



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

International Dialogue on Migration 2012
Managing Migration in Crisis Situations

Intersessional Workshop • 13 and 14 September 2012

**PROTECTING MIGRANTS DURING TIMES OF CRISIS:
IMMEDIATE RESPONSES AND SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIES**

Chair's Summary

As part of IOM's annual International Dialogue on Migration (IDM) – dedicated in 2012 to the theme *Managing Migration in Crisis Situations* – the IOM membership selected the topic “Protecting migrants during times of crisis: immediate responses and sustainable strategies” as the focus of a workshop in Geneva, Switzerland on 13 and 14 September 2012.¹

The workshop was the second in a series that examines the relationship between humanitarian crises and human mobility. It focussed on the situation of international migrants when their destination or transit countries experience upheavals or natural or man-made disasters.

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. International migration will always be a factor in crises.

- Migration crises come in various shapes and sizes, but regardless of their nature or magnitude, the situation of migrants caught in crises has not received adequate attention in the past.
- Workshop participants recognized that, as human mobility intensifies around the globe, crises are increasingly likely to affect migrant populations in their countries of transit and destination. Bangladesh also urged that environmental migrants and climate-induced displacement be included in efforts to protect migrants in emergency and crisis. This was supported by representatives of countries in the Sahel region, where a severe drought aggravated the challenge of receiving large numbers of returning migrants.

¹ The workshop background paper, agenda and other conference materials can be found at: www.iom.int/idmmigrantsin crisis

2. Destination and origin countries need to factor their migrant population into planning for emergencies.

- For proper contingency planning States need to know where migrants are, who they are, and how to reach them in the event of a crisis. Many participants stressed the long-standing, sometimes historic connections between countries that shape migration flows and patterns, for example in sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, however, they accepted that knowledge and data concerning migration is often lacking, hampering efforts to respond to migrants' needs in the event of a crisis.
- Preparedness at a regional level would benefit from the development of specific, migrant-oriented early warning systems.
- Better training and preparation of migrants before leaving their country of origin can help them make informed decisions in the event of a crisis.
- A Memorandum of Understanding on the protection and evacuation of Korean nationals during crises recently concluded between the Republic of Korea and IOM elicited great interest from participants as an example of an effective preparedness measure.

3. How migrants' human rights are protected before a crisis will directly affect their level of vulnerability and exposure to abuse during a crisis.

- Participants identified both domestic legal frameworks and international norms as important mechanisms to strengthen the protection of migrants during crises. International Humanitarian Law and the International Labour Organization's Convention on Domestic Workers were cited as particularly relevant in this context.
- The discussion also revolved around improving social protection for migrants, for example through insurance schemes, which can also help migrants and their families absorb any shocks as a result of crises.
- Participants expressed concern at illicit practices by recruitment agencies: for example, owing debt to a recruiter may limit migrants' ability to leave or otherwise protect themselves during a crisis.
- Access to safety during crises is even further compromised for those already experiencing extreme human rights violations, such as trafficked persons and exploited migrants.

4. When stranded in a crisis situation, migrants are exposed to specific vulnerabilities.

- Several speakers, including from Bangladesh, the European Union and the United States, drew attention to the vulnerabilities and specific needs of migrant populations, which are not always sufficiently covered by the humanitarian system. In the event of a crisis, migrants experience numerous barriers to accessing protection and assistance, ranging from the practical (e.g. language) to the legal (e.g. irregular status).
- Participants stressed that gender differences affect how migrants are affected by and cope with crises. Women migrant domestic workers were mentioned as a potentially vulnerable group, as they often work in isolation and their mobility may be restricted.

- On the other hand, one should not underestimate migrants' capacities to help themselves: participants from Benin, the Philippines and Sri Lanka cited examples of migrant communities who self-organized, supported each other and worked with embassies and local authorities to ensure their own safety and that of fellow migrants during crises.

5. States are using diverse strategies to reach out to migrants during crises.

- New technologies are opening up more effective channels to establish contact and disseminate information to migrants before and during crises. Countries such as Sri Lanka have started utilising social media and mobile phone technology to communicate with their nationals abroad. Japan, with the support of IOM, has used multilingual radio broadcasting to disseminate information to migrant communities after the 2011 earthquake.
- Consular services need to be capable of dealing with emergencies, for example by training consular officials or by establishing specialised rapid response teams. Capacity-building and coordination among local authorities, international humanitarian actors and diplomatic missions can also serve to enhance in-situ protection of migrant workers, short of a full evacuation. However, consular services can only be provided if countries are granted access during emergencies.
- Where a country cannot maintain a large consular network, bilateral or regional partnerships between States, as concluded among ASEAN countries, for example, have allowed countries to share consular responsibilities and to extend services to nationals of other States.

6. Return to the home country is sometimes inevitable to protect migrants caught in crises, but this is not without consequences.

- Many participants explained the steps and lessons learned in evacuating and repatriating their nationals from a country in crisis. They concluded that sometimes evacuation can be the best available tool to ensure the protection of migrants and to reduce the risk of prolonged displacement and other, more drastic humanitarian consequences.
- Evacuations are complex operations: they involve coordination among States, international organizations, civil and military actors, air carriers and border officials, to name a few. The Libya crisis in 2011 and the ongoing conflict in Syria have highlighted particular challenges related to the issuance of documents and securing exit visas for migrant workers.
- As stressed by representatives from Chad, Niger and South Sudan, large-scale returns can overwhelm a country's capacity and resources to receive and reintegrate their nationals who often face unemployment, loss of assets, debt and emotional hardship. Returning migrant children – who may in fact have never lived in the country of their parents – may have difficulty accessing education. Families who had relied on remittances are suddenly left without income.
- Numerous participants cited reintegration efforts such as private sector initiatives to generate employment (as done in Viet Nam), community-level reintegration strategies (such as the "Economic Heroes" of Sri Lanka), or counselling (by civil society organizations in the Philippines).
- It emerged that many of those who returned home from the Libyan crisis, in fact, aspire to migrate again. It was highlighted that solving the issue of stranded migrants requires long-term migration policies that go beyond crisis response. Several participants also underlined that

development factors are inextricably bound up in any attempt to tackle the immediate and longer-term consequences of migrants caught in crises.

7. No one actor can ensure the protection of migrants during crises, requiring instead multiple levels of coordination.

- Coordination between States is indispensable, for example in information sharing, granting of consular access, affording temporary protection, or facilitating humanitarian border management to allow safe transit for populations fleeing crisis.
- Regional organizations have added the issue of migrants caught in crisis to their agendas: the African Union, ASEAN, the Colombo Process, the European Union, the South American Conference on Migration, to the name a few, have jointly tackled consular questions and the development and security consequences of migration crises.
- Crises also challenge different authorities within a State to harmonize their actions, such as different government departments, embassies and consulates, local and national authorities, civil defence actors, border and customs officials, and the military.
- Participants drew attention to the obligations of the private sector, such as migrant recruiters and employers, to ensure the rights and safety of migrant workers during crises. Others pointed to the scope for creative cooperation with the private sector, including in job creation for returned migrants.
- Participants also called for closer coordination among international organizations, especially humanitarian, migration and development actors. For instance, speakers from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and IOM drew lessons from the 2011 Libya crisis concerning the coordination of evacuations.
- Discussions also touched on the role of the media in crises, and the occasionally detrimental effects of sensationalist reporting in relation to the movement of people.

Overall, the plight of international migrants stranded in crises in the destination countries remains an invisible and underreported issue. Participants called for greater awareness-raising and further discussion, including in international fora such as the 2013 UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, the Global Forum on Migration and Development, and the World Economic Forum.

Numerous participants recognized the central role of IOM – as the global migration agency – in responding to migration crises in which migrants are predominantly affected, with particular reference to the large-scale evacuations of migrant workers and their families from within and around Libya in 2011. In the same vein, several speakers called for better resourcing of IOM Migration Emergency Funding Mechanism, adopted by the IOM Member States in 2011 to guarantee more immediate and flexible responses to migration crises on the part of IOM.

The IOM Director General concluded the workshop indicating that IOM will further build on the work undertaken in the IDM 2012, including at an IDM seminar in New York on “Migrants in times of crisis: an emerging protection challenge” on 9 October 2012 and at the IOM Council Session in November 2012. Furthermore, an upcoming session of the IOM Standing Committee on Programmes and on 30-

31 October 2012 will allow Member States to discuss in more detail IOM's activities to assist and protect migrants caught in crisis situations and to review the progress made in developing an IOM Migration Crisis Operational Framework. Several delegations present at the IDM workshop referred to this operational framework, which will enable IOM and its partners to better respond to a migration crisis and address many of the issues raised during the workshop, and demonstrated their support for this IOM initiative.

Geneva, 14 September 2012