

Press Release by the United Nations Network on Migration

COVID-19 & Immigration Detention: What Can Governments and Other Stakeholders Do?

Around the world today, we are witnessing the severe impacts of the use of migration-related detention on migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic – indefinite detention in overcrowded facilities for some, prolonged situations of irregularity and fear of detention for others, heightened risk of infection for all: migrants, staff, their families, and their communities.

Yesterday, the United Nations Network on Migration released urgently needed [practical recommendations with guidance for States and stakeholders on preventing and responding to COVID-19 in the context of immigration detention](#). By focusing on the development of non-custodial alternatives based in the community, the brief highlights steps that several governments have already taken to swiftly release migrants from detention and to provide access to healthcare, housing and other services regardless of migration status. The Network looks forward to feedback from all partners and to updating these recommendations on an ongoing basis.

The Network's Working Group on Alternatives to Detention – co-led by UNICEF, UNHCR and the International Detention Coalition – has developed this guidance in partnership amongst UN agencies and civil society. The recommendations have been informed by the broad and diverse experience of Working Group members, including UN agencies, civil society organizations and networks, young people, local governments and technical experts working on immigration detention and alternatives all over the globe.

The Network calls on States to introduce a moratorium on the use of immigration detention; to scale up and implement non-custodial community-based alternatives; to release all migrants in detention into alternatives, following strict safeguards and prioritizing children, families and other migrants in vulnerable situations; and to urgently improve overall conditions in places of immigration detention while we transition to alternatives.

In releasing this guidance, the Network reminds States of their commitment in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to prioritize alternatives to immigration detention, using detention as a measure of last resort only and working towards ending child immigration detention. The COVID-19 pandemic has created momentum for alternatives to immigration detention as a viable solution to mitigate public health concerns while ensuring access to human rights and essential services for migrants. Together, let's seize this opportunity to redouble our collaborative efforts, look beyond the current crisis, and showcase concretely how migration can be governed without resorting to immigration detention.

The United Nations Network on Migration is committed to supporting all partners in pursuit of the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, recognizing that this cooperative framework provides an invaluable tool for ensuring all in society can contribute to a collective response to COVID-19 and are protected equally against its impact.



The United Nations Network on Migration was established to ensure effective, timely and coordinated system-wide support to Member States in their implementation, follow up and review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The Working Group on Alternatives to Detention is one of six thematic working groups established under the Network, tasked with promoting the development and implementation of human rights-based alternatives to detention in the migration context. While the Network's mandate is limited to migration and provides the context in which this policy brief has been written, UNHCR calls on States to also implement these recommendations where they apply to refugees and asylum-seekers and to protect the human rights and health of everyone equally, regardless of migration status.

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