

Social Protection for Migrants during the COVID-19 crisis

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SP programs are core to the C-19 response around the world

- As of May 1, 2020, **159 countries** had planned or introduced SP responses to C-19
- Out of **752 programs**, most are Social Assistance measures, then Social Insurance and Labor Market Programs



Countries with planned or ongoing social protection responses to COVID-19 as of May 1, 2020 (n = 159)





**3 reasons why migration matters
for the COVID-19 response**

1: Migrant health and livelihoods are at significant risk

- Migrants tend to live and work in crowded conditions that do not permit social distancing, putting them at **increased risk of contracting the disease**
 - In **Singapore**, 40% of COVID-19 cases in mid-April were low-skilled foreign workers; in **Saudi Arabia** more than 50% cases were foreigners
- Migrants are at **high risk of income loss** because they work in jobs affected by social distancing and stay-at-home orders
 - According to the UN, foreign workers are **30% of workforce** in highly affected sectors in OECD
- **Effects** of job loss **particularly significant** for internal and international migrants
 - They often work in informal jobs and lack safety nets in case of job loss or illness

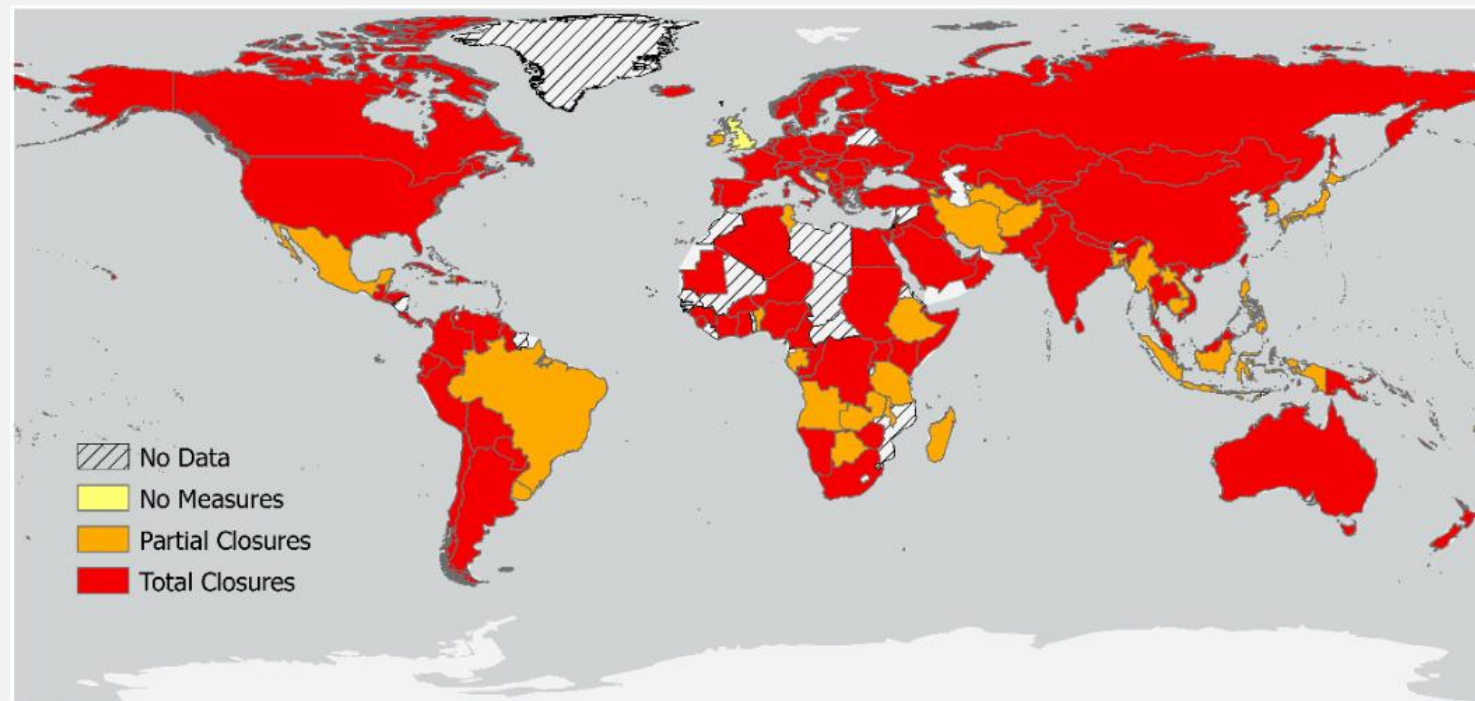
2: Migrants' families and countries of origin face severe impacts

- Income losses will translate into **declines in remittances**
 - According to the WB, remittances to LMICs will drop by around **20 percent in 2020**, the sharpest decline in recent history
- Remittances represent a **crucial source of income** for families' consumption and for investments in human capital and businesses
 - Remittances to GDP greater than 4% in **14 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa**, implying high risks when migrants lose their jobs
 - In a small country like **Tonga** remittances account for 20% of household income, implying potentially **significant increases in poverty**

3: Severe disruptions in certain sectors in destination countries

- Major migration destinations have **closed their borders** to international travelers
- Limited availability of migrant workers is a concern for **employers in certain sectors in receiving countries**, e.g. agriculture, food processing, health and elderly care

Travel restrictions around the world as of early April 2020



Source: [IOM](#); [Hale et al. \(2020\)](#).



**4 types of programs
to address migration-related challenges
as part of the COVID-19 response**

1: Social Safety Net Programs

Three options to include migrants in Social Safety Net Programs

1. **Expand eligibility** of existing safety net programs to include migrants

- **Australia** expanded access to financial assistance for people in financial hardship to some categories of migrants

2. **Implement** newly created C-19 response programs **irrespective of migration status**

- Residence permit holders in **Italy** can apply for subsidy under the C-19 *Cure Italy* stimulus
- Migrants in **Ireland** have access to the €350 weekly Pandemic Unemployment Payment

3. **Provide specific services** to migrants to help them address their distinct challenges

- Virus testing and treatment, i.e. **Kazakhstan, Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia**
- Food and accommodations, i.e. **Panama**
- Transportation, i.e. **Indonesia** for emigrants, **Kuwait** for repatriation, **China** for internal migrants
- Cash grants, i.e. **Philippines** for emigrants, **State of California** for undocumented migrants

2: Employment Retention Policies

Three options to apply Employment Retention Policies to migrants

1. Wage subsidies

- In **Korea**, migrants under the Employment Permit System are eligible for C-19 wage subsidies
- In **New Zealand**, self-isolated seasonal workers due to C-19 case are eligible for wage subsidies
- **China** provided wage subsidies to stabilize employment including for internal migrant workers

2. Deductions in SI contributions

- **China** introduced exemption and reduction of SI contributions including for internal migrants
- **Singapore** and **Saudi Arabia** introduced cancellations and reductions of foreign workers levies

3. Changes to migration regulations in sectors facing shortages

- Extensions to work permits introduced in several countries: **Australia, Bahrain, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, UK**, etc.

3: Employment Promotion Policies

Two options to apply Employment Promotion Policies to migrants

1. Job matching and job search programs

- **Australia** seeks to match some categories of temporary migrant workers with new employers where existing employment has ceased due to the crisis
- **China** has developed an app and held online job fairs, interviews, and recruitment to help match workers, including internal migrants unable to travel to their workplaces, to jobs

2. Adjustments of **rules regarding migration programs** to facilitate employment

- **Germany** relaxed travel restrictions to allow seasonal agricultural workers to enter the country
- **Spain** announced that work permits will be provided to young immigrants with residency but not work permits to fill shortages in the agriculture sector
- **Canada** and **Vietnam** created exceptions to restrictions on international entry to allow foreign workers to enter the country to address current shortages

4: Remittances

Two sets of actions to support the **recovery of remittances**

1. In the **short-term**:

- Classify remittance service providers as **essential services** that are permitted to operate
- Support the remittances industry with instruments to help it manage **credit and liquidity risks**

2. In the **medium-term**:

- Promote **digital models** of remitting
- Support **universal financial access**
- Enhance **payment systems**
- Help develop the **regulatory capacity** necessary to support these systems

**3 main challenges and 2 opportunities
for the design and implementation of these programs**

Challenges for design and implementation

1. Migrants face **barriers to accessing social protection** including documentation requirements and language differences
2. **Identifying migrants** might be difficult, particularly where they have not used legal channels
 - Innovative approaches include **self-targeting, self-enrollment, and cooperation** with telecommunications companies and remittance services providers
3. **Delivery** will need to consider public health practices and the migrants' circumstances
 - **Health screenings, guidelines** on how work should be undertaken, and **plans for responding** if a migrant worker falls ill will be key
 - **Accommodations** will need to be provided in cases in which job losses also result in housing loss
 - **Distributing benefits** may require reliance on **digital and mobile transfers**, and on **alternative delivery means**

Opportunities for design and implementation

1. **Mainstreaming** migrants into existing programs would have several advantages:

- **All groups** are provided protections against getting and transmitting the disease
- Less **administrative complexity**
- Migrants can access benefits **more quickly**

2. **Local governments** could have an important role to fill emerging gaps:

- These governments are well positioned to **understand the unique needs** of their residents and to **create programs** to address these needs when action is not taken at the national level
- However, action at the local level should **not replace comprehensive responses** to the challenges faced by migrants by national governments
- Examples include: City of **Chicago** and City of **Minneapolis** (USA), Regional Government of **Campania** (Italy), Regional Government of **Tasmania** (Australia)

What's next?



Longer term impacts of C-19 on migration are uncertain

Less migration?

- **Negative economic conditions** and **less support** for permissive migration
- **Technological progress** in sectors (agriculture, services) where shortages do arise

More migration?

- Some countries are **liberalizing migration rules** to fill or prevent shortages
- Technology **unlikely to completely automate** away the need for migrant labor

Irrespective of its impacts on future flows, the C-19 crisis highlights the importance of building migrant-sensitive social protection systems



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Thank you!

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More info available at:

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/428451587390154689/pdf/Potential-Responses-to-the-COVID-19-Outbreak-in-Support-of-Migrant-Workers-April-21-2020.pdf>