

COVID-19 and Its Impact on Social Cohesion: How We Have Responded

Discrimination arising from COVID-19 poses threats to societies world-wide. In Singapore, we need to be watchful and work together to keep our community united and resilient.

COVID-19 does not discriminate. As of 2 June, **more than 6.1 million people in almost every country have been infected** - regardless of race, religion or social status.

However, people sometimes discriminate, especially when they are afraid and stressed. COVID-19 has seen discrimination rear its ugly head all over the world, even dividing countrymen of the same race and culture. Thankfully, we have seen signs of solidarity and kindness in Singapore and in the world as a response to this pandemic.



COVID-related discrimination spreading across the world

When COVID-19 started in Hubei, China, its residents initially faced **discrimination and mistrust from their own countrymen** after their strict two-month lockdown was first lifted.

As the coronavirus spread outwards from its epicentre in China and started to wreak havoc on the rest of the world, the targets of discrimination similarly evolved. In Europe and Australia, people who appeared to be Chinese or Asian became the next to **face xenophobia** and even **physical assault**.

Similarly, in the early phases of COVID-19 in Singapore, **some from China were shunned** despite not having been to China recently. When the outbreak of coronavirus infections in dormitories increased, it resulted in some initial negative responses towards migrant workers.

In response to such sentiments, Singaporeans from all walks of life have stepped up to point out such views as **xenophobic, insensitive and reflecting a lack of cultural understanding**. Community and opinion leaders, including National Integration Council (NIC) members, have also urged all in Singapore to show support for each other and **avoid those who seek to manipulate social harmony**.

Responding with compassion and empathy

Since the start of the outbreak in Singapore, **the community has rallied together to start several initiatives** to show our **collective support for those affected** - especially our frontline workers and vulnerable groups. Ground-up efforts that promote understanding and support for migrant workers have also been integral in our nationwide effort to support everyone in the community.

While discrimination occurs from time to time, we can ensure that it does not become an accepted norm. It is not what Singapore stands for. We can strive for greater integration by taking a stand against discrimination, speaking up for the vulnerable, and working together for the common good through the many community-led initiatives.

Check out the [SG United portal](#) for more stories and opportunities!

Here are how some groups have contributed:

#WelcomeInMyBackyard

A campaign started by Singaporean youths to help migrant workers feel more at home in their new temporary lodgings in HDB estates during this outbreak, with thoughtful little welcome notes penned for them. You can submit your own welcome notes [here!](#)

Migrants We Care

An initiative by the Temasek Polytechnic community to collect simple words of encouragement for migrant workers, and work with ground-up organisations to share these messages during the Hari Raya celebrations.

Masks Sewn with Love

A grassroots initiative which saw more than 1,000 volunteers coming together to sew and donate about 50,000 cloth masks to various vulnerable groups including the elderly, children and domestic workers.

“A message for our Migrant brothers”

A short film in six different languages that seeks to encourage migrant workers during COVID-19, which was started by a Singaporean freelancer. Her call for volunteers led to an outpouring of support from Singaporean creatives and freelancers.



Contributing to Community Cohesion During COVID-19

While we continue to play our part to reduce community transmission during this pandemic, it is also important to help and encourage each other to remain united so that we can weather this crisis together. From volunteering and donating, to making “thank you” cards and calling out discriminatory behaviour – there is plenty for us to do.

Here are some ways that we can contribute during this challenging period:



Be an active part of community response efforts

You can **contribute to ground-up initiatives** to help those adversely hit by the COVID-19 outbreak, by donating funds or **in-kind**, or volunteering. For example, you can donate or volunteer for YMCA’s “**Wok the Talk**” initiative to provide food and grocery deliveries to beneficiaries, or you can support seniors in need by volunteering with the **Silver Generation Office**. Do visit the **SG United portal** to explore more volunteering opportunities by our partners.



Card by Vishwa Muthukumaran for The Get Well Card Project

Show appreciation to our frontline heroes

You can show your appreciation for our frontline workers who keep our city up and running during this difficult time, by sharing thank you cards, little notes of encouragement or homemade artworks on initiatives like **SG United**, **#HealthcareHeroes** **#CheerForThem** or **#BraveHeartSG**.



Call out discriminatory and inflammatory behaviour

Tensions may be running high during this period as everyone tries to cope with COVID-19, but **discrimination is never the answer**. Some discrimination may be a result from stress and dealing with transitions. We can **stand up respectfully against discriminatory views** when we see them online or in everyday life, while **providing resources to assure others**. Every voice makes a difference.



Avoid spreading fake news

Spreading unverified news may cause unnecessary stress within the community. We can safeguard the cohesion of our nation by only referring to reliable sources for our news and reminding our family and friends to do the same.

These resources include our official local newspapers, **government websites** and social media platforms, and the Gov.sg **WhatsApp** and **Telegram** channels.



Thank you to all our partners who have stepped up!

- ♥ NIC Alumni **Jeff Cheong** penned a heart-warming Facebook post to show support for migrant workers in Singapore, who faced some negative responses as COVID-19 infections rose among those living in dormitories.
- ♥ Volunteers from our partner **Singapore Federation for Chinese Clan Associations** have come forward to show their support for frontline workers and other groups affected by COVID-19 with thoughtfully put-together care packs.
- ♥ Our friends at the **Singapore Bangladesh Society** organised a donation drive for the Bangladeshi workers and their families back home, and an online quiz to keep them engaged during this period. They have also worked with organisations such as the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) to **translate advisories and infographics** into Bengali.
- ♥ **Members of Jiangsu Association (Singapore)** came together to do their part for our community, raising funds for needy students and donating masks and air purifiers to hospitals in Singapore.
- ♥ **Bengali Association Singapore** members translated advisories and messages for migrant workers into Bengali, and also recorded messages of encouragement for migrant workers for HealthServe’s Solidarity Wall.
- ♥ Business leaders from ground-up initiative **WorkWell Leaders Workgroup** developed an e-guide which shares concrete tips for employers and employees, including how to handle xenophobic and discriminatory behaviours at the workplace.

COVID-19 could be a generation-defining challenge. Whether local or foreign-born, each of us can do our part to make Singapore a caring and inclusive home for all. Every action matters.

How have you done in coping and supporting others during this difficult period? We would like to hear from you! Share with us your experiences or ongoing projects or if you have any ideas on how you would like to contribute at NIC_Secretariat@mccy.gov.sg.