

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMMES AND FINANCE

Twenty-third Session

ASSISTING MIGRANTS IN CRISIS CONTEXTS:

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GUIDELINES TO PROTECT MIGRANTS IN COUNTRIES

EXPERIENCING CONFLICT OR NATURAL DISASTER

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Introduction

1. Today, more people live, work, study and travel abroad than ever before. The number of international migrants globally surpassed 250 million in 2017, and many more people move temporarily or in an irregular manner and are therefore usually not recorded in official migration statistics. Migrants are also increasingly moving to more diverse locations, and further afield.

2. At the same time, no country is immune to crises. In recent years, complex and protracted conflicts have affected countries such as Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen, while natural hazards have triggered disasters in places as diverse as Bangladesh, Greece, Mexico, Sierra Leone and the United States of America. Technological and other man-made hazards, violence and terrorist attacks, economic crises, and epidemics can – and in fact regularly do – affect both more and less affluent countries in any region.

3. One of the implications of increased international mobility is that virtually all of those events affected migrants alongside local residents; for example, migrants living on Caribbean islands hit by hurricanes Irma and Maria, migrants working in fire-affected rural areas of California, or migrants transiting through and stranded in Libya and Yemen. In most crisis contexts, migrants face specific obstacles linked to linguistic barriers, legal and administrative impediments, social isolation, and abuse and discrimination. These obstacles reduce migrants' ability to ensure their own safety and well-being, access assistance, and recover swiftly and effectively.

4. These scenarios are likely to become increasingly frequent in the coming years and decades owing to upward migration trends and limited success in tackling disaster risk drivers, affecting even more significantly the lives and well-being of migrants, as well as the short- and long-term prospects of families, communities and societies in both places of origin and destination.

5. In the six years since the discussion during the Eleventh Session of the Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance on the role of IOM in assisting migrants and their home and host countries in the context of crises, the issue of migrants affected by crises has become an established topic within global, regional and national policy discourses and frameworks. Increased interest in the topic has translated into a variety of operational efforts by national and local governments and non-governmental actors around the world. Despite these positive developments, much remains to be done to reduce migrants' vulnerability in crisis contexts. The international community is at a critical juncture to reflect on what has been achieved so far and to plan for the future.

The current policy landscape and the outlook for the future

6. In 2014, the calls to address the situation of migrants affected by crises – which had been raised in particular after the 2011 crisis in Libya, in which hundreds of thousands of migrants found themselves caught up in the midst of turmoil and state collapse – coalesced into the Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative. Under the leadership of the Governments of the Philippines and the United States of America, a group of States and other stakeholders launched a consultative process to take stock of relevant experiences and lessons learned, effective practices and tools, and existing challenges and priorities.

7. The outcome document of this process, entitled *Guidelines to Protect Migrants in Countries Experiencing Conflict or Natural Disaster*, contains a voluntary, non-binding set of principles and

recommended guidelines, complemented by a collection of practices, tools and approaches. The Guidelines were launched at the United Nations in New York and Geneva in 2016 and now stand as the blueprint for all efforts to reduce the vulnerability of migrants in crisis contexts.

8. Since the publication of the Guidelines, references to the need to reduce the vulnerability of migrants in crisis contexts (and to the Guidelines themselves) have been included in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and in the final draft of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The latter clearly calls on States to strengthen consular protection, humanitarian assistance, international cooperation and migrant-inclusive crisis management as essential areas of work to improve migrants' prospects throughout their migration trajectories.

9. The topic of protection of migrants in crisis situations is now well established in regional forums on migration and crisis management in Africa, Central and South America, and Central and South-East Asia. Migrant-inclusive approaches are also included in key policy frameworks on sustainable development, humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction and climate change, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Paris Agreement. In addition, reference to such approaches is made in the Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Migration and the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit.

10. Translating these recommendations into more concrete approaches at the international, regional, national and local levels will be essential to guide efforts by all relevant actors, particularly those contributing to migration governance and emergency management or providing services and assistance to people living, working or in transit in a country other than their country of origin.

Operational efforts to reduce migrants' vulnerability: where we are today and the way forward

11. The Guidelines recognize the well-established principle that States bear the primary responsibility for the protection of migrants in crisis situations, but also highlight that efforts to reduce their specific vulnerability are inevitably multi-stakeholder in nature. This is well reflected in the diversity of efforts currently carried out by State and non-State actors.

12. In many countries around the world, foreign services and other institutions relevant to the protection of citizens abroad are working to be better equipped to face the unique challenges posed by crises. Relevant structures, mechanisms and capacities are being established or strengthened to support a number of diverse functions, such as communications, search and rescue; relief and evacuation assistance; and return and reintegration support. For instance, 90 Guatemalan consulates and embassies have recently revised their contingency plans and procedures to assist Guatemalan nationals affected by crisis situations abroad and have started a process to raise awareness among their personnel of potential crises and measures that can help mitigate them.

13. National and local emergency management institutions are working to provide assistance in a more inclusive manner to account for the increased presence of migrants. Mechanisms to deliver emergency services in a non-discriminatory manner in multicultural and multilingual communities exist or are being established in many countries, such as Japan and South Africa, while institutions in Germany, the Republic of Korea and Thailand are actively engaging migrants in their emergency management efforts.

14. Much additional work is being carried out by civil society organizations, migrants' employers and recruiters and private sector actors, all of which can contribute to addressing the different facets of crisis preparedness, response and recovery.

15. These efforts are being complemented by the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate cooperation and communication among all relevant actors. Such systems may be local (for example,

arrangements to support multilingual emergency communications in Christchurch, New Zealand), nationwide (such as efforts by Mexico to build synergies between the work of civil protection agencies and migrant assistance institutions), or bilateral, multilateral or regional (such as experience-sharing platforms on this topic that have been active in Central America and South-East Asia).

16. It is especially positive that relevant efforts are now taking place in many more countries than ever before. This work, however, will need to be strengthened and made more systematic in order to effectively reduce migrants' vulnerability. It is particularly important to:

- (a) Raise awareness among key actors, and their personnel, of the specific vulnerability of migrants in crisis contexts and of their role in reducing it through appropriate interventions before, during and after crises.
- (b) Improve the ability of these actors to mobilize resources, personnel and capacities to better protect and appropriately assist migrants at risk from, or affected by, crises.
- (c) Enhance cooperation among relevant State, non-State and international actors in countries of origin, transit and destination, including by establishing or strengthening bilateral and multilateral coordination mechanisms.
- (d) Empower migrants to better protect themselves, by removing any barriers they may face to accessing essential resources and opportunities before, during and after crises.
- (e) Improve the awareness of all other groups in societies of origin, transit and destination of the benefits that are derived from the movement and presence of migrants, and on the right of migrants to be safe from the impacts of a crisis situation.

IOM's current and future role

17. IOM served as the Secretariat of the Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative and, since the publication of the Guidelines, it has led efforts to raise awareness and strengthen the capacities of key stakeholders on the principles, recommended guidelines and practices contained therein. Since the Initiative ended in 2016, IOM has worked to ensure continued interest among practitioners and policymakers in the issue of better protecting migrants in times of crisis, and to promote the Guidelines as the key guidance tool for the design and implementation of relevant policies and operations.

18. As part of its efforts to support implementation of the Guidelines, IOM has developed and disseminated a comprehensive capacity-building toolkit,¹ including training materials for personnel of foreign services and emergency management agencies, operational guidance for improved management of crises affecting migrants, and methodologies to support experience-sharing and coordination at the local, national and regional levels. Through this work, the Organization has supported the establishment of relevant capacity-building and institutional strengthening processes in over 20 countries in all regions of the world.

19. The Organization's engagement on this topic has been accompanied by communications and outreach work, specifically the creation and management of a dedicated website,² through which the Guidelines and hundreds of relevant practices and documents are made available in several languages to all stakeholders. IOM has also embarked on an internal capacity-building process; as a result, over 100 staff members have been trained to mainstream the Guidelines' recommendations into their work and to facilitate awareness-raising and capacity-building activities for key partners. In line with the recommendations emanating from the discussion at the Eleventh Session of the Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance, and in the light of growing requests for support from Member States and other actors, activities related to the roll-out of the Guidelines are now a specific programmatic area for IOM.

¹ Available from: <https://micinitiative.iom.int/capacity-building>.

² <https://micinitiative.iom.int/>.

20. These efforts complement and build upon decades of engagement on the part of IOM to provide direct assistance to migrants in crisis contexts. In coordination with governmental, non-governmental and international actors in migrants' home and host countries, the Organization has provided a wide range of services, including local and long-distance evacuation, documentation, emergency shelter, and return and reintegration support to hundreds of thousands of migrants in distress. IOM's operational footprint and operational capacity have put it at the forefront of responding to relevant humanitarian crises in recent years, and the Organization considers maintaining and strengthening this capacity a core element of its mandate and objectives.

21. IOM will continue to offer support to its Member States and other partners in reducing migrants' vulnerability in the context of crises, through direct assistance to crisis-affected individuals, and the provision of dedicated capacity-building and preparedness services to different stakeholders. The Organization's priorities going forward include:

- (a) Disseminating and raising awareness of the Guidelines at all levels and in all regions;
- (b) Supporting or building new thematic partnerships at the national and regional levels among key State, non-State and international actors;
- (c) Expanding its portfolio of awareness-raising and training products and multiplying opportunities for capacity-building activities for external partners;
- (d) Maintaining and scaling up mechanisms for collecting data, providing assistance and otherwise intervening in humanitarian settings in which large numbers of migrants are affected;
- (e) Mainstreaming migrant-inclusive perspectives throughout its crisis-related portfolio, including by continuing to build awareness and capacities of its staff.

Conclusion

22. The efforts mentioned above have resulted in improved awareness in many countries of the need to address the specific vulnerability of migrants in crisis contexts and to strengthen capacity to assist migrants at risk from or affected by emergency situations. However, migrants continue to suffer disproportionately when crises strike. While this is closely linked to the marginalization, lack of access to services and opportunities and limited respect of basic rights that migrants may experience in non-crisis times, effective emergency prevention, preparedness, response and recovery measures can go a long way in reducing their vulnerability during crises.

23. The Guidelines are a useful blueprint for the engagement of all relevant actors in that regard. Over the coming years and decades, targeted efforts to roll out and mainstream the Guidelines into relevant policies and programmes will be vital to pursue shared humanitarian, development and migration governance objectives.

24. IOM's mandate, established partnerships with key actors and operational footprint and experience makes it the best-placed institution to lead the roll-out of the Guidelines to ensure that policy, capacity-building and operational approaches to reduce the vulnerability of migrants in crisis contexts are adequately supported and monitored.

25. IOM stands ready to continue to work with all its governmental and non-governmental partners on the implementation of relevant efforts. It is also committed to further improving its ability to provide policy guidance, capacity-building tools and services and operational support to partners, and direct assistance to affected migrants. Continued interest and commitment from Member States on this topic will be essential to ensure that migrants are more protected, that their journeys are safer, and that their home and host communities and societies become more resilient.