

Street art for all during COVID-19: a call to stand together, and to stand with migrants

Accra - Amidst the fight against the spread of COVID-19 in Ghana, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), and the Delegation of the European Union to Ghana have joined forces with artists from the Ghana Graffiti collective, in an effort to use street art to sensitize people about COVID-19 prevention, safe migration and solidarity.

As the numbers of COVID-19 cases are rising in Ghana – we are counting 7,303 cases, 2,412 recoveries and 34 deaths – the Government, supported by the entire UN system, has put measures in place to curb the spread of the virus, that was first detected in the country on 12 March 2020. However, for many, including internal and international migrants living in crowded slums, access to clean running water or the possibility to maintain social distance, remain a luxury. IOM is therefore focusing its efforts to ensure that migrants and migration issues are fully included in the COVID-19 response.

The crisis is likely to negatively impact livelihoods and wellbeing of migrants and returnees, but also of people in vulnerable employment in the informal sector, as well as of households relying on remittances from abroad. In these circumstances, many, especially young people, may turn to migration in an attempt to cope. This may fuel irregular migration but also migrant exploitation and abuse including smuggling and human trafficking.

“The pandemic is going to exacerbate existing migration dynamics. Some people are going to lose their jobs and many may decide to move from rural areas to urban centers like Accra or from Ghana to the subregion or beyond, looking for greener pastures. So even in the midst of the immediate COVID-19 response, we need more than ever to actively continue our safe migration campaigns and to advocate for the response to leave no one behind including migrants,” said Sylvia Lopez-Ekra, IOM Ghana Chief of Mission.

To bring COVID-19 prevention and safe migration messages to the people, IOM is supporting a series of awareness raising activities throughout the country. For Accra, the capital city that sees the bulk of coronavirus infections in Ghana, street art was chosen, as it transcends cultures and creates bridges between people.

“These graffiti speak about hope, tolerance, love and solidarity. In fact, solidarity is more important than ever now that the world is hit by the COVID-19 crisis. As the graffiti reminds us, each and every one of us is concerned by this pandemic,” said H. E. Ambassador Diana Acconcia, Head of European Union Delegation to Ghana.

The location of the mural is a busy road in the Okaikwei North Municipal community that sees a lot of traffic and commuters from all walks of life passing by every day.

“For decades Accra has been, and continues to be, a haven for migrants, and I am glad to be part of an initiative that celebrates the diversity of our city while creating awareness on COVID-19,” said Mayor of Accra, Honourable Mohammed Adjei Sowah.

More interventions of the kind are planned with the team of artists in other locations across the country. It is also part of a larger street art project IOM is working on across West and Central Africa and involving to date five countries, namely Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Mauritania, Niger and Ghana.

“We have worked tirelessly over a period of 10 days on translating the COVID-19 prevention, safe migration and solidarity messages into a creative and colourful piece of street art that speaks to the people,” stated the Ghana Graffiti collective.

The project has been made possible through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) which has assisted over 1,400 Ghanaians to return home since 2017. Furthermore, 124 awareness raising sessions have taken place in communities and schools across the country, while radio and TV broadcasts with similar messages have reached approximately 200,000 Ghanaians nationwide.

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