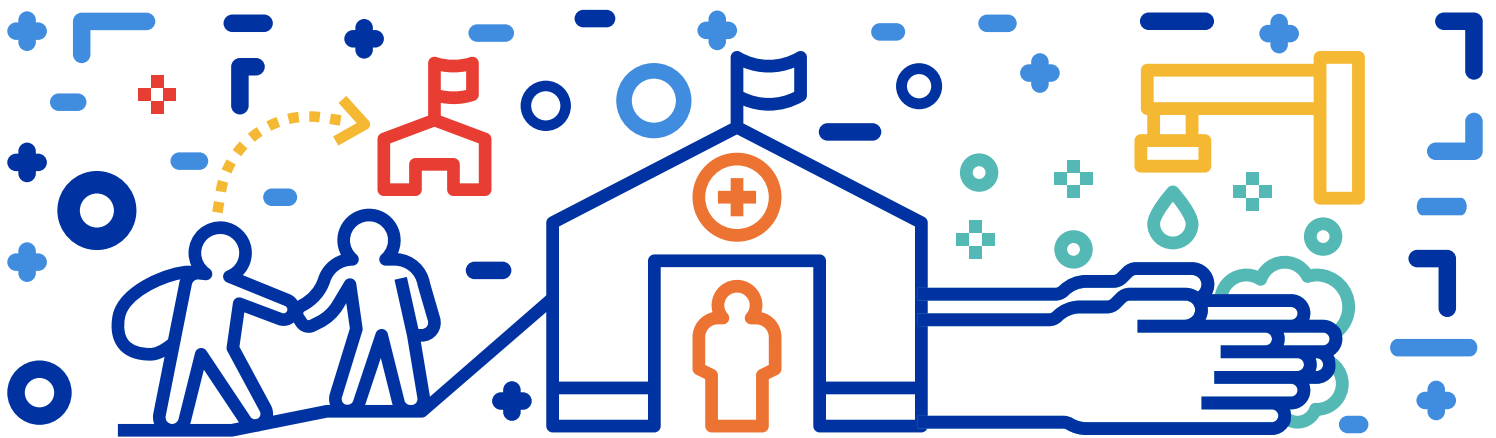


COVID-19 Response: Lessons from Haiti

Risk Communication, Infection
Prevention and Control,
Rehabilitation of Health Facilities



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Initiative Summary

Initiative	Multi-dimensional interventions implemented by IOM Haiti in the context of the COVID-19 humanitarian response.
Description	This knowledge product describes how IOM's country office in Haiti assisted the country in boosting its COVID-19 pandemic response by employing a strategy anchored on following pillars: application of a COVID-19 protocol, development of raising awareness activities, COVID-19 contact tracing, and rehabilitation of the local health infrastructure and ambulance system.
Objective	To assist the host country in increasing its capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, employing a COVID-19 protocol, conducting raising awareness campaigns and actions through multiple channels, and rehabilitating important pieces of the local health infrastructure.
Location	Haiti
Beneficiaries	Local populations, inmates, National Government of Haiti, returning migrants.

Introduction & Context

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic reaching Haiti, the country had historically struggled with recurring episodes of political instability, considered to be one of the root causes of the multiple challenges the country continually faced in its development¹. As the first cases of COVID-19 arrived in Haiti and the pandemic went global, in the early months of 2020, the Haitian government, in partnership with multiple stakeholders in the humanitarian systems, reinforced the national health system in preparation for subsequent waves of infections. Although the country was experiencing a low rate of infection, constant surveillance was employed as any surges could have easily overwhelmed the already weak health system present in the country.

In response to this challenging context, IOM Haiti quickly adapted its operations, reprogrammed funds, and raised new resources to implement interventions addressing COVID-19 through different lenses. The country office structured its response in three pillars,

namely, 1) implementation of a COVID-19 protocol; 2) raising awareness, and 3) rehabilitation of infrastructure and ambulances.

Initially, its actions were planned with the aim of assisting both the national government of Haiti and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in the implementation of the national COVID-19 protocol designed specifically to improve tracing of suspected cases, as well as give the country an improved capacity to respond to the pandemic more effectively. Next, the country office conveyed key risk communication messages through several different channels to raise awareness concerning the virus and instruct local populations on how to employ effective infection prevention measures in their daily activities. Lastly, the country office channeled funds towards the rehabilitation of existing health infrastructure to meet the minimum operational capacity to effectively address COVID-19 cases and minimize the risks of contagion and to improve the Haitian ambulances system.



Risk communication disseminated by IOM in Haiti along with USAID and local partners about the correct mask use to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

¹ More information in this [document](#), *Haiti Migration Governance Needs Assessment*. IOM, 2019.

COVID-19: Main Actions

In the context of the COVID-19 humanitarian response employed by multiple humanitarian entities in Haiti, IOM structured its interventions in multiple areas, notably: border management (working with government to monitor movements in and out of the country to facilitate tracing), risk communication (raising awareness on how to prevent the spread of the virus), and infection prevention and control (building capacity in health systems to prevent new cases).

When the pandemic started, **IOM Haiti worked closely with Haiti's Ministry of Health and PAHO to establish sanitary border protocols aimed at containing new COVID-19 infections.** These efforts facilitated contact tracking amongst migrants and passengers arriving in the country, allowing for data collection² that was later employed to assist the government instituting new measures to decrease the level of contagion observed in the country.

Also, IOM invested heavily in conducting sensitization of the local populations in multiple levels, to raise awareness concerning the spread of COVID-19 and what measures could be adopted to curb infections. In that context, **the country team engaged local artists to paint murals in highly populated urban areas in the country calling attention to the COVID-19 pandemic.** The murals showcased efforts in wearing masks and social distancing and established an innovative way to communicate these concepts to the local audiences. Furthermore, **IOM Haiti also included leaflets conveying key information about risk communication to almost 11,000 hygiene kits** (such as masks, alcohol, and soap) **distributed to 18 detention facilities across the country.** This improved sanitary conditions in these facilities, while raising awareness amongst inmates. Lastly, the local staff **adapted its existing counselling and psychosocial support hotline through the incorporation of COVID-19 preventive measures to operators.** This positively added another layer of sensitization to beneficiaries in Haiti.

Additionally, **IOM Haiti channeled funds towards rehabilitation of 18 health facilities across the country,** focusing on providing technical support and resources to ensure facilities had the adequate structure to comply with COVID-19 prevention guidelines – including triage structures, waste management, incinerator, ventilation, and isolation wards. The preparatory work consisted also of working with the local Ministry of Health and WHO teams to conduct a technical evaluation of the national health system to make more accurate decisions on where to intervene and prioritize the funds. Each facility also featured a space for beneficiaries to comply with quarantine periods, contributing significantly to curbing new infections.



IOM HAITI ALSO CONDUCTED THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

- Construction of a Quarantine Center, using **40** tents.
- Reparation and adaptation of **50** ambulances.

² More information about *IOM Haiti Border Monitoring*, [here](#).

Lessons Learned

- **Adapting the communication strategy to the local context was essential.** The decision to convey key risk communication messages about COVID-19 prevention by using urban art interventions was made after careful analysis of how to best expose these concepts to the population. As an example, the project team favored a more visual approach, given the high levels of illiteracy in the country. **The mission also heavily involved local artists and community leaders** to strategically decide on how to tailor the messages to the specific locations.
- The innovative approach of incorporating local artists in the risk-communications awareness, could be replicated in similar interventions, to **support the creative sector to face the economic effects of the pandemic while improving community spaces.**
- Donor flexibility was perceived as an overall positive point while the mission quickly moved to adapt its operations to channel resources to the COVID-19 humanitarian response. **The country office prioritized their interventions and developed a global protocol to help contain the contagion based on the data collected in the border areas, they communicated the urgency of the situation and vulnerability of the area,** which contributed to persuading donors to be more flexible and allow significant restructuring efforts.
- **By liaising with both the PAHO and the National Government to conduct technical evaluations prior to any activity,** IOM Haiti managed to tailor the rehabilitations of health facilities in the country to the needs identified during this preparatory stage. The response was designed to incorporate elements made available during the evaluation stage, thus making it more accurate and aligned to the needs on the ground.
- The **contact tracing assistance provided by the organization in the border areas combined with data collection allowed the mission to prioritize their COVID-19** prevention activities and to culturally adapt their communication strategies. To conduct these initiatives partnerships with PAHO and the Ministry of Health were crucial to adapt their COVID-19 prevention protocols.



Risk communication disseminated by IOM in Haiti along with USAID and local partners about the correct mask usage, proper hand washing and physical distance to prevent spread of COVID-19.

Recommendations

- **Interventions related to infrastructure adaptation and reconstruction should focus on strengthening the national health systems and promote migrants' equal health access.** In the case of IOM Haiti, the mission used the information collected about the migrant population to adapt 18 hospitals and prepare one quarantine space for migrants, supporting migrants' health care access.
- **Any significant interventions, particularly in the domain of construction and rehabilitation, can greatly benefit from preemptive technical evaluations.** These are essential mechanisms to bring visibility of the needs and gaps that can be bridged through IOM's intervention. Technical evaluations can be facilitated through the involvement of appropriate national government actors as well as specialized agencies within the U.N. system.
- To quickly navigate the administrative procedures and comply with IOM's resources management guidelines, **it is essential to use the existing capacities, train staff on administrative procedures, and reassign them to prioritized activities; until additional staff can be incorporated.** In the case of Haiti, this strategy contributed significantly to a more agile and effective implementation of the proposed activities.
- **Risk communication activities conducted with local populations must always incorporate elements that are specific to that population and adapt to local context.** This preliminary analysis is typically facilitated by national government partners, local NGOs, and members of civil society, as well as local community leaders with extensive understanding of the local reality.
- **Maintaining partnerships and open dialogue with stakeholders enables to better engage human and financial resources, especially in the early stages of any public health emergency.** The mission used its strong relationships with the government, local government, and community leaders to promote COVID-19 assistance activities between the migrant and local population.
- **Risk communications and awareness activities could be effectively conducted in the migrant reception centers.** The mission adapted the material to conduct these activities between the migrant population in border communities.



IOM Haiti staff distributing personal hygiene kits along with risk communication in prisons to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among these populations.

Annexes



Annex 1

[Photographic evidence](#) of urban art interventions conveying risk communication messages.



Annex 2

[Photos](#) of distributions of hygiene kits containing sensitization messages to 18 prisons in Haiti.



Annex 3

[Report](#) containing main achievements and photographic evidence covering the rehabilitation of 18 health facilities in the country.

