



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM)
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)

Migration Consequences of Complex Crises: IOM Institutional and Operational Responses¹

Introduction

1. Contemporary crises² are illustrating a more evident migration dynamic than ever before. As seen most visibly from the 2011 crisis in Libya, as well as from recent natural disasters in Haiti (2010 earthquake) and Pakistan (2010 and 2011 floods), crises are having a pronounced effect on the volume and range of population flows generated before, during and after a crisis event, both internally and across borders.

2. The awareness that crisis-related migration flows are growing in scale and complexity has led to a strong interest by the international community in the nexus between crises and migration. Accordingly, IOM has developed the concept of “migration crisis” to describe the dimensions of human mobility during a crisis. A migration crisis may be either sudden- or slow-onset, can have natural or man-made causes, and can take place internally or across borders. Essentially, the migration crisis concept outlines the major humanitarian challenges for States and international actors in managing the large-scale, complex migration flows that arise during a crisis and involve significant vulnerabilities for those affected.

3. IOM seeks to highlight how a migration approach to crises can complement and strengthen existing systems aimed at providing assistance and protection to crisis-affected populations. IOM is examining ways to strengthen its own humanitarian approaches to respond to the patterns of mobility during crises, including by providing support to States and other partners. From this point of view, IOM considers that bringing together its relevant service areas – as outlined in the IOM Strategy – under a migration crisis framework may be one method to improve its assistance to a wider group of vulnerable populations affected by a crisis, and is seeking the guidance and support of the membership in this endeavour.³

4. This document builds on previous engagement with the IOM membership on the migration dimensions of crises as a growing challenge for crisis response, and acts on the requests for IOM to

¹ This issue was first considered by IOM Member States at the Tenth Session of the IOM Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance (SCPF) in May 2012. Subsequently, in November 2012, IOM Member States adopted the IOM Migration Crisis Operational Framework (MCOF) which is discussed here. For more information, see <http://www.iom.int/cms/mcof>. The present document should be read in conjunction with materials developed for the IOM International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) 2012, for which the IOM membership selected the topic “Managing Migration in Crisis Situations”.

² The term “crisis” is being used to broadly encapsulate a range of scenarios, including environmental hazards (climate change, natural disasters), economic/financial factors (market collapse), violence-related situations (conflict, internal and international disorder) or health-related matters (pandemics). Although crises can be local, national or transnational, they usually have similar consequences on communities and governments, including instability (political and/or economic), disruption of social life and of basic service delivery, mortality and health issues, and population movements (internal and/or cross-border). IOM also recognizes that a crisis involves various phases – pre-crisis, emergency and recovery phases – which influence the type of response needed.

³ This framework would build on the structural reform of the Organization, and would be a way to further improve on the complementarities of different IOM service areas at the operational or activity level. Deliberations by IOM Member States at the IDM intersessional workshop held on 24 and 25 April 2012 concluded that the concept of migration crises and a corresponding migration crisis management framework deserve further discussion and development (see www.iom.int/idmcomplexcrises).

suggest approaches for more inclusive, efficient and predictable responses. It will move from a description of the “migration crisis” concept towards the ongoing discussion of an IOM migration crisis framework. In doing so, the document brings to light some of the ways in which IOM may assist States to make the link between migration and humanitarian approaches.

Migration consequences of crisis and IOM’s unique role and response

5. Contemporary crises are prompting new forms of migration both internally and across borders, with patterns often shifting during the crisis period alongside evolving factors and changing dynamics.⁴ While forced and involuntary migration are the primary forms of movement foreseen in crisis situations, less familiar patterns of migration during crises require special attention, given that the current frameworks at the international, regional and national levels do not always comprehensively cover all types of migration flows.

6. IOM has identified a number of situations where the migration dimensions of crisis situations have illustrated clear operational gaps or challenges to the provision of adequate assistance and protection to all those affected by a crisis. A few examples from recent crises include the following:

- (a) Crisis situations leaving migrants stranded in a country of destination or transit and in need of international migration assistance and protection: During the crisis in Libya in 2011, Member States called upon IOM to evacuate more than 229,000 migrants who were either trapped inside the conflict zone in Libya or fled across borders to neighbouring States.
- (b) Complex patterns of internal mobility in the aftermath of a disaster, affecting the dynamics of displacement and the pursuit of durable solutions: In Haiti, for example, IOM has mapped the mobility patterns of more than 1.5 million displaced persons in over 1,500 sites for internally displaced persons mostly in urban areas since the 2010 earthquake. With this information, IOM and its partners have been able to provide targeted assistance to affected populations based on their movement patterns during different phases of the crisis.
- (c) Migrant workers and their families who, irrespective of their legal status, may be de facto excluded from humanitarian response frameworks in the aftermath of natural disasters; or migrants who have difficulty accessing aid due to language and other barriers: IOM has increasingly stepped in to provide the necessary assistance in such situations. For example, during the 2011 floods in Thailand, IOM established mechanisms to disseminate up-to-date information on the disaster and emergency relief provided to migrant communities in need of assistance.
- (d) Countries of origin confronting large numbers of migrants returning from a crisis-affected country, creating real economic and social reintegration challenges: For example, IOM was called upon by the Government of Bangladesh and the World Bank to administer the provision of reintegration assistance to more than 36,000 migrant workers from Bangladesh who had fled the crisis in Libya.
- (e) The lack of inclusion of migrants in broader international preparedness efforts: IOM collaborated with the United Nations System Influenza Coordinator in the aftermath of the avian influenza to develop initiatives targeting migrants, mobile and cross-border populations and minorities for more inclusive coverage in emergency response plans.

⁴ See the IDM background paper, *Moving to safety: Migration consequences of complex crises*, prepared for the intersessional workshop held on 24 and 25 April 2012.

7. Within these scenarios, IOM's core humanitarian efforts have been to provide services to meet the various needs of individuals affected by crises. IOM's humanitarian emphasis and role⁵ has been to enable immediate and reliable responses to the migration realities flowing from modern-day crisis situations, and to ensure that due attention is paid to the relationship between vulnerability and human mobility before, during and after a crisis.

Elements of IOM's migration crisis framework for IOM operations before, during and after a crisis

8. In the light of the recent large-scale migration crises in Libya, Haiti, Pakistan and other disaster-affected areas, IOM is re-examining its approach to crisis situations. It is critical to note that an IOM migration crisis framework would not represent a departure from any existing international approaches, systems and mechanisms, such as those put in place by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) or the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. IOM considers that a migration crisis management framework is an operational endeavour designed to make more readily available its relevant service areas for all phases of crisis response. These efforts would enhance IOM's capacity to fulfil its obligations as the lead migration agency, and its ability to meet its international commitments under the IASC-led humanitarian system.

9. An IOM migration crisis management framework would complement existing mechanisms and build on IOM's partnerships with States, other international organizations and other relevant actors in the field of humanitarian response and migration. The framework would be based on the understanding that States bear the primary responsibility to protect and assist crisis-affected persons residing on their territory in a manner consistent with international humanitarian and human rights law. Where needed, States should allow humanitarian access to crisis-affected persons such that humanitarian assistance can be provided by other States, including those whose nationals have been affected, and other relevant actors. The responsibility of international humanitarian actors, including IOM, is to support States and other relevant actors in carrying out these activities.⁶

10. IOM's proposed operational migration crisis management framework could also add value to other systems and frameworks in two important ways: (a) by enhancing systematic responses to both the causes and consequences of crisis-related migration; and (b) by addressing the service provision and resource gaps that currently constrain rapid or effective responses to the migration dimensions of crises.⁷ In both these ways, IOM could tackle the needs of a wider group of vulnerable persons who are often less visible or not fully accounted for under current humanitarian and protection systems and approaches, such as victims of trafficking in persons, unaccompanied children and undocumented migrants.

11. A migration crisis management framework for IOM operations could rest upon two axes or reference points, which, as described below, draw upon the various IOM service areas and experiences in dealing with the migration consequences of crises.⁸ The list of IOM service areas

⁵ The main references to IOM's role and mandate in this regard are found in the IOM Constitution, Article 1.1(a) and Article 1.1(b); the 12-point IOM Strategy of 2007, points 9 and 10 (see MC/INF/287); the three strategic objectives for 2010–2015 as presented by the Director General during the 100th Session of the Council in 2011 (see MICEM/3/2011); and the paper entitled *Protection of persons involved in migration: Note on IOM's role* (IC/2007/3).

⁶ This is accomplished by: (a) strengthening the capacity of State authorities and institutions to respond to crises; (b) facilitating the necessary cooperation at the bilateral, regional or international level; and (c) directly delivering humanitarian and emergency assistance when the government systems cannot do so as effectively as the humanitarian actors, which is done principally through the United Nations humanitarian coordinated response system.

⁷ IOM Council Resolution No. 1229 of 5 December 2011 establishing the Migration Emergency Funding Mechanism is one example of the recognized need of States for more immediate and reliable responses to the migration realities flowing from modern-day crisis situations and IOM's role to respond to these dimensions of crises.

⁸ For example, IOM has used its migration approach to provide emergency transport to save lives or reduce tension in conflict-affected areas; provide livelihood options to reduce aid dependency and facilitate durable solutions during recovery periods; and improve the resilience of communities in areas exposed to risks of forced migration.

under each axis of the framework are either: (a) service areas IOM already utilizes in crisis response; or (b) service areas that IOM has not traditionally made available during crises, but that would improve its ability to address the aspects of mobility arising in crisis situations. The following is an illustration of this which can be further developed.

Phases of migration crisis response

12. An IOM operational migration crisis management framework could be organized along a sequence of three phases illustrating the “before, during and after” stages of a crisis. For example, through the understanding that forced or involuntary movement cannot always be prevented, an IOM framework would include preparedness measures to anticipate population flows and ensure the safety of persons who are moving under crisis circumstances.⁹ On the response side, an IOM migration crisis management framework would seek to better integrate the Organization’s migration approaches into existing humanitarian systems and tools in order to widen the provision of protection and assistance to those who may not otherwise receive it, and to ensure that crisis situations remain manageable environments in which the needs of the affected population, including host and transit communities, can be met. At the point of recovery, an IOM framework would better align the Organization’s services based on the relationship between migration patterns, durable solution options and sustainable development needs.¹⁰ Across all phases, this aspect of the framework includes IOM’s support to governments to enhance the capacity of their civil protection, social, health and psychosocial services to better manage the humanitarian needs resulting from crisis situations.

Core management needs within migration crisis response

13. Based on its experience, IOM has identified a number of key migration management challenges in a crisis context, relating broadly to mapping movements and needs; managing internal mobility; managing cross border movements; managing mobility of vulnerable persons; and managing positive migration. The second axis of an IOM migration crisis management framework could be structured around some of these identified management challenges or needs. In each of these areas, IOM has begun to map ways in which its service areas could be applied, improved or adapted to ensure a more comprehensive response to the migration consequences of crises.

14. A few illustrative, although not exhaustive, areas for IOM to adapt or improve its service delivery to meet these core management needs could include:

- Developing context-specific technologies for monitoring and registering the needs of populations across all crisis phases to deal with the challenges of locating and responding to the humanitarian needs and protection concerns of people affected by crises. IOM foresees the need for greater strategic investment in tools and systems for monitoring migration patterns, such as a “migration crisis alert” to allow IOM to pinpoint the links between push and pull factors of crisis-related movements and the various vulnerabilities and humanitarian needs emerging from different crisis situations.

⁹ IOM has, for example, sought to minimize the incidence of forced migration by addressing the underlying factors contributing to migration pressures; enhancing community resilience; and ensuring that the migration taking place is well-managed for individuals and their communities. IOM has also developed assessment and movement-tracking and mapping systems; identified infrastructure for evacuation and temporary relocation; and pre-positioned assets for anticipated large-scale movements. A key example for further investment within an IOM migration crisis management framework might be assisting or promoting alternative livelihoods or legal migration channels as adaptation strategies for persons residing in crisis-prone areas.

¹⁰ IOM services in this regard have assisted States in stabilizing communities affected by crisis, focusing for instance on conflict mitigation activities, resolving land and property issues and providing durable solutions for the displaced; and opening channels for remittances or diaspora support to aid recovery efforts.

- In contexts of internal mobility, IOM can continue to strengthen its cluster capacities to address the needs of people affected by crises. Through its lead agency role for camp coordination camp management (CCCM) in natural disasters within the IASC-led cluster approach, IOM CCCM activities aim to manage service provision needs and improve camp living conditions, an integral part of which is to monitor and map the varied and scattered patterns of movement of persons affected by a crisis.¹¹ IOM, as an active member of the health cluster and the IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, has contributed to the integration of a migration angle in relevant IASC tools, including the *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings* for camp managers and coordinators.
- Responding to both internal and cross-border mobility scenarios emerging from a crisis situation, IOM can make available a variety of its service areas to address the triggers of economic and social vulnerabilities and their migration consequences, such as addressing service provision and shelter needs and assisting States and communities in resolving land and property issues undermining sustainable return, local integration or resettlement.
- Improving effective referral systems in order to respond to the assistance and protection gaps that affect certain types of crisis-affected persons, such as victims of trafficking, unaccompanied children at border points, stranded migrants,¹² trapped populations, or migrants unable to access assistance because of language or other barriers. Effective referral systems are particularly essential when dealing with large-scale movements, including mixed migration flows. Such systems aimed at identifying and responding to the needs of various categories and conditions of people on the move should ensure due referral to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for refugees and asylum-seekers in order to guarantee that the level of assistance and protection required is not compromised.
- When migrants and their families are caught in crisis situations, IOM can assist operationally to help States assist their nationals through border management/processing and referrals to respond to mass influxes in humanitarian crises; liaison with consular services to provide emergency travel documents and laissez-passer to migrants without documents; travel health assistance or referral of vulnerable migrants to health services, including mental health as needed; movement assistance; and return and reintegration support, including health and psychosocial support. In life-threatening situations, IOM has, for example, used humanitarian evacuations by land, air and sea to countries of origin as a protection mechanism to help States fulfil their obligations when they require assistance to do so.¹³
- Facilitating mobility or the benefits of migration as a useful and important strategy for long-term recovery of a crisis-affected area. Within efforts to harness the benefits of positive migration, service areas could include engagement with diaspora communities to support reconstruction, recovery and post-crisis development through the return of qualified nationals or remittance sending; or facilitating regular and safe mobility for crisis-affected persons.

¹¹ IOM has created flow-based information databases, Geographic Information System interfaces and information portals, and a displacement tracking matrix to improve the ability of the CCCM cluster to meet its core functions in the provision of assistance and protection.

¹² IOM has long been called upon to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable migrants stranded in transit or at destination, and has at its disposal special funds, such as the Humanitarian Assistance to Stranded Migrants mechanism, for providing quick and flexible assistance to stranded migrants in vulnerable situations. While providing transport assistance, IOM ensures that people travel in a safe and dignified manner, are fit to travel and receive appropriate assistance when necessary.

¹³ IOM evacuated about 40,000 migrants trapped in Misrata, Sebha, Gatroun, Tripoli and Benghazi, of which 8,432 persons were evacuated by IOM through 15 sea rescue missions.

Conclusion¹⁴

15. IOM's expertise and service provision in humanitarian crises makes it well placed to complement existing systems and frameworks in better responding to the migration dimension of crises. IOM has a number of services that can meet the needs of a variety of vulnerable persons affected by crisis situations.

16. Given the interest by the international community in recent years to explore the concept of "migration crisis" and propose solutions to better deal with the migration consequences of crisis situations, IOM can make its expertise more readily available in pressing crisis situations through the development of an operational migration crisis management framework. Based on interest expressed by the Member States, further consultations are envisaged to receive guidance and support on strengthening IOM's core capacities to respond to the migration dimension of crisis situations.

17. IOM foresees that an operational migration crisis management framework would serve as a pragmatic, flexible and evolving tool to respond to the different facets of migration crises as they continue to occur, and would outline the concrete activities that could be undertaken by IOM to better address the needs and vulnerabilities of persons affected by crises.

18. An improved resource base for an operational IOM migration crisis management framework based on what IOM can bring to humanitarian responses, would have the following outcomes: (a) more timely responses to migration crises; (b) more predictability in IOM's partnerships with humanitarian systems and approaches; and (c) enhanced ability of IOM to use its technical expertise to confront the migration consequences of crisis situations.

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¹⁴ Further to the consultations on this issue in May 2012 and subsequent discussions, IOM Member States adopted the IOM Migration Crisis Operational Framework (MCOF) at the 101st Session of the IOM Council in November 2012 in resolution No.1243. For more information, see <http://www.iom.int/cms/mcof>.