



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
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International Dialogue on Migration 2012  
Managing Migration in Crisis Situations

**Intersessional Workshop • 24 and 25 April 2012**

## **MOVING TO SAFETY: MIGRATION CONSEQUENCES OF COMPLEX CRISES**

### **Chair's Summary**

As part of IOM's annual International Dialogue on Migration – dedicated in 2012 to the theme *Managing Migration in Crisis Situations* – the IOM membership selected the topic "Moving to safety: migration consequences of complex crises" as the focus of a workshop in Geneva, Switzerland on 24 and 25 April 2012.<sup>1</sup>

The workshop was framed by the concept of "migration crisis" to describe large-scale, complex migration flows due to a crisis which typically involve significant vulnerabilities for individuals and communities affected. A migration crisis may be sudden or slow in onset, can have natural or man-made causes, and can take place internally or across borders.

The workshop was attended by approximately 250 policymakers and practitioners from around the world with specialization in migration and displacement, humanitarian action, disaster management, protection and related issues. This document summarizes the main conclusions and key ideas for action which emanated from their discussions.

#### **1. The concept of migration crisis captures contemporary realities where migration due to crises is a growing challenge for States, societies, migrants and international organizations.**

- Participants recognized that crises and displacement have always happened and that the main drivers have largely remained the same. However, the scale of disasters, their propensity to create large population movements, and the complexity of these movements mark important new challenges for existing response mechanisms. Participants affirmed that migration crises should be factored into global agendas of governments and international organizations.
- Workshop participants discussed various types of migration crises, including sudden large-scale events and slowly evolving situations, natural and man-made crises, and their internal and cross-border dimensions. They acknowledged the need to develop new strategies to address the nexus between crises and mobility trends and patterns.
- The effects of climate change already give rise to forced migration, and to potentially large migration crises in the future. Temporary displacement due to natural disasters and the need for

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<sup>1</sup> The workshop background paper, agenda and other conference materials can be found at: [www.iom.int/idmcomplexcrises](http://www.iom.int/idmcomplexcrises)

permanent migration solutions, especially where countries are affected by sea level rise, were underlined as some of the most acute challenges. Adaptation efforts to forced migration induced by climate change and environmental factors are still lacking, according to workshop participants.

## **2. Humanitarian and migration policies can reinforce each other at all stages of crisis response and contribute to achieving longer term development objectives.**

- There was a call for developing policy options that better link humanitarian response to migration policy, and integrating them with development strategies in the longer term. Such policies should be based on human rights and humanitarian principles, respect for State sovereignty and international cooperation.
- It was recognized that the existing humanitarian system has produced well-developed mechanisms to coordinate international responses to emergencies, in particular as regards internal displacement due to natural disasters and conflict through the cluster approach. One successful experience shared at the workshop concerned the adoption of the cluster system at national level.
- Preparedness for migration crises remains uneven, although more and more States are taking proactive steps to better anticipate crises and their migration consequences, including through disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management. Allocation of adequate resources was underlined as a particularly important element in this regard; as was the clear allocation of responsibility to act in a crisis when different government agencies are involved.
- In the emergency phase of a crisis, different migration management tools are relevant to ensure a humane and effective response to populations on the move: a few examples included temporary protection, expedited visa procedures, special humanitarian visas, stabilizing border areas, emergency consular services, emergency medical evacuation, and referral systems for persons with special protection needs.
- Regarding longer term solutions, different avenues for restoring rights and dignity were explored, including as a means to prevent future forced migration. Some participants mentioned return and reconstruction, including empowering communities to engage in their own reconstruction or providing skills training to facilitate reintegration. Others highlighted the opportunities and challenges of local integration; or resettlement elsewhere.
- Migration's role in transition and post-crisis recovery, and ultimately in development, was reflected in discussions on the impact of remittances on recovery. It was also illustrated by one innovative example of the creation of a special labour migration channel for a crisis-affected population.
- Much discussion revolved around the emerging urban dimension of crises and displacement. This factor not only influences approaches to delivering assistance and providing protection, but can also change settlement patterns in the longer term. However, a focus on the urban dimension should not lead to the neglect of vulnerable rural populations affected by migration crises.

### **3. The interactions between vulnerability, agency and rights are essential for understanding and responding to migration crises.**

- Vulnerability was a key theme: as a condition that may lead to displacement and that may be experienced by displaced persons. The discussions highlighted the need for better mapping of vulnerabilities and devising measures to reduce vulnerability.
- In this context, the workshop drew attention to the vulnerabilities of those unable to move during a crisis, who remain potentially trapped in dangerous circumstances. There was mention of the right to leave and seek safety and the potential of migration to be a coping and protection strategy. By contrast, neglecting the mobility behaviours of populations affected by crisis, including migration patterns which existed prior to the crisis, risks pushing communities into irregular and precarious migration routes.
- One strong message which emerged from the debates concerned the agency, capacity and resilience of affected communities, including strengths and skills acquired through the crisis itself. Participants strongly cautioned against perpetuating the victimization of populations while delivering needed assistance.
- The needs of host communities should not be neglected while providing tailored assistance to displaced populations, in the immediate aftermath of a crisis and in the long term.
- Participants reiterated the importance of existing legal categories and protection mechanisms, as laid down in various binding and non-binding international instruments, such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Numerous interventions reflected on the question of rights of those moving as a result of crises and how governments and other actors can ensure access to the full spectrum of rights in a migration crisis context.
- Discussions also reflected a growing realization that existing categories for crisis-affected populations often do not capture the varied risks, vulnerabilities and human rights violations experienced by those displaced by crises. More flexible approaches in line with international human rights law, humanitarian law and protection principles were deemed potentially more realistic and useful.
- The discussions touched on the need for appropriate data collection, needs assessment and vulnerability mapping but also stressed that in conducting such exercises, and depending on the context, responsible actors should pay due consideration to protection and confidentiality concerns of individuals.

### **4. Migration crises call for strong, new and innovative partnerships.**

- Participants acknowledged that responses to the migration consequences of crises should not be viewed as separate from humanitarian action. Close cooperation between different relevant players is thus indispensable.
- A resounding theme concerned the importance of partnerships to improve access to affected populations in large-scale, complex situations. This includes effective coordination amongst the primary actors in crisis response – primarily governments and different agencies and levels within government, the international humanitarian system, and local and international NGOs.
- In the context of cooperation and partnerships, participants highlighted a number of regional initiatives which can be relevant to migration crisis response, such as the 2010 Migration

Principles adopted by the South American Conference on Migration, the European Civil Protection Mechanisms, the Colombo Process (in particular its 2011 Dhaka Declaration), and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa ("Kampala Convention").

- Participants also deliberated the risks and opportunities of international involvement in crisis response. Participants stressed the value of international assistance in building capacities of States to fulfil their responsibilities to respond, assist and protect in times of crisis.

Based on the deliberations summarized above, it was concluded that the concept of migration crises, and a corresponding migration crisis management framework, deserve further discussion and development. IOM will continue to offer a venue for its membership to advance this process, including through an upcoming session of the IOM Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance (SCPF) on IOM's institutional and operational response to migration consequences of complex crises – on 15 May 2012; a second IDM workshop on "Protecting migrants in times of crisis: immediate responses and sustainable strategies" on 13 and 14 September 2012; an IDM seminar in New York on "Migrants in times of crisis: an emerging protection challenge" on 9 October 2012; the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the SCPF on an "Institutional framework to assist and protect migrants caught in crisis situations" in October 2012; and the IOM Council Session in November 2012.

Geneva, 25 April 2012