

A Roadmap to Local Inclusion in the age of COVID-19

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Welcoming movement - comprised of hundreds of towns and cities worldwide transforming themselves into inclusive places - is working to ensure that norms of inclusion not only don't fall by the wayside, but are further affirmed in this time of extreme crisis. A key lesson our movement is imparting is as follows: if municipalities and other local stakeholders fail to build trust among residents, and fail to follow inclusive practices in their COVID-19 responses, their communities will be more likely to suffer from greater health threats and disparities, greater economic inequality, and squandered human potential. On the other hand, if localities utilize inclusive approaches in their response - and regional and national authorities support them to do so - communities will be much more likely to emerge more resilient, prosperous, and united. What follows is a series of recommendations for inclusive responses, based on the actions Welcoming International members are employing - or preparing to employ - during their COVID-19 response.

Inclusive Emergency Response

During a public health emergency, inclusion is about making sure everyone is safe. Ethnicity, migration status, neighborhood, or language shouldn't determine someone's fate, but too many community residents are facing unnecessary hardship or even death because they face unique barriers to protection and support. An inclusive emergency response should strive to address the unique barriers that migrants, refugees and other marginalized populations face during these times.

Addressing language barriers: To start with, many communities are not currently equipped for the translation needs required to keep migrant communities

informed of near daily changes to information, guidelines, etc. This leaves migrant communities - including migrant business owners - at greater risk of contracting COVID-19, and less likely to receiving accurate and timely information about certain relief benefits that are available to them. In order to ensure the language barrier doesn't inhibit protection and support, local government and civil society actors should create and implement policies and programs to ensure universal access to essential information in all relevant languages.

Addressing information barriers: The same is true for access to accurate information. Traditional channels used to communicate information about public health are often not effective in reaching migrants and other vulnerable residents, who tend to rely on alternative information channels. Instead, local actors should utilize alternative communications platforms - everything from WhatsApp and social media to migrant-owned newspapers that cater to these populations.

Addressing barriers to relief: An inclusive municipality should be mindful of its application requirements for local government relief programs/services. If citizenship or legal status in the country is required, for example, some residents will not be eligible, which will put them at greater risk of falling through the cracks. In addition to creating inclusive guidelines for traditional relief programs, local and regional governments should also explore the creation of alternative "inclusive relief funds," which can be created through partnerships with philanthropic partners. A good example of this is [California Immigrant Resilience Fund](#) being implemented in the state of California.

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Inclusive Recovery

Although towns and cities worldwide are currently deep within the emergency response phase, some are gearing up for the next phase - recovery. In order for the local-level recovery phase to be successful, it

must include community-wide recovery planning, and that planning should be as inclusive as possible. Local participants in the global Welcoming movement have been doing community-wide inclusion planning for years. These planning processes - which are usually led by the municipality, and always engage representatives from all sectors of the community - identify, and subsequently address the major barriers that migrants and other marginalized groups face in their journeys towards full economic and civic participation. These processes should serve as a model for inclusive COVID-19 recovery planning. During the recovery phase, there will be pressure on municipalities to act quickly and possibly skip the community-wide planning process. Unfortunately, a closed recovery process is more likely to leave the most vulnerable behind, whereas an inclusive process is more likely to ensure broad recovery and prosperity.

During the pandemic it is also important to note that inclusive planning approaches will need to be adapted slightly - for example multi-sector, in-person planning gatherings must be moved online for obvious health and safety reasons. In moving these processes online, communities must ensure that the technology and technological knowledge needed to participate fully are accessible to all participants.

Inclusive Narrative

One of the biggest future barriers to an inclusive recovery will be threats to social cohesion. As economies begin to gradually open up again, the potential for scapegoating of foreigners and other marginalized groups - which has already begun - is likely to increase. If community members turn against one another, and some leaders take on an "us vs them mindset", public trust and social cohesion - two of the most important ingredients in a successful recovery - will be lost.

In order to avoid this scenario, aggressive work to advance social cohesion needs to begin now. With this in mind, Welcoming International - which has always made local community cohesion core to its work - is laying the groundwork for a global campaign to harness the enhanced sentiments of good will and community solidarity experienced by many during the initial stages of the outbreak, especially towards front line workers in health care, emergency services, food

services and other essential industries - all occupations where immigrants and other marginalized groups play outsized roles. This campaign will be led by local actors, and will ultimately strive to help redefine the "us" in our societies to include everyone - migrants, refugees, religious and other minorities, etc., alongside majority populations. The campaign will be open to all who would like to participate, and the impact and lessons learned will be shared widely.

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All of us have the power to make choices now that will not only reduce the immediate impact of this pandemic, but also make our societies more unified and resilient to future global crises.

**David Lubell, Founding Director
of Welcoming International**

About Welcoming International

Welcoming International supports and connects institutions that are advancing inclusion around the world. Our vision is a world in which all people - including immigrants and refugees - feel at home. We believe the work of accomplishing that vision begins in local communities, with all sectors working together to build community cohesion and advance institutional inclusion.

