



Overview

Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative

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With more people than ever living outside their home countries, the plight of migrants caught in countries experiencing crises has become increasingly apparent. Over the past ten years, the world witnessed a number of *natural disasters* and *conflicts*, including the civil unrest in Libya in 2011, hurricane Sandy in the United States, the earthquake and tsunami in Tohoku, Japan, in 2011, the crisis in the Central African Republic which began in 2012, and the conflict in Yemen in which migrants have been among those seriously affected. When countries experience such crises, migrants may lack adequate means to ensure their own safety. Migrants do not fall under a specific protection mandate and do not always have access to traditional humanitarian responses or, for various reasons, might be overlooked in such responses. They can “fall between the cracks” because no frameworks exist delineating responsibilities of States and other actors.

Building on earlier efforts and calls for action by States, international organizations, and UN Representatives, discussions during the 2013 UN General Assembly High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development drew attention to the need for an initiative to address the impacts of crisis situations on migrants. It became apparent that the time was right for the international community to come together through a voluntary, bottom-up, and government-led process to better coordinate responses to migrants caught in countries experiencing conflicts or natural disasters.

A small working group of governments, chaired by the United States and the Philippines and joined by Australia, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, and the European Commission, has partnered with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (which serves as its secretariat), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the office of the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative for International Migration, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), and Georgetown University’s Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM), to develop and advance an initiative on migrants in countries in crisis (the MICIC Initiative). Through an inclusive, consultative process, this group is working to explore and define the issues, identify effective practices, collect the evidence base, and propose a way forward to strengthen national, regional, and international capacity to better address the needs and vulnerabilities of migrants caught in countries experiencing conflicts and natural disasters – keeping in mind that States continue to bear significant responsibility for the safety and welfare of their nationals/citizens, even when they are traveling, residing, or working abroad.

The MICIC Initiative’s ultimate goal is to improve the ability of States and other stakeholders to prepare for and respond to the needs of migrants caught in countries experiencing crises, whether as a result of conflict or natural disaster, including by protecting their dignity and rights and alleviating suffering. To this end, the MICIC Initiative will develop a set of non-binding, voluntary principles, guidelines, and effective practices that identify the roles and responsibilities of States (host, origin, transit), international organizations, the private sector, and civil society, including migrants and diaspora, as well as practical measures that each can take, individually and together, to better protect and assist migrants, and minimize negative development impacts. States and other actors at the national, regional, and international level can use the principles, guidelines, and effective practices as a key reference tool to inform their policy making and programming.

The Initiative encompasses migrants with and without legal status, those present in the country temporarily or on a short-term basis, and those residing permanently but who are not nationals/citizens.

This could include, amongst others, tourists, business travelers, students, marriage migrants, migrant workers and their families, victims of trafficking, and smuggled migrants. Some may have citizenship of other countries, whereas others may not.

The MICIC Initiative focuses on two types of crises whose magnitude demands a significant humanitarian response by the authorities of the country experiencing a crisis and/or by the international community: those triggered by natural disasters and/or conflict. Such crises can affect the whole country or parts of it, as in a natural disaster limited to one locality. While there are other situations of migrants caught in dire circumstances (such as irregular migrants in maritime disasters or migrants victimized by criminal groups while in transit), these call for different types of planning and responses, and are not the types of situations which this Initiative aims to address.

To comprehensively address impacts arising from situations in which migrants are caught in countries experiencing conflicts or natural disasters, the Initiative focuses not only on the emergency phase of a crisis but also on the pre-crisis and post-crisis phases. Research and consultations have highlighted that preparedness measures are essential to ensure efficient and robust responses towards migrants during subsequent phases of a crisis. Similarly, the extent to which migrants' rights are respected and protected in normal times will affect their resilience and agency during a crisis. During the emergency phase, migrants require access to the same life-saving assistance as nationals/citizens. Targeted action may also be needed to overcome vulnerabilities or specific obstacles faced by migrants. Challenges persist regardless of whether migrants remain in the country that experienced the crisis, move to another country in search of safety, or return to their home country. Addressing protection issues, debt and destitution, loss of livelihoods, health consequences, and other reintegration challenges through a development lens can facilitate better outcomes for migrants as well as home and host communities.

With a view to launching the non-binding, voluntary principles, guidelines, and effective practices in mid-2016, a series of six regional consultations is being convened, supported by the European Commission, and four stakeholder consultations, supported by the United States. Evidence, insights, and recommendations are also being gathered through other means, including webinars, the production of issue briefs, and targeted interviews. More information about the MICIC Initiative, its activities, and progress and on how to contribute to the Initiative's work is available at: <http://micicinitiative.iom.int/>.