migrants in social protection schemes during the pandemic and beyond. For instance, the Regional Office for the MENA region rolled out a remote case management platform, the IOM Migrant Assistance Portal, as a pilot in Lebanon and Algeria to enhance synergies among local, national, and international actors, increase reintegration opportunities for returnees, and improve partner coordination to assist migrants.

3. HUMAN CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT: ADDRESSING THE NON-INCOME FORMS OF POVERTY

During 2020, IOM implemented COVID-19-related operations to ensure that migrants, displaced populations and communities had access to COVID-19 services, through government institutions, IOM and partners, thereby mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to these population groups. IOM's work included reintegration services to returnees through counselling, economic, social or psychosocial assistance. Furthermore, enhancing regional and national disease surveillance, information-sharing, and reporting was cornerstone of IOM's pandemic preparedness and response activities.

IOM also led or co-led numerous inter-agency coordination fora related to COVID-19. As Secretariat and Coordinator of the United Nations Migration Network (UNMN), IOM has facilitated coordination among member agencies for migrant inclusion, especially through the Working Group on Access to Services. IOM has engaged in joint advocacy in this regard with a variety of partners, such as the IFRC, and numerous agencies, such as UNICEF, the WHO and UNHCR, to advance the integration of migrants, displaced populations, and communities into the COVID-19 response.

4. THE FUTURE OF FOOD AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Recognising the critical role migrant workers play in many countries in agriculture and food production, IOM has provided policy advice and support to government to ensure safe labour migration pathways amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

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In November 2020, IOM and the World Food Programme (WFP) also published key findings from a joint study exploring COVID-19's impact on livelihoods, food security, and the protection of migrants and displaced populations. The [report](#) highlighted the interconnection among hunger, conflict, migration, and displacement, which has been further aggravated by the pandemic.

5. REDUCING INEQUALITIES

Recognising the unequal impact of COVID-19 across the world and in particular on migrants and displaced populations, IOM has provided direct assistance to stranded migrants in precarious and highly vulnerable positions, including to support their return.

Furthering IOM's efforts to balance negative public narratives about migration and counter growing anti-migrant xenophobia worldwide as a driver of exclusion and inequalities, IOM also launched the global platform [It Takes a Community](#), a global awareness-raising campaign and community of practice sharing inspiring stories of migrants and their communities, to support local and regional authorities and cities to engage in global migration governance.

At the policy level, IOM has promoted an integrated response to the pandemic, in particular on universal access to health care and vaccination campaigns and mitigate growing inequalities globally. IOM also promoted the engagement of diaspora communities in support of the COVID-19 response, [mapping best practices and lessons learned for further replication](#). Furthermore, together with partners, such as UNDP, IOM provided technical assistance to national and local governments to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic and empower communities to recover better.

6. ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF NATURAL HAZARDS

In 2020, IOM engaged in migration, environment, and climate change programming, through national and regional policy dialogues, awareness-raising initiatives, research and data collection, supporting States by building capacities, influencing key policy processes related to environmental migration, and the development of policies on environmental migration.

IOM also worked in crisis and post-crisis environments to prevent or reduce displacement associated with disaster and climate risk, and to strengthen resilience by incorporating “build-back-better” measures in recovery and reconstruction, and formulated operational guidance on climate change and migration in COVID-19 recovery.

7. FIGHTING POVERTY IN FRAGILE AND HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

In 2020, crisis response interventions remained one of the largest areas of intervention for the Organization and increased through the year, in response to challenges generated by overlapping crises, including COVID-19. IOM had an operational reach of over 37 million beneficiaries in 2020, through a wide array of programmes inclusive of COVID-19 prevention, mitigation and response measures, humanitarian, transition and recovery programming as well as resettlement and humanitarian return movements IOM's coordinated, multi-sectoral, at scale response to the crisis will continue into 2021 and beyond to halt further transmission of the disease, mitigate the pandemic's humanitarian and socioeconomic effects, and support affected communities to prepare for longer-term recovery from COVID-19.

Gaps, challenges, and recommendations for the way forward

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated multidimensional poverty and substantively set back sustainable development indicators across the globe. To address bottlenecks to recovering better and accelerate the progress towards the 2030 Agenda, governments and societies need to strengthen collaboration and partnerships, including through maximizing the positive impact of migration. IOM continues to work within the relevant international frameworks, in particular the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Migration, linking the response and recovery to COVID-19 with broader sustainable development planning through a [Strategic Response and Recovery Plan](#), its overarching Strategic Vision, and its Institutional Strategy on Migration and Sustainable Development.

For the 2021 High-Level Political Forum, IOM articulated 11 accelerating actions and policy recommendations that are embedded in the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Migration as the UN's main multilateral framework of action for safe, orderly and regular migration.⁵ The global response to COVID-19 presents a unique opportunity to reimagine human mobility from the ground up, to implement the vision of the GCM and build prosperous, healthy and resilient communities. Doing so will ensure that no one is left behind, that we build back better, that migrants and their families contribute to and benefit from a green recovery, resilience building, and climate change adaptation, and that we work towards safer, healthier, more sustainable and inclusive mobile societies.

1. Protect migrants' human rights, including to ensure that social and economic rights are protected across borders;
2. Identify and address factors which lead people to move in an unsafe manner;
3. Leverage digitalization to enhance migrants' well-being and facilitate their contributions to sustainable development;
4. Restart mobility and expand safe and regular migration pathways in the circular economy to boost recovery efforts;
5. Empower diaspora groups, migrants and displaced persons, in particular through financial inclusion in line with sustainable and productive investment strategies;
6. Protect migrant workers along global supply chains and throughout recruitment processes;
7. Empower local governments and include migrants in local decision-making to support recovery;
8. Effectively connect recovery with greening the economy and climate change in relation to migration;
9. Combat xenophobia and harness the positive role of diversity for inclusive recovery;
10. Ensure equitable access to services to recover better;
11. Strengthen data, research and analysis on the interlinkages between migration, internally displaced, COVID-19 and sustainable development.

⁵ Please also consult [IOM's 2021 contribution to the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#)