

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 Xenophobia, Racism and Social Inclusion

Nermin Ahmad
Rashmi Jaipal
Corann Okorodudu
Emily Van Vleck

June 30, 2021

Executive Summary

The NGO Committee on Migration is an international coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a substantive committee of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (“CoNGO”) in consultative relationship with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (“UN ECOSOC”). The Committee advocates for the protection and fulfillment of the human rights of migrants and refugees. Its Sub-Committee on Xenophobia, Racism and 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 to NGOs working with migrants and refugees in various parts of the world focused on counteracting xenophobia, 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.

This 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 with migrants and refugees in various international locations. There was some overlap between the 2017 and 2020/2021 survey results. Specifically, the most common challenges organizations identified while protecting and assisting migrants and refugees who were victims of xenophobia and intolerance are: government barriers (bureaucratic delays, level of training needed, corruption), challenges 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. Additionally, this report finds that 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 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 also rooted in the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (2015). In both 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 2020 and ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The NGO Committee on Migration is a substantive committee of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (“CoNGO”) in consultative relationship with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (“UN ECOSOC”). The Committee advocates for the protection of migrants and refugees and the promotion of their human rights. Its Sub-Committee on Xenophobia, Racism and Social Inclusion 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 about 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. 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 also identified common 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 COVID-19 Pandemic, and challenges faced by the NGO in protecting and assisting migrants/refugees who have been victims of the COVID-19.

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 and the listserv of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women – New York. The survey was translated from English 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 or two location(s) where they currently served migrants.

The majority of the respondents (20 respondents, 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

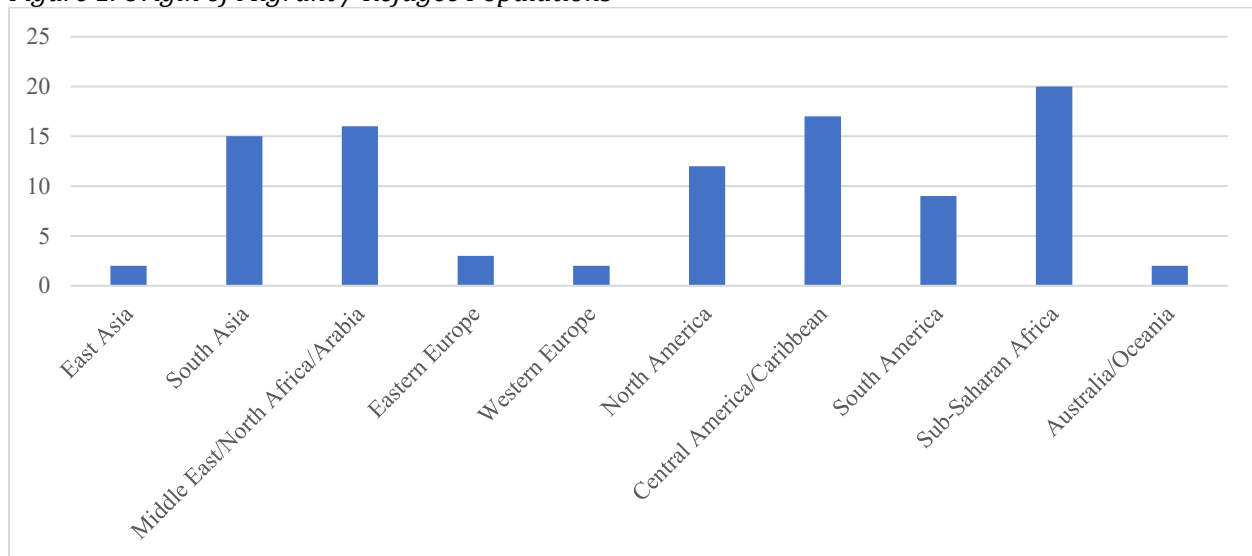
	Female	Male
Age 0-12	26 (44.83%)	22 (37.93%)
Age 13-17	13 (22.41%)	27 (46.55%)
Age 18+	32 (55.17%)	31 (53.45%)

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

Figure 1. Origin of Migrant / Refugee Populations

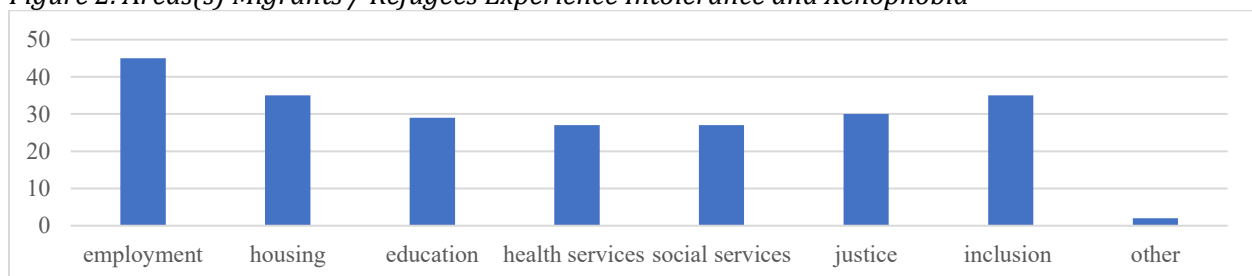


Areas(s) Migrants/Refugees Experienced Intolerance and Xenophobia

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 respondents (80.4%)
- Housing: 35 respondents (62.5%)
- Education: 29 respondents (51.8%)
- Health Services: 27 respondents (48.2%)
- Social Services: 27 respondents (48.2%)
- Justice: 30 respondents (53.6%)
- Inclusion: 35 respondents (62.5%)
- Other: 2 respondents (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 respondent 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.

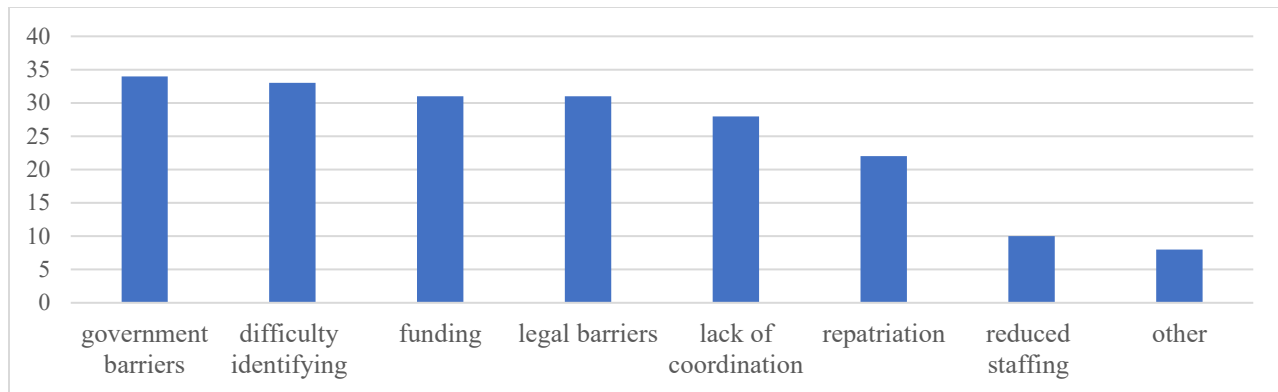
However, there are some interesting variations among the 21.4% of organizations reporting increases in xenophobia. Besides South and East Asia, xenophobia also increased towards Mexican/Latin American migrants/refugees in the US and Mexico, towards migrants/refugees within countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 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 respondents are:

- Government barriers (bureaucratic delays, lack of training, corruption, etc.): 34 respondents (63%)
- Difficulty identifying those who need assistance (fear of arrest/deportation): 33 respondents (61.1%)
- Need for organizational funding: 31 respondents (57.4%)
- Legal barriers (lack of laws, limitations in existing laws, criminalization of migration): 31 respondents (57.4%)
- Lack of coordination in providing services: 28 respondents (51.9%)
- Migrant repatriation: 22 respondents (40.7%)
- Reduced staffing (due to COVID-19): 10 respondents (18.5%)
- Other challenge: 8 respondents (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 associated with 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 strong correlation between the number of organizations that reported a greater number of challenges experienced and those reporting the greater number of areas in which migrants/refugees experienced intolerance and xenophobia, $r = .53$, $p < .01$.

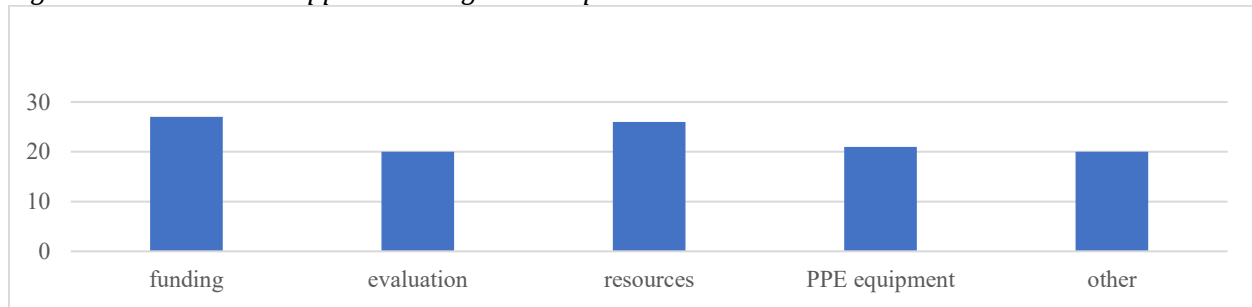
Government Support to Mitigate Xenophobia due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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 respondents (49.1%)
- Evaluation: 20 respondents (36.4%)
- Other resources: 26 respondents (47.3%)
- PPE equipment: 21 respondents (38.2%)
- Other support or comments: 20 respondents (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 respondents reported receiving multiple avenues of funding, $r = .37$, $p < .01$.

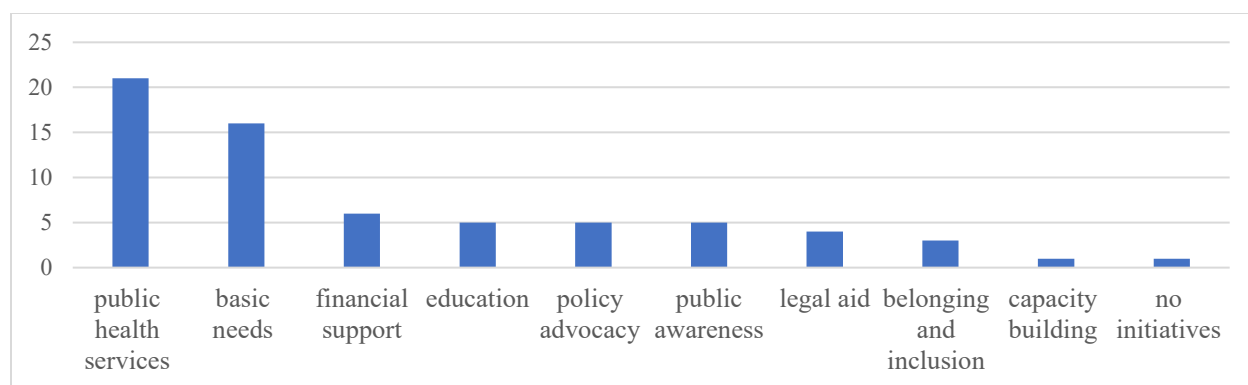
Successful Initiatives in Response to the Pandemic

To support opportunities for policymaking, respondents 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 respondents (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 respondents (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 respondents (9.8%)
- Policy advocacy: 5 respondents (9.8%)
- Public awareness campaigns: 5 respondents (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 respondents (7.8%)
- Belonging and inclusion: 3 respondents (5.9%)
 - 2 indicated programming to welcome migrants/refugees to the host society
 - 1 indicated connecting migrant youth online
- Capacity building: 1 respondent (2%)
 - no information on what specific domain
- No initiatives 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 were employment, followed by 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 Sub-Saharan Africa, and towards Ukrainian migrants/refugees in Greece.

The most common challenges encountered by the respondents in protecting and assisting migrants and refugees who were victims of xenophobia and intolerance generally included difficulty navigating government structures. Specifically, the most common challenges organizations identified included: government barriers (bureaucratic delays, level of training needed, corruption), followed by 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.

Finally, successful organizational initiatives included providing basic services for migrants and refugees in need of health or financial resources. Specifically, the most common successful initiatives organizations identified included: providing public health services, followed by providing basic needs (such as food, shelter, public benefits), financial support to help with lost employment, education, policy advocacy, and public awareness campaigns.

Reference:

Mandalaywala, T. M., Gonzalez, G., & Tropp, L. (2020). How intergroup contact and exposure predict anti-Asian prejudice in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic (in preparation for publication).

United Nations General Assembly (2018). Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2018, U.N. Doc. (A/73/L.66). Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/pga/72/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2018/07/migration.pdf>

United Nations General Assembly (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, U.N. Doc. A/RES/70/1). Retrieved from http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E