

# **Report of a Survey on Migrant and Refugee Victims of Xenophobia, Racism and Intolerance in the Context of the Coronavirus Pandemic**

The NGO Committee on Migration Sub-Committee on Countering Xenophobia and Racism and Promoting Social Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees

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## Executive Summary

The Non-Governmental Organization Committee on Migration is an international coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and a member of the Conference of Non Governmental Organizations (CoNGO) in consultative relationship with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), advocating for the protection of migrants and refugees and the promotion and safeguarding of their human rights, in accordance with the United Nations Charter. Its Sub-Committee on Countering Xenophobia and Racism and Promoting Social Inclusion has focused on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM, 2018) and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (2015), as negotiated agreements strongly framed by human rights standards, and as guides to their work on behalf of migrants, refugees and their families. The Sub-Committee identifies promising governance practices, highlights gaps in policy, and underscores innovative and successful initiatives which can assist policymakers, funders and grant-makers in achieving greater levels of success in their support of migrants and refugees.

The Sub-Committee conducted a survey in November 2017 of NGOs working with migrants and refugees in various parts of the world, focused on counteracting xenophobia and promoting social inclusion and creating peaceful and harmonious societies. The survey found that the main barriers to protecting and assisting migrants and refugees were due to the absence of governmental support in the form of legislation, social policy and adequate funding.

The present report provides the findings of a 2020/2021 survey conducted by the Sub-Committee with the goal of assessing the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the work of 58 responding organizations serving migrants and refugees in various international locations. There was some overlap with the 2017 survey results in the most serious challenges organizations experienced in protecting and assisting migrants and refugees who were victims of xenophobia and intolerance. These serious challenges included government barriers (bureaucratic delays, level of training needed, corruption), difficulty in identifying those who needed help (due to fear of arrest or deportation), need for organizational funding, legal barriers, and lack of coordination in services provided. Organizations saw some increases in xenophobic incidents among the populations they served due to COVID-19. A little over 21% of the respondents reported xenophobic incidents had increased very much, a finding that was especially true for organizations serving migrants originating from South or East Asia.

## Introduction

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018) is framed by human rights standards which entitle migrants to universal human rights and fundamental freedoms that also frame the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (2015). In both of these negotiated agreements, Member States, UN entities, and other stakeholders have committed themselves to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of all migrants, eliminating xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance against migrants and their families. Both agreements also recognize the need for broader effective measures and actions when the physical and mental health and well-being of migrants are threatened by humanitarian emergencies such as those created by the 2019 and continuing coronavirus pandemic.

The NGO Committee on Migration, an international coalition of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in consultative relationship with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, advocates for the protection of migrants and refugees and the promotion of their human rights. Its Sub-Committee on Countering Xenophobia and Racism and Promoting the Social Inclusion of Migrants develops and shares with Member States of the UN, UN entities, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders a more complete understanding of xenophobia, racism and related barriers to the social inclusion of migrants and refugees. It also identifies promising practices that foster the creation of peace and harmony in transit and host societies. The Sub-Committee seeks to research, advocate, and educate with respect to policies and practices that respect the human rights of migrants and refugees to dignity, safety, development, social participation, and well-being.

In November 2017, the Sub-Committee distributed a survey to NGOs in various parts of the world whose missions focused on counteracting all forms of xenophobia and racism, consistent with SDG16 on promoting the social inclusion of migrants and refugees and creating peaceful and harmonious societies. The responding organizations reported that the main barriers to protecting and assisting migrants and refugees were the absence of governmental support through legislation, social policy, and adequate funding.

As a follow-up to the success of the 2017 survey, in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Sub-Committee circulated a survey to NGOs in 2020 consistent with the Global Compact on Migration (GCM, adopted by Member States in December 2018) Objectives 15 (Provide access to basic services for migrants), 16 (Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion), and 17(Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration) and with SDGs 10 (Reduce Inequalities), 16 (see above) and 17(Create Partnerships). It is our belief that surveys like these, that elicit information about promising governance practices and successful, innovative initiatives, can lead to improved understanding of psychosocial factors, barriers to movement forward, and gaps in resources and services that hinder full integration of migrants and refugees into host communities. Therefore, the goal of this survey was to gather information on how the COVID-19 Pandemic, a time of increasing fear, isolation, xenophobia and racism globally, has affected the severity of challenges experienced by NGOs working with migrants

and refugees. We looked for promising practices that the responding organizations developed to reduce xenophobia and racism and foster social inclusion, with a focus on leaving no one behind.

## Methodology

### Survey Instrument

The survey consisted of 20 items including country and specific location of the NGO's migrant/refugee project, category of project location as a transit or destination country, description of the project, number of staff, sources of funding, number of the population served that had tested positive for COVID-19, number of migrant deaths attributed to COVID-19, number of migrants/refugees served, changes in the number of migrants/refugees served and factors to which they were attributable, countries of origin of the population served, reasons population served left their former domicile, population ethnicity/religion, age group of the majority of the population, areas in which migrants/refugees experienced xenophobia and intolerance, degree of increase in xenophobic incidents against the population served due to COVID-19, types of governmental and local authority support to mitigate the effects of xenophobia, description of the NGO's most successful initiative in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic, and challenges faced by the NGO in protecting and assisting migrants/refugees who have been victims of COVID-19. (PER DISCUSSION)

### Procedures

The surveys were distributed to NGOs in various parts of the world through a number of UN facilities, especially the outreach networks of the Department of Global Communication, and NGO channels, including the listserv of the NGO Committee on Migration, the listserv of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women – New York, as well as selected NGO networks. The survey was translated into Spanish and French, and widely distributed among respondents to the 2017 survey, as well as through personal contacts of subcommittee members. In order to get the most reliable, first-hand information, the survey instructions asked that respondents be members of NGOs or townships who worked directly with migrants/refugees in the specific locations involved in their answers to the survey.

### Sample

Fifty-eight respondents returned the 2021 online survey. They were located in ten regions, categorized as: (1) East Asia, (2) South Asia, (3) Middle East/Northern Africa/Greater Arabia, (4) Eastern Europe, (5) Western Europe, (6) North America, (7) Central America/Caribbean, (8) South America, (9) Sub-Saharan Africa, and (10) Australia/Oceania. The average number of geographical locations listed was  $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ , suggesting that most organizations only had one location where they currently served migrants.

The majority of the respondents (20 participants, 35.1%) were located in North America, 15 (26.3%) in South Asia, 11 (19.3%) in Sub-Saharan Africa, 10 (17.5%) in Western Europe, 7 (12.3%) in Middle East/Northern Africa/Greater Arabia, 4 (7%) in Eastern Europe, 3 (5.3%) in East Asia, 2 (3.5%) in Central America/Caribbean, 2 (3.5%) in South America, and 1 (1.8%) in the Australia/Oceania region.

### Analyses

The survey responses were submitted to both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Qualitative survey items were categorized into responses analyzable in a cleaned dataset. Descriptive analyses were conducted to ascertain means and standard deviations, and frequency analyses were performed to

obtain percentages with accompanying graphs. A means comparison was conducted with an independent t-test and correlations between variables were obtained where relevant.

## Results

### Migrant and Refugee Populations Served

Survey respondents reported serving migrants/refugees across age and biological sex (see Table 1). One organization wrote in that they also served transgender migrants/refugees. About half (48.28%) indicated that they served more than 300 migrants or refugees in their local project, 17.24% served between 101 and 300, and 34.48% served 100 migrants/refugees or less. The majority (75.86%) served international migrants or refugees while only a quarter (24.14%) served internal migrants.

*Table 1. Migrants and Refugees Served by Age and Biological Sex*

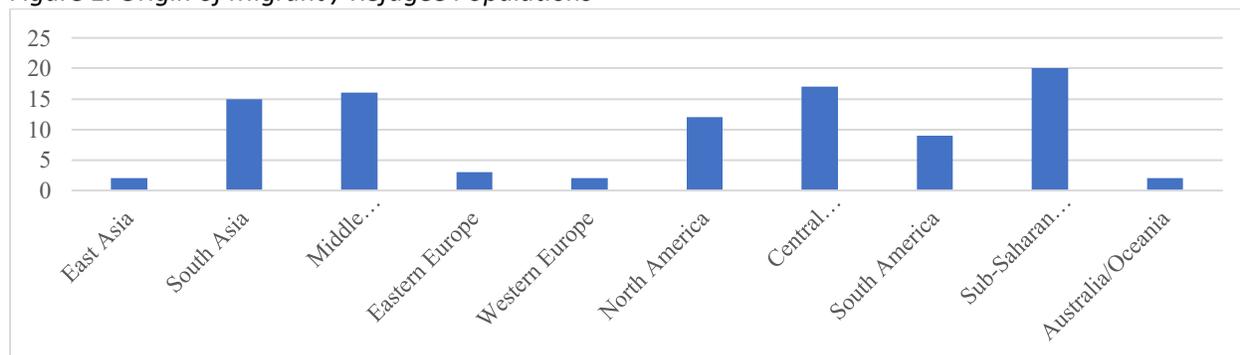
	Female	Male
Age 0-12	26 (44.83%)	22 (37.93%)
Age 13-17	13 (22.41%)	27 (46.55%)
Age 18+	32 (55.17%)	31 (53.45%)

### Origin of Migrants and Refugee Populations Served

Organizations were invited to provide written responses, and only 49 out of 58 respondents provided complete answers, tabulated in Figure 1, below. The number and percentage of organizations with migrants/refugees originating from various world regions were distributed as follows:

- Sub-Sahara Africa 20 participants (40.8%)
- Central America/ Caribbean 17 (34.7%)
- Middle East/Northern Africa/Greater Arabia 16 (32.7%)
- South Asia 15 (30.6%)
- North America 12 (24.5%)
- South America 9 (18.4%)
- Eastern Europe 3 (6.1%)
- Asia 2 (4.1%)
- Western Europe 2 (4.1%)
- Australia/Oceania 2 (4.1%)

*Figure 1. Origin of Migrant / Refugee Populations*

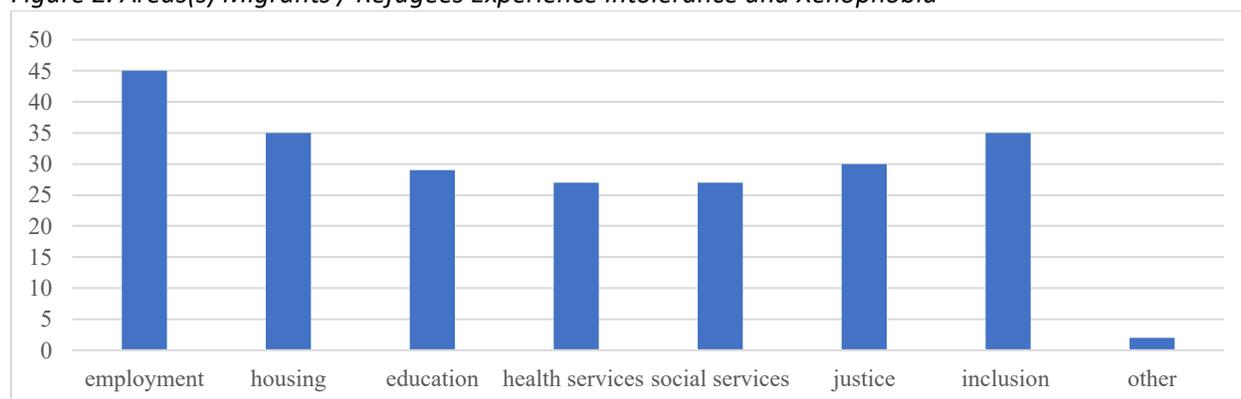


### Areas(s) Migrants/Refugees Experienced Intolerance and Xenophobia

Seven options were provided, and more than one response could be selected. Fifty-six (56) organizations marked at least one area in which migrants/refugees experienced intolerance, while two (2) said either they did not know, or the question was not relevant (see Figure 2). Additionally, 67% of organizations reported that the populations they served experienced xenophobia in more than one of the seven areas, suggesting that many migrants/refugees' experiences of xenophobia are compounded and intersect across various areas.

- Place of Employment: 45 participants (80.4%)
- Housing: 35 participants (62.5%)
- Education: 29 (51.8%)
- Health Services: 27 (48.2%)
- Social Services: 27 (48.2%)
- Justice: 30 (53.6%)
- Inclusion: 35 (62.5%)
- Other: 2 (3.6%)
  - One described migrants/refugees being “warmly welcomed” by the local community which they described as being made up of a mix of migrants and minoritized racial groups.
  - One organization wrote in that the biggest obstacle was economic in nature.

Figure 2. Areas(s) Migrants / Refugees Experience Intolerance and Xenophobia



### Increase in Xenophobic Incidents due to COVID-19

Responses about increases in xenophobic incidents could range from (1 = not at all to 5 = very much). Two organizations did not respond. The Mean reported increases was slightly above the midpoint of a 5-point scale ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ), suggesting that organizations saw some increases in xenophobic incidents among the populations they served due to COVID-19. Frequencies indicate that 21.4% reported no increase at all, while 21.4% reported xenophobic incidents increased very much. In correlating reported increases in xenophobic incidents to the origin of the migrant/refugee populations they served, we found that organizations serving migrants originating from South or East Asia reported significantly higher increases in xenophobic incidents due to COVID-19 ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ), compared to organizations who do not serve these populations ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ,  $t(53) = -2.80$ ,  $p < .01$ ). No other migrant origin reported was associated with significant increases in xenophobic incidents due to COVID-19.

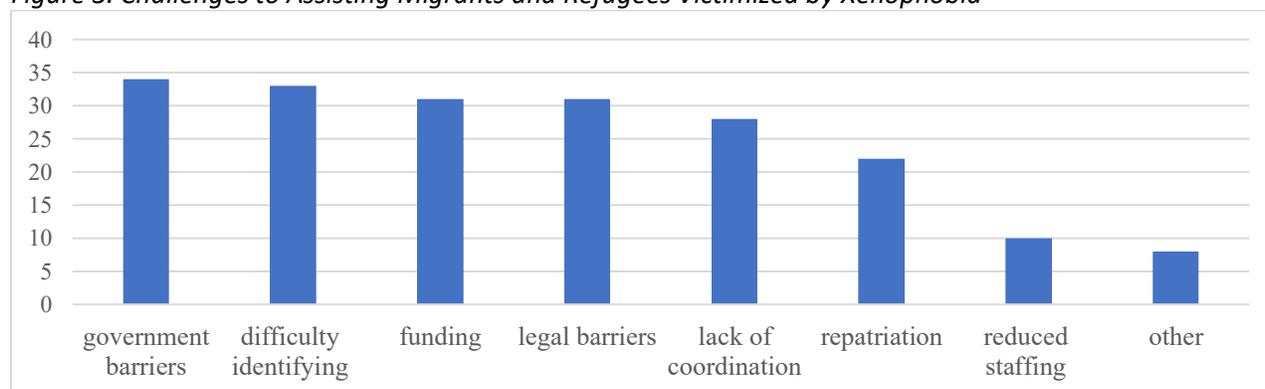
However, there were some interesting variations among the 21.4% of organizations reporting increases in xenophobia. Besides South and East Asia, xenophobia also increased towards Mexican/Latin American migrants/refugees in the US and Mexico, towards migrants/refugees within countries in SubSaharan Africa, and towards Ukrainian migrants/refugees in Greece.

#### Challenges to Protecting and Assisting Migrant and Refugee Victims of Xenophobia and Intolerance

Multiple response options were provided (see Figure 3). Four (4) organizations did not respond or considered the question as not relevant or applicable. The responses in terms of the number and percentage of participants are:

- Government barriers (bureaucratic delays, lack of training, corruption, etc.) 34 participants (63%)
- Difficulty identifying those who need assistance (fear of arrest/deportation) 33 participants (61.1%)
- Need for organizational funding 31 participants (57.4%)
- Legal barriers (lack of laws, limitations in existing laws, criminalization of migration) 31 participants (57.4%)
- Lack of coordination in providing services 28 participants (51.9%)
- Migrant repatriation 22 participants (40.7%)
- Reduced staffing (due to COVID-19) 10 participants (18.5%)
- Other challenge 8 participants (14.8%) Write-in responses included:
  - inability to provide basic services (safe housing, effective medical care)
  - exploitation of labor (labor brokerage system)
  - fear of safety or harassment (organized crime, instances of xenophobia, fear of government officials)
  - challenges to working remotely
  - fewer migrants/refugees passing through the border

Figure 3. Challenges to Assisting Migrants and Refugees Victimized by Xenophobia



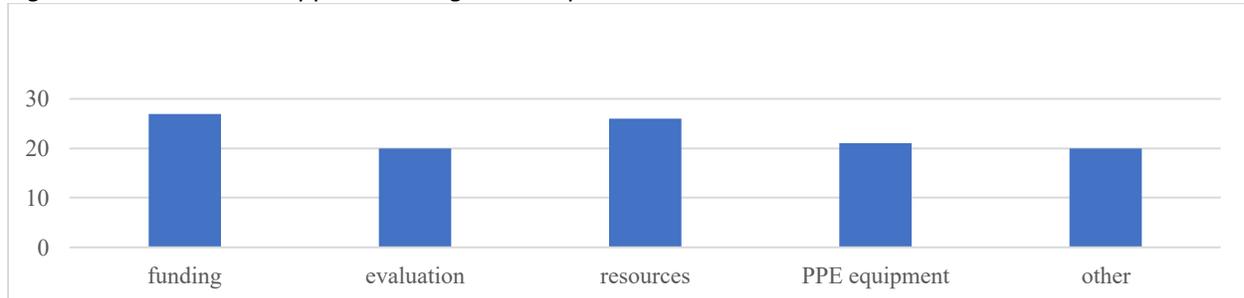
The majority of organizations only listed one challenge experienced in assisting migrants/refugees ( $M=1.32$ ,  $SD=1.11$ ). There was a correlation between the number of organizations that reported the greater number of challenges experienced and those reporting the greater number of areas in which migrants/refugees experienced intolerance and xenophobia,  $r=.53$ ,  $p<.01$ .

### Government Support to Mitigate Xenophobia due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Three of the 58 organizations indicated the question was not relevant or applicable. The number and percentage of respondents who reported various types of support (Figure 4) provided by government entities were as follows:

- Funding initiatives 27 organizations, (49.1%)
- Evaluation 20 (36.4%)
- Other resources 26 (47.3%)
- PPE equipment 21 (38.2%)
- Other support or comments 20 (36.4%). Among these:
  - 6 suggested that the government does nothing or causes further marginalization (i.e., through policy, refugees being burned out of their homes, cramped living conditions in detention centers caused COVID-19 outbreaks).
  - 5 suggested that the government provided other medical or health related resources outside of providing PPE equipment (i.e., water, medical care, contact tracing, translating COVID-19 information into local community languages).
  - 2 discussed how the government took steps to improve relationships between law enforcement and migrant community members (i.e., reduction in detention centers, improved law enforcement relationships with local community groups).
  - The remaining responses suggested that the government provided “public awareness,” or “legal action,” and one participant described that they primarily received non-profit assistance, not governmental assistance.

*Figure 4. Government Support to Mitigate Xenophobia*



On the average, organizations reported receiving more than two different types of government support  $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ . The more migrant populations originated from different points of origin, the greater the likelihood of multiple avenues of funding,  $r = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### Successful Initiatives in Response to the Pandemic

To support opportunities for policymaking, participants were asked to describe their organization's most successful initiative, specifically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Promising practice categories and a write-in option were provided. Seven organizations did not respond, provided an incomplete response, or indicated that the question was not relevant or applicable (see Figure 5).

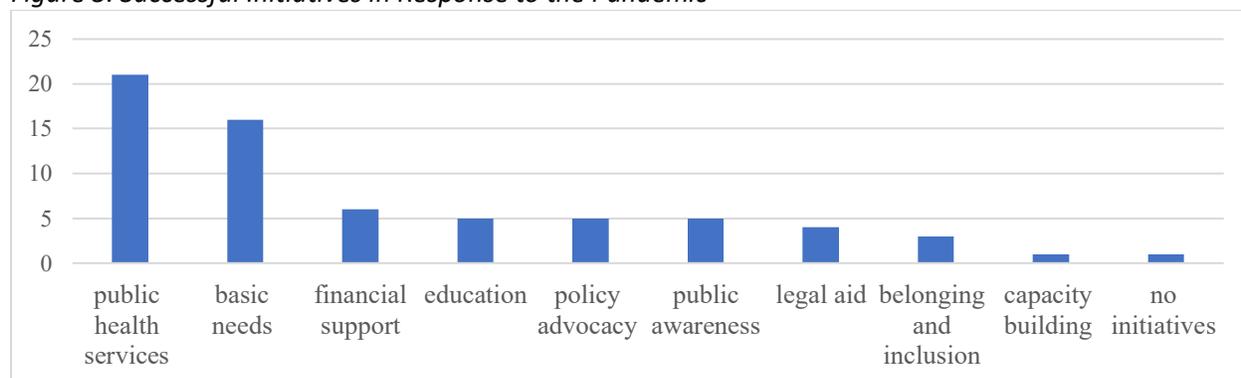
Among the 51 respondents:

- Provided public health services to migrants/refugees: 21 organizations (41.2%).

This included information regarding hygiene or sanitation, education related to the COVID-19 pandemic (distributing masks or other types of Personal Protective Equipment- PPE), mental health services, or programs to support reproductive health.

- Basic needs (food, shelter, public benefits): 16 (32.4%)
- Financial Support: 6 (11.8%), to help with loss of employment related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Education (i.e., language services, tutoring, skills training): 5 (9.8%)
- Policy advocacy: 5 (9.8%)
- Public awareness campaigns: 5 (9.8%)
  - 2 related to COVID-19
  - 1 related to the organization's work
  - 2 did not elaborate on the content of these campaigns
- Legal aid: 4 (7.8%)
- Belonging and inclusion: 3 (5.9%)
  - 2 indicated programming to welcome migrants/refugees to the host society
  - 1 indicated connecting migrant youth online
- Capacity building: 1 (2%) no information on what domain
- No initiative due to government restrictions: 1 (2%)

*Figure 5. Successful Initiatives in Response to the Pandemic*



## Conclusions

The goal of the 2020/2021 survey was to gather information on how the COVID-19 Pandemic, a time of increasing fear, isolation, xenophobia and racism globally, has affected the severity of challenges experienced by NGOs working with migrants and refugees. We looked for promising practices that the responding organizations developed to reduce xenophobia and racism and foster social inclusion, with a focus on leaving no one behind.

In terms of their demographic profile, the 58 organizations that responded to the 2020/2021 survey reported serving migrants/refugees including male and female children, male and female youth, and male and female adults – the largest age group. A little more than 65% of the organizations served between 101 to more than 300 migrants/refugees.

More than two-thirds of the organizations reported that their migrant/refugee population experienced xenophobia and intolerance in more than one of seven potential areas. The areas with the

highest reported experiences of xenophobia and intolerance were employment, housing, social inclusion, justice, education, and health services. Organizations serving migrants/refugees from South or East Asia reported significantly higher increases in xenophobia and intolerance related to COVID-19 than organizations that served migrants/refugees from other geographic areas of origin. These findings are consistent with recent research which suggests that greater increases in xenophobia in the context of COVID-19 is associated with greater anti-Asian prejudice (Mandalaywala, Gonzalez, & Tropp, 2020). However, besides South and East Asia, xenophobia also increased towards Mexican/Latin American migrants/refugees in the US and Mexico, towards migrants/refugees within countries in SubSaharan Africa, and towards Ukrainian migrants/refugees in Greece.

The most serious challenges encountered by the respondents in protecting and assisting migrants/refugees who were victims of xenophobia and intolerance were: Government barriers (bureaucratic delays, level of training needed, corruption), difficulty in identifying who needed help (due to fear of arrest or deportation), need for organizational funding, legal barriers, and lack of coordination in services provided.

Successful organizational initiatives included: Providing public health services, basic needs (such as food, shelter, public benefits), financial support to help with lost employment, education, policy advocacy, and public awareness campaigns.

**Reference:**

Mandalaywala, Gonzalez, & Tropp, 2020

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM, 2018)

2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (2015)