MICIC — MIGRANTS IN COUNTRIES IN CRISIS

IOM — UN MIGRATION

G 09: COMMUNICATE WIDELY, EFFECTIVELY, AND OFTEN WITH MIGRANTS ON EVOLVING CRISES AND HOW TO ACCESS HELP

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Once a conflict or disaster erupts, multiple formal and informal communication systems can be activated to ensure migrants receive information on the evolving nature of a crisis and ways to access assistance. Repeating messaging, through multiple channels and different mediums that are used and trusted by migrants, can help expand coverage. This is particularly important to reach migrants in an irregular immigration status, those working in isolated and remote conditions, and those who lack access to social and other networks. Engaging with a diverse representation of migrants, including with marginalized groups, improves needs assessment.

Stakeholders can communicate information to and receive information from migrants and other actors. Migrants themselves, may have clear ideas about how to improve their safety and security in an emergency. They can also be an important source of information about risks, local needs and gaps in protection.

Sharing information and knowledge on the evolution of crisis and on available assistance can support efforts by all stakeholders to protect migrants, enhance coordination and enable adaption of response to changing needs. Stakeholders may find value in developing consistent messaging on risks and status updates during a crisis.

Lessons from Hurricane Katrina in the United States (2004)

Hurricane Katrina hit the United States in 2011 and caused severe destruction along the Gulf coast from central Florida to Texas. Evaluations of the relief and recovery efforts after Katrina found that official warnings and emergency communications shared through radio and TV stations in languages other than English were scarce or non-existent despite the presence of migrant communities. Prior to Hurricane, no awareness-raising activities targeting migrant communities in the area had taken place. During the disaster, however, there was no time for warnings and messages to be tailored to the various local communities. In addition, computerized translation devices went for weeks without power during and after Katrina. Responders had to rely heavily on volunteers and untrained community members to disseminate information and provide affected migrants not proficient in English with services. In the aftermath of the crisis, migrants' ability to access services was severely affected by their access to timely information. The Vietnamese migrant community overcame this challenge by broadcasting messages through their local community-based station and community network support. The group's recovery was much quicker than that of other migrant groups affected by the disaster.

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RECEIVING INFORMATION FROM MIGRANTS

STATES, CIVIL SOCIETY, PRIVATE SECTOR

Migrants can be a source of information on local conditions, avenues for assistance and challenges faced by other migrants. There are a range of methods for gathering crisis-related information from migrants, as for example establishing migrant focal points who can liaise with stakeholders establishing connections with migrants' families in the State of origin, or creating avenues for them to share information received from migrants. Employers, recruiters and placement agencies can also help setting up mechanisms to enable migrants to communicate by providing free access to phones, the internet or other communication and accountability services.

eBayanihan, Phillipines

eBayanihan is a mobile and web-based participatory disaster management system that ensures the flow of critical and actionable information to those who need it before, during and after a crisis. The participatory platform mobilizes different segments of society and allows communities to receive and to share disaster-related information as part of disaster preparedness and mitigation. The platform crowdsources information from residents. eBayanihan also allows for posting of citizen reports, shelter reports and flash reports for initial damage and needs assessment, connecting to friends and relevant social media sites, requesting for skills, resources and volunteers, and visualizing layers of information on a map.

Facebook Safety Check, Facebook

Facebook Safety Check is a feature managed by Facebook and activated by the company during natural or man-made disasters to quickly determine whether its users in the affected geographical area are safe. The tool, which automatically sends users in the affected area a prompt asking if they are safe, notifies Facebook friends when a user clicks "Yes, let my friends know." Launched in October 2014, Safety Check was first activated following the Nepal earthquake in early 2015, and was since activated in other natural disasters, including after the earthquakes in Afghanistan and Chile. More than four million people used the tool to mark themselves safe following the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015.

HOTLINES, HELPLINES AND CALL CENTRES

STATES

Hotlines, helplines and call centres can be set up in migrant's home and host countries to offer one-way or two-way communication for migrants and their families, in particular in the acute phase of a crises. They can be staffed to answer calls to provide updated, targeted information, but also to receive migrants' location and identity information. Call centres can also provide additional services, including counselling, referrals and family tracing. Factors to consider when setting up these facilities, include language capacity of staff and volunteers, hours of operation in the acute phase of a crisis as well as the provision of free or paid access and how to inform migrants of the service available.

Yorisoi hotline and social inclusion support centre, Japan

After the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, a 24-hour, 7/7-day telephone consultation service was established to serve people affected by the crisis. The Yorisoi hotline, eventually evolved into the establishment of the Social Inclusion Support Centre (SISC) under the initiative of several Mayors and former Mayors of Tohoku. With financial support from the national government, it became a nationwide hotline in March 2012. Its telephone consultation service for non-Japanese residents, including migrants, is the first service of its kind in Japan.

British hotlines after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Thailand

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, the British Foreign Service established a hotline facility as point of contact for those concerned about friends and relatives who may be caught in the affected areas. The emergency number was advertised widely on television and radio, in newspapers and on the Foreign Service website. Given the high volume of calls received, the London Metropolitan Police Service stepped in to handle some of the calls. Meanwhile, the British Embassy in Bangkok had set up already an incident centre and hotline, staffed with available officers, including consular staff, their spouses and family members as well as volunteers. Enquiries were mostly handled through the centre's eight dedicated lines.

USE OF MULTIPLE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

Multiple communication channels that combine traditional and innovative mediums that are trusted by migrant communities can increase coverage and reach of information. This includes broadcasting messages on national and local radio and television networks in both host States and States of origin as well as official press releases. Preparedness messages and warnings on evolving crisis can also be transmitted through digital communication through dedicated websites in multiple languages that share regularly updated crisis-related information, social media hubs that distribute virtually real-time information, with information sources from the public, monitored and verified before being published, or SMS and text alerts. It can also be useful to disseminate brochures and multilingual maps highlighting main areas at risks, evacuation sites and disaster assistance facilities that include pictures or pictograms.

Spanish-language television channels, United States of America

During the 2007 San Diego fires, the Spanish-language television channels Telemundo and Univisión provided translated information on evacuation and relief for Spanish-speaking communities. While their reporting lagged behind that of the English media sources, throughout the crisis they played an important role for non-native communities and helped improve coordination with disaster risk management authorities.

Translation system for disaster-related information, Japan

The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations in Japan has devised a system that allows automatic translation of disaster-related information into community languages. These multilingual notices can be posted alongside Japanese signs, ensuring foreign evacuees have equal access to accurate information. The service is available in ten languages: English, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Russian.

GRASSROOTS EFFORTS TO REACH MIGRANT COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNICATE CRISIS-RELATED INFORMATION

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organizations are well placed to conduct dedicated outreach activities. Through door-to-door visits, for instance, they can target isolated and marginalize migrants and disseminate information on risks, logistics and assistance. Civil society can also play a vital role in supporting other stakeholders to reach migrant populations by collecting and sharing information on gaps in assistance, inconsistent messaging, or gaps in communication strategies.

Door-to-door visits during Superstorm Sandy, United States of America

Community-based organizations funded by the New York Women Fund were first responders to assist the far-reaching neighbourhoods and isolated, hard-to-reach populations hit by superstorm Sandy in 2012. They immediately tended to the most vulnerable populations of New York, including immigrants and families who live at or below the poverty level, single female heads of households, and persons of diverse sex, sexual orientation and gender identity – including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people (LGBTI). Organizations reached vulnerable populations through door-to-door visits, also in dark, flooded buildings.

Snapshot Programme and Missing Persons Radio Programme, IFRC and ICRC

The "Snapshot" programme is an online and print-based project run by the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda to help find missing relatives. Where access to the internet is limited, photos published in booklets are circulated in camps and communities. The "Missing persons" radio programme, run by ICRC in cooperation with the BBC, broadcasts the names of missing Somalis at the request of their families six times a week. In cooperation with the Somali Red Crescent Society, the ICRC maintains a list of people whose names have been broadcast and for whom tracing requests have been opened by the Red Cross Red Crescent network.

MICIC SMARTPHONE APPLICATION

IOM, in support of the operationalization of the recommendations of the MICIC Guidelines, developed a registration and travel advisory smartphone app that supports governments to communicate with their citizens travelling or living abroad. Through the app, migrants can access basic consular assistance, receive warnings and emergency communications, and request specific support when facing hardship. Migrants can also register through the app with their closest consular office.

During an emergency, the app can be a useful means of two-way communication with crisis-affected nationals. Consular Posts can disseminate warnings and real-time information through the app and migrants can send requests for assistance, through a dedicated messaging service including by sharing their GPS location.

Functionalities at a glance:

- Registration and contact details

- Online consular services

- Scheduling an appointment

- GPS search of closest consulate

- Travel advisory

- Emergency warnings and alerts

- Options for assistance
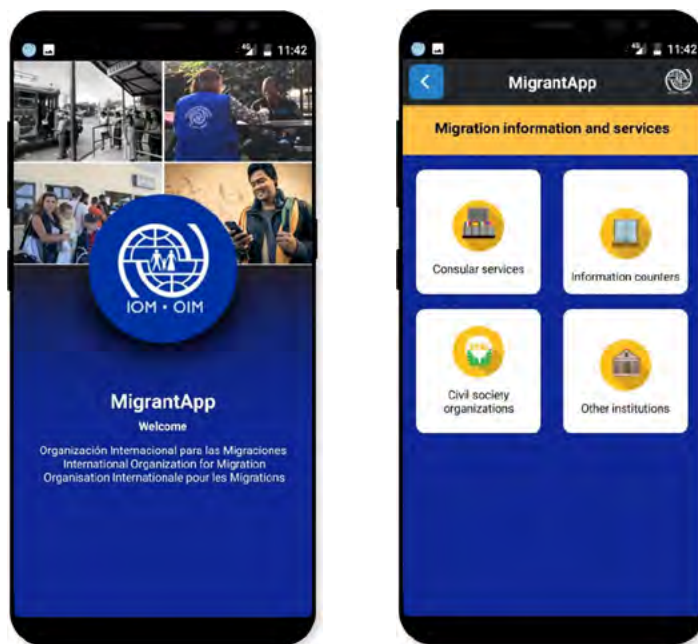
The app has so far been developed at the request of several countries. Functionalities can be adjusted to the specific requirements of States or other actors. For more information, please contact the **MICIC team**.

The growing importance of smartphone communication has offered opportunities to communicate with migrants including when crisis hits. IOM has been at the forefront of building capacity on mobile and technology solutions. In cooperation with governments and other stakeholders, it has designed numerous mobile applications to assist migrants. IOM's MigApp provides reliable, rapid, safe and free information in three languages on governmental, private and civil society services for migrant. It provides access to information on protection and assistance, visa requirements, remittances and crisis alerts. IOM's Safe & Work Abroad App for instance was developed as preventative and educational tool to raise awareness on the risks to human trafficking. Both Apps are available for download at GooglePlay and iTunes stores.

Other actors, including international non-governmental organizations, are also providing technological solutions that enhance assistance and awareness-raising on the challenges migrants may face when they embark on their journeys. IFRC, developed Virtual Volunteer to provide migrants and refugees with information on medical, psychological and legal support. IFRC's Global Disaster Preparedness Center created the Hazard App as a model multi-hazard preparedness app that allows user to monitor and track weather developments and prepares individuals and communities for disaster scenarios. It also assists users in finding help and sending safety notifications to family and friends.

The Guidelines in Action present implementation examples and tools to support the operationalization of the MICIC Initiative Guidelines to Protect Migrants in Countries Experiencing Conflict or Natural Disaster. Practices and tools may be relevant for one or more stakeholders. Find more examples of practices in the MICIC Guidelines and in the online Repository of Practices on our website.
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