

GUIDELINE 6: Communicate effectively with migrants

Migrants need to understand potential risks associated with a crisis, where and how to obtain assistance, and how to inform stakeholders of their needs. Stakeholders should find appropriate channels to communicate with migrants and to identify their needs and capacities. To do so effectively, States, private sector actors, international organizations, and civil society should address language, cultural, and other barriers. The effects of crises, such as power failures, loss of internet and satellite communication systems, and even the deliberate spread of misinformation (for instance, by people smugglers) may disrupt or constrain communication with migrants.

Communication efforts should also take into account the diversity among migrants present in host States. Diverse, multiple, formal, and informal methods of communication can help overcome barriers to effective communication with migrants. Women migrants are a large majority of domestic workers worldwide. Due to the isolated nature of this work, women in domestic work are extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, including physical and sexual abuse, forced labor, and confinement. In times of crisis, this vulnerability is exacerbated and they can be hard to reach via traditional communication channels. Fear of being detected, detained, or deported may inhibit migrants in an irregular immigration situation from accessing available communication channels. Migrant children can become unaccompanied or separated. They absorb information and communicate their needs in different ways than adults. Elderly migrants sometimes lack host-language capabilities. Migrants with disabilities may need braille, audio cues, and other disability-sensitive interventions. In the chaos that can ensue during crises, migrants in detention may be overlooked. Efforts to communicate with migrants should be sensitive to the predicaments of migrants in different circumstances.

Communication channels can take advantage of social media, places of worship, and migrants' connections with their families and communities in their States of origin. Enlisting and involving migrants and faith-based and other civil society in establishing communication methods, and promoting their ability to communicate with each other, can facilitate communication with migrants, including hard-to-reach and hard-to-engage populations. Health or outreach workers who are already present in the community may be able to communicate in the languages migrants speak and understand different cultures in the community. Engaging and training them may be an effective method to deliver information to migrant communities.

Sample Practices

- *Multiple traditional and innovative communication channels to reach diverse migrant populations and minimize the effects of possible communication disruptions.*
- *Multiple mediums for communication in the languages migrants speak, at diverse literacy levels, to accommodate ways in which people absorb information, including accessible formats for persons with disabilities.*
- *Mobile applications and social media as a cost-effective, user-friendly, and widely accessible mechanism to provide crisis-related information.*
- *Helplines, hotlines, and call centers as an accessible and low-tech means through which one-way or two-way communication with migrants can be facilitated.*
- *Communication by civil society, especially migrant networks, diaspora, and faith-based actors with migrants in an irregular immigration status and others who may be hard to access.*

PRACTICES TO IMPLEMENT GUIDELINE 6: Communicate effectively with migrants

Multiple Stakeholders

Multiple communication channels

Multiple and targeted communication channels can ensure wide coverage of diverse migrant populations and minimize the effects of possible communication disruptions, such as power failures and loss of internet or satellite connections. Communication channels can be traditional or innovative, formal or informal, and should include ways for migrants to access information without revealing their identity, status, or location. Communication channels can include the following options, many of which are described in more detail in this section:

- Consular and other subscription services;
- Social media, mobile applications, and text messages;
- Websites and web-based news releases;
- Radio, television, and newspapers in host States and States of origin, including those specific to migrants;
- Hotlines, helplines, and call centers;
- Migrant networks, associations, focal points and leaders as well as door-to-door and other grass roots outreach;
- Support centers which are frequented by migrants, including shelters;
- Consular posts;
- Other civil society networks, associations, and focal points/leaders, including faith-based actors;
- Pre-established ‘communication trees’;
- Liaison and focal point networks, sometimes also referred to as ‘wardenship’ systems.

Multiple mediums for communication

Information provided through the mechanisms listed above should be simple and clear, avoid jargon and acronyms, be provided in languages migrants speak, reflect diverse literacy levels, and accommodate ways in which people absorb information, including accessible formats for persons with disabilities. The following types of mediums may need to be used:

- Written material;
- Audio and video material;
- Pictures, graphic symbols, and signs;
- Cartoons;
- Color codes;
- In-person interaction.

Content of information

Information provided could include:

- Location, contact details, and focal points at consular posts and at relevant State ministries and institutions, including identity and passport services;
- Other emergency focal points and contacts;
- Contact and location information of emergency services and assistance in host States, including hospitals, local police, helplines, counseling centers, shelters, and relief services and aid;
- Travel advisories and checklists;
- Bulletins, alerts, and warnings, including on crisis-related security, safety, and threats;
- How to act in the event of a crisis (e.g., where to go, whom to contact, and what to do), including information tailored to the cultural, social, and other particularities of host States;
- Rights and obligations in specific host States.

Websites

Websites that provide information for migrants regarding their stay or transit in host States can be a conduit to communicate crisis-related information. A large array of information can be published and regularly updated on dedicated websites. Information on disaster and security risks and helpful safety emergency tips may also be incorporated within existing travel-related websites, which are usually referred to or visited by migrants. When establishing websites, factors to consider include:

- Simultaneous use of different mediums (e.g., video, audio, pictorial, and written material);
- Availability of information in multiple languages;
- User-friendly layout and content;
- Regularity of updates;
- Links and contacts for additional information;
- Interface with other mechanisms, such as social media.

Social media

Social media is widely accessible and pervasive. It has the capacity to reach large migrant populations in real time. Migrants use social media to seek information and communicate with each other and with family and communities in their States of origin. Social media can sustain migrant networks and enable migrants to play a key role in the generation and dissemination of information. Social media can be used to:

- Allow migrants to follow hashtags about crises and respond in their own languages;
- Provide early warning and emergency response information;
- Create discussion or chat groups that migrants can join or follow;
- Create photo and video sharing sites that allow users to upload and geo-tag photos;
- Support crowd-sourcing projects that bring new and additional information into mapping and analysis of disaster needs and response availability.

Mobile applications

Mobile applications are a cost-effective, user-friendly, and widely accessible mechanism for

communicating with migrants. Individually or in partnership with others, stakeholders could develop applications that target migrants' information needs. The content and features mobile applications can offer include:

- SOS messaging to emergency numbers chosen by the migrant;
- GPS location and tracking capabilities;
- Maps and navigation, including to available emergency services and consular posts;
- Information downloads and offline information storage;
- Platforms that allow migrants to share information and facilitate two-way communication;
- News feeds;
- Translations and currency converters.

Text messages

Similar to mobile applications, text messages are a cost-effective, user-friendly, and widely accessible mechanism for communicating with migrants. They can be linked to telephones, mobile applications, websites, social media platforms, and other mechanisms that can generate automatic messages when needed. Text messages are particularly effective for communicating warnings, threats, alerts, emergency contact information, and information on where and how to access assistance and services.

Helplines, hotlines, and call centers

Helplines, hotlines, and call centers are an accessible and low-tech means through which one-way or two-way communication with migrants can be facilitated. In establishing helplines, hotlines, and call centers, factors to consider include:

- Hours of operation-24 hours a day or less;
- Cost structure-toll free access or paid access;
- Language capacities of staff;
- Whether migrants can receive and provide information;
- The scope and content of information to be provided (and received)-information only or services, such as counseling, direct referrals, family tracing, and complaints.

Support centers

Migrant support centers can be established in host States and States of origin. Such centers can provide a wide range of information and services to migrants. Support centers can also target specific groups of migrants, such as irregular migrant workers, migrant domestic workers, or migrant victims of trafficking, and tailor information to accommodate the vulnerabilities and needs of such groups.

Measures to identify and engage local actors in outreach to migrant communities

Local organizations generally have the best and most up-to-date information on crises affecting their communities. They have the best contacts with migrant populations, especially migrants in an irregular immigration status. They are the first responders, present and active before national and international actors arrive. Activities to leverage their strengths include:

- Mapping communities ahead of crises to identify migrant neighborhoods, organizations, and leaders that are respected by and representative of migrant populations;
- Establishing points of contact with migrant organizations and leaders;
- Helping points of contact establish communication trees and other methods of communicating with migrants within their communities;
- Forming partnerships with migrant organizations and leaders and specifying roles and relationships during crises;
- Helping migrant organizations obtain funding to support their crisis-related activities.

Liaison networks

Liaison networks in which migrant, consular, or other focal points are voluntarily engaged to care for groups of migrants and keep them informed of relevant information can ensure migrants, particularly those in an irregular immigration status, are connected and informed of crisis-related information. Liaison systems, sometimes also referred to as ‘wardenship’ systems, may also be important for migrants who, for various reasons cannot access other communication mechanisms, including consular channels. In establishing these networks, factors to consider include:

- Whom to select as focal points. Criteria to consider include access to migrants, respect and trust garnered, gender, and relationship with consular posts;
- Which migrants fall within the responsibilities of a given focal point. This could be based on geographic location or other criteria;
- What actions and services a given focal point should provide;
- Support to focal points, such as training and assistance in developing contingency plans.

States of Origin

Consular posts

Consulates are a key conduit for information dissemination to and communication with citizens abroad. Due to their presence in the host State, they have access to country-specific information. Many of the mechanisms listed above can be employed by consulates to communicate with their citizens. Other measures that consulates in particular could use to conduct active outreach to their citizens include familiarizing them with emergency contacts, procedures, and contingency and evacuation plans through special events at consular posts, such as on national holidays. Consular websites can amplify social media and other methods for citizens to contact their family members to update them on their safety and needs.

Private Sector Actors

Employers and recruitment and placement agencies

Employers often have the most ongoing contact with migrant workers. Establishing mechanisms,

such as communication trees, to communicate with all of their employees, including migrant workers, during crises can be an efficient way to reach large numbers of people. Recruitment and placement agencies may also have contact with migrants after they have been placed with an employer. These private sector actors can get information to migrants about an emerging crisis, risks, and steps they need to take to protect themselves. This could include:

- Information on prevention, preparedness, and emergency response activities;
- Alerts on evolving conditions in host States;
- Information on steps to take when in need of evacuation.

Civil Society

Migrant and other civil society networks

Specialized local civil society actors may have strong relationships with migrant communities and networks, which can, among other things, facilitate two-way communication and foster understanding of migrants' needs. Migrant and civil society networks have the capacity to reach migrants in an irregular immigration situation and others who may be hard to contact. Important activities to leverage these links and capacities include:

- Mapping communication systems and tools used by migrants in specific contexts;
- Developing guidance and procedures for communicating emergency messages to migrants;
- Developing policies on enlisting migrants to facilitate communication;
- Organizing formal and informal events (meetings, conferences, or gatherings) to maintain contacts with migrant networks and discuss crisis-related communication issues;
- Advocating with other stakeholders and coordinating with them on crisis-related communication with migrants;
- Working with migrant representatives to develop guidelines on ways to communicate.