

GUIDELINE 9: Communicate widely, effectively, and often with migrants on evolving crises and how to access help

Multiple formal and informal communication systems should be activated once a conflict or natural disaster erupts. Migrants should receive information on the evolving nature of a crisis and on ways to access assistance. In addition, those affected by conflicts or natural disasters often have clear ideas about how to improve their safety and security in an emergency. They are an important source of information about risks, local needs, and gaps in protection.

Stakeholders can communicate information to and receive information from migrants and other stakeholders. Repeat messaging, using multiple channels, and different mediums (infographics, audio, and print) 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. Communicating and engaging with a diverse representation of migrants, including with marginalized groups, improves needs assessment.

All stakeholders also benefit from timely information as crises evolve and new issues arise. In conflicts, for example, fighting may break out in new geographic areas and affect different migrant populations. In natural disasters, such as earthquakes, aftershocks may cause new damage. It is important to continue to assess these shifting patterns and adapt responses to changing needs.

Different stakeholders are often privy to unique information. Sharing information and knowledge on the evolution of crises and on available assistance can support efforts by all stakeholders to protect migrants and can mitigate confusion that might otherwise arise. For example, some States may obtain information on particular aspects of conflicts or natural disasters helpful to informing actions by other stakeholders, including humanitarian actors. Stakeholders may find value in developing consistent messaging on risks and status updates during crises.

Sample Practices

- *Regular crisis updates and information on where and how to access assistance through multiple communication channels in relevant languages.*
- *24-hour call centers with linguistically diverse and trained staff offering information and services.*
- *Dedicated outreach through volunteers and grass-roots actors to disseminate information on risks, logistics, and assistance to those in an irregular immigration status or working in isolated conditions.*
- *Migrant support centers to disseminate information to migrants.*
- *Migrants as a source of information on local conditions, on sources of assistance, and challenges.*
- *Briefings and situation updates by host State authorities.*

PRACTICES TO IMPLEMENT GUIDELINE 9: Communicate widely, effectively, and often with migrants on evolving crises and how to access help

Multiple Stakeholders

Regular crisis updates and information on assistance

Migrants need information to make informed decisions during a crisis, including:

- Information on the development of the crisis, such as geographic areas affected, intensity and scale of the crisis, and damage and risks;
- Emergency contact points and personnel who can assist;
- Available assistance and where to access different types of services, including medical assistance, shelters, and other assistance centers;
- Available hotlines, helplines, and call centers;
- Rules on eligibility for different types of services and aid;
- Whether presentation of valid identity documents is necessary to obtain services and aid;
- Information on whom to contact for relocation or evacuation assistance, such as consulates of the State of origin, the host State's foreign ministry, or organizations collecting such requests.

Communication channels

Multiple communication channels that combine traditional and innovative mediums can increase coverage and reach of information. Communication mechanisms could include:

- Dedicated user-friendly websites in multiple languages with crisis-related information and regular updates, links, contact information, and interface with other media, including social media;
- Web-based news releases with maps of risk areas, evacuation sites, and assistance facilities;
- Digital or social media hubs that distribute virtually real-time information, with information sourced from the public, monitored and verified before being published;
- SMS and text alerts;
- Regular media briefings;
- Broadcast messages on national and local radio and television networks in host States and States of origin;
- Brochures and multi-lingual maps highlighting main areas at risk, evacuation sites, and disaster assistance facilities;
- Translated messages to facilitate communication in languages migrants understand, and using pictures or pictograms where possible.

Coordinated and consistent messaging between stakeholders

Consistent messaging among all stakeholders helps ensure that migrants, stakeholders, and the general public receive and act upon the same information. Consistent messaging also

helps avoid misunderstandings and the spread of misinformation during crises. Stakeholders can take the following steps to ensure consistent and accurate messages:

- Identifying a lead agency to initiate information flow, including information on evacuation or relocation, eligibility of migrants for services, and any changes in immigration enforcement or visa requirements during the crisis;
- Reaching out to migrant associations and civil society to identify accessible sources of information that migrants trust;
- Establishing a clearing house to confirm the accuracy of information prior to sharing and dissemination;
- Using trained translators and interpreters who are able to convey agreed information accurately and effectively to migrant populations.

Dedicated outreach to disseminate information on risks, logistics, and assistance

For migrants, particularly those in irregular immigration status or working in isolated conditions, traditional approaches to communication can be supplemented by dedicated outreach through individuals who have access to migrant communities, or in places migrants gather. Aspects to consider are:

- Engaging multiple relevant actors, particularly those close to migrants. This could be either as volunteers, or in some cases, as employees. Such actors include: (1) community and faith-based organizations providing services to migrants; (2) migrant shelters; (3) migrant gathering places, such as restaurants or community centers; (4) news outlets, radio, television channels, and internet portals in States of origin, or those in host States targeting migrant populations; (5) private civil protection and emergency actors; (6) major employers of migrant workers, business associations, or unions; and (7) migrant focal points and leaders;
- Employing interpreters and translators for the languages spoken by affected migrants.

Receiving information from migrants

Migrants are also a source of information on local conditions, avenues for assistance, and challenges faced by other migrants. Ways to receive crisis-related information from migrants include:

- Establishing migrant focal points who can liaise with stakeholders and provide information;
- Providing migrants with phones to relay information;
- Establishing connections with migrants' families in the State of origin and creating avenues for them to share information received from migrants.

Positive communication about migrants

Anti-migrant rhetoric can increase in times of crisis and migrants may face increased levels of discrimination, hostility, and xenophobia in host States and States of transit. Positive communication about migrants promotes tolerance, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, and respect toward migrants. This can include, for example, ensuring that the language when referring to migrants avoids triggering hostile or xenophobic responses, such as using the term

‘illegal’ to refer to migrants.

24-hour call centers with linguistically diverse and trained staff

Hotlines, helplines, and call centers can offer one-way or two-way communication. If the latter, they can be staffed to answer calls and provide targeted information, receive location and identity information, and provide other services. Factors to consider are:

- Hours of operation—24 hours a day during the acute phase of a crisis;
- Cost structure—toll-free access or paid access;
- One-way or two-way communication—whether migrants can receive and provide information;
- Language capacity of staff or volunteers;
- Whether to limit use to migrants, their families or others, or leave open for general use;
- The content of information to provide and if applicable, receive;
- Additional services to provide, such as counseling, referrals, and family tracing.

Migrant support centers

Migrant support centers can provide a wide range of services and assistance to migrants, including:

- Dissemination of crisis-related information;
- First aid;
- Access to phones, phone credit, and phone charging stations;
- Access to the internet.

Host States

Briefings and situation updates by host State authorities

Where possible, host State authorities can provide regular briefings on the development and scope of a crisis, associated threats, available assistance, status of search and rescue operations, and other pertinent information on the crisis or migrants to consular officials, private sector actors, international organizations, and civil society. These briefings can take different forms, including:

- Public meetings and briefings;
- Direct engagement with consular authorities of States of origin;
- Operational coordination meetings with key stakeholders, including international organizations and civil society;
- Web-based updates and other virtual communications.

States of Origin

Consular posts as focal points to generate and disseminate information to citizens abroad

Consular services play a central role in delivering communication to citizens abroad. Information that can be provided includes:

- Crisis alert levels and recommendations for suggested actions;
- Travel advisories, restrictions, and bans;
- Situation updates;
- Evacuation plans and sites;
- Availability and location of temporary shelters;
- Ways to access available assistance.

Consistent messaging among States of origin

To the extent possible, States of origin should coordinate warning systems to avoid providing conflicting advice to their citizens in a host State. This may require, for example, agreeing with other States (regionally, or other States with a large citizen population in a particular host State or region) to adopt similar crisis alert levels.

Private Sector Actors

Mechanisms to enable migrants to communicate

Employers, recruiters, and placement agencies can facilitate communication between migrants and other stakeholders, including consular officials, international organizations, civil society, and families. This can be done by providing free access to phones, the internet, or other communication services.

Remittances and access to funds

Remittance sending companies can facilitate migrants' access to remittances sent from families in the States of origin and other States. These remittances can often enable migrants to remain safely in, or pay for transport out of, the host State. In prior crises, remittance companies have waived fees for funds sent to countries experiencing crises.

International Organizations

Migrant communication hubs

Setting up a two-way communication hub (e.g., within a crisis information center operated by the humanitarian community and coordinating communications with all affected populations) can provide timely and updated information on available assistance. Such hubs can host communications for multiple entities that provide information to migrants, including consular services, employers and recruiters, international organizations, and civil society.

Feedback and complaint mechanisms

Enabling migrants to provide feedback and make complaints helps to identify gaps in assistance and contributes to monitoring and evaluation efforts. Factors to consider in establishing feedback and complaint mechanisms include:

- Creating a physical or virtual feedback box where migrants can express concerns and provide feedback;
- Anonymity and compliance with applicable laws and standards on data protection and privacy;
- A fair and transparent verification and assessment process;
- Follow-up, including in terms of assistance and redress.

Support to other stakeholders, especially States

International organizations can help bridge communication gaps and challenges between migrants and States. This is particularly the case where international organizations have an established presence in the host State. Support can include:

- Identifying cultural or linguistic barriers faced by migrant populations in accessing assistance;
- Identifying trustworthy and representative community leaders, faith-based leaders, or other actors who can assist;
- Engaging migrants as volunteers or employees to search for and report on migrant populations, migrants stranded in remote locations, or migrants in detention;
- Supporting the dissemination of information for marginalized and isolated migrants, including through visits to detention centers.

Civil Society

The above-mentioned practices identified for international organizations are also relevant to civil society.

Grassroots efforts to reach out to migrant communities and communicate crisis-related information

Civil society can be well placed to conduct grassroots communication efforts, targeting more isolated and marginalized migrant communities. They can support other stakeholders to reach migrant populations by providing information on gaps in assistance, inconsistent messaging, or gaps in communication strategies. The initiatives they can implement include:

- Door-to-door visits to engage with isolated communities with language, mobility, or other limitations;
- Free and easy-to-access hotlines, with linguistically and culturally competent and trained staff for communicating with crisis-affected migrants and their families;
- Information dissemination and awareness events in schools, restaurants, churches, and other venues frequented by migrants;
- Social networks and mobile applications to communicate with migrants;

- Using migrant ‘agents of influence’ for outreach and communication;
- Recruiting migrants as volunteers or staff for communication campaigns.