

OBJECTIVE 02

To promote Human Rights and
Democracy, involving citizens in policy
dialogue, design and monitoring

COUNTERING HATE AND DISCRIMINATION AT THE TIME OF COVID-19 CRISIS

Refugee Rights Association (RRA)

Photo: www.freepik.com



THIS ACTION INVOLVED

Addressing the discriminatory communication towards migrant communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Updating and upgrading the RRA's website to allow easy and timely access to updated information and advocacy materials.

Translation of information and provisions regarding COVID-19 measures from Turkish to English and Arabic for non-Turkish speaking migrant communities.

Production and dissemination of social media visuals to raise public awareness against racism and discrimination.

ABOUT THE REFUGEE RIGHTS' ASSOCIATION

Formed in 2009, the Refugee Rights' association works against the shortcomings and violations regarding the rights to asylum in the northern part of Cyprus to provide legal and social support to refugees and victims of human trafficking and combat human trafficking and racism. It also aims to raise awareness on the rights of refugees to ensure solidarity between the Turkish Cypriot community and the refugees, to collect and distribute financial and material donations.

STORY OF THE ACTION

According to the RRA, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the risk of existing inequalities and discrimination on the most vulnerable migrant communities who were already marginalized in the northern part of Cyprus. The pandemic has posed more challenges to the migrant communities with a lack of proper access to information, services and assistance, as well as increased racism and discriminatory practices. These challenges required prompt responses by local bodies, which according to the RRA, were "discriminatory and contributing to xenophobia and racial discrimination".

"Concerns over Covid-19 created a large-scale anxiety in the Turkish Cypriot community and have also led to placing blame on others who are perceived to be associated with the outbreak. The response of representatives of local bodies to the coronavirus pandemic has been contributing to xenophobia and racial discrimination. Furthermore, migrant communities, including refugees and asylum seekers, have been subjected to mistreatment that range from hateful slurs to denial of information, services and assistance. The decisions of the relevant local bodies regarding the Covid-19 measures are published only in Turkish and rarely translated into English or other languages. For this reason, the most vulnerable segments of society, including refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and students, are left out in the dark."

Faika Paşa

Due to the lockdown, the ability of the RRA to be actively involved in policy and decision making has been curtailed, while the RRA recorded a considerable increase in the number of its website visitors who have been seeking information regarding the pandemic measures.

The RRA aimed to promote human rights of non-Turkish speaking migrant communities, including refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and students, by ensuring their access to information on the COVID-19 measures and by developing actions to counter rising racism and discrimination in the Turkish Cypriot community.



The RRA website has been updated and upgraded to incorporate a user-friendly admin panel allowing for easy and timely upload of already available materials. The RRA also published new information and advocacy materials to address the rights violations that migrant communities faced during the pandemic. Covid-19 related measures and provisions adopted by local bodies have been translated from Turkish into English and Arabic and disseminated through the RRA's updated multilingual website and social media channels. Social media visuals have been produced and disseminated to raise awareness against increasing xenophobia and racial discrimination to respond to the pandemic. The advocacy visuals included key messages such as "Covid-19 does not discriminate; nor should our response", "root out discrimination and stigma", "ensure marginalized populations can access health care without discrimination", and "address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and girls". The visuals included specific demands regarding the measures that should be taken to end discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

This action has promoted human rights and democracy, involving citizens in policy dialogue, design and monitoring, by developing and advocating specific policy recommendations to the relevant duty bearers. It has increased access of non-Turkish speaking migrant communities and refugees to Covid-19 related information in languages they can understand. The RRA's increased online visibility of advocacy and awareness raising materials helped to combat Covid-19 related acts of racial discrimination and xenophobia. It further raised awareness of the fundamental human rights of migrant communities in the Turkish Cypriot community during the crisis.

"The action has promoted human rights via increasing access to information, raising awareness Covid-19 pandemic of a human rights-based CSO."

Faika Paşa

WHAT'S NEXT?

The RRA is committed to providing assistance and protection to the target groups in the northern part of Cyprus. The RRA staff and volunteers aim to ensure the maintenance of its newly set up multilingual website to keep its increased and active online visibility of advocacy and awareness raising materials.

TO FIND
MORE ABOUT
THE ACTION



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