

22 May 2017

CRISIS-DRIVEN MOBILITY: WHAT DO MIGRANTS HAVE TO SAY?

by Meagan Hendow

In this second article of the series, we feature practical examples of migrant experiences and stakeholder responses to human-made crises, drawing on key findings from recent research on migrants caught in situations of crisis around the globe. We focus in particular on migrant responses and migrant voices, as these are necessary to ensure a global compact that responds to the needs of all, and in particular those who are vulnerable to violence or exploitation in the context of a crisis.

Mobility when a crisis hits – how migrants move

Those who are displaced across borders due to conflict are primarily – but not exclusively – refugees, their situation discussed in the global compact on refugees. Nonetheless, conflicts and crises, including environmental crises, also impact the mobility of other migrants in the country when a crisis hits, who need to move to avoid risk to health and life. This can mean mobility within a building, a city, a country, a region, or return to the home country. The global compact should take into account the impact conflict and other forms of crisis have on migrants and their mobility – both within the country of destination, as well as to countries to which migrants may be displaced. It can provide guidance on support that can be provided to migrants at every stage of their movement, in line also with support that will be outlined under the global compact on refugees as well as the various international instruments and guidance already elaborated. Notably, it should integrate practical guidance from the Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative’s [Guidelines to Protect Migrants in Countries Experiencing Conflict or Natural Disaster](#) and the [Global Migration Group’s draft Principles and Guidelines, supported by practical guidance, on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations within large and/or mixed movements](#). These guidelines are building blocks that can be used and referenced in concrete ways by the global compact, in a way that speaks to the realities of migrants on the ground.

For migrant domestic workers caught in the 2006 war in Lebanon, the role of the employer was crucial, as domestic workers are tied to them in the sponsorship program. In our research, migrants highlighted various forms of mobility: moving with employers to another home

outside of Beirut in the mountains, to a hotel in Beirut, being locked in their employer's apartment, and going (or being brought) to their respective embassies or consulates for evacuation and repatriation. *"There were 6 workers including my cousin in Saida whose employers had left and locked the doors on them. I told them to break the doors and collect themselves and get a cab and come to Achrafieh. The cab took \$400 – of course using the situation"* (Female Filipino migrant in Lebanon during the 2006 crisis)

During the crisis, Caritas and migrants who had identified migrant domestic workers trapped in employers' houses contacted and coordinated with the Lebanese Internal Security Forces to rescue them. This type of communication and coordination facilitates migrants' access to support in an emergency, and is already clearly indicated in the MICIC Guidelines (Guideline 6 on effective communication with migrants) and the GMG Guidelines (Principle 3 on rescue and assistance), together with examples of effective communication channels.

For many migrants displaced by the Libya conflict in 2011, they returned to their respective home countries, after a short sojourn in countries neighbouring Libya, where transit camps were set up to facilitate return. In Tunisia, the state maintained an open door policy during the crisis, allowing those fleeing the violence in Libya to seek shelter there, as well as access services (including evacuation). *"When we arrived in Tunisia, we felt at home. We were met with food and shelter. The Red Cross helped us contact our families by phone, so did the Tunisian army, families and volunteers"* (Male Egyptian migrant in Libya during the 2011 conflict).

Facilitating people's ability to move to safe areas is an essential part of crisis response in general and MICIC Guideline 10 and GMG Principle 5 have outlined pragmatic ways states can apply this to migrants. Beyond facilitating border crossings, states can help migrants access or obtain travel documents and allow detained migrants to get out of harm's way.

In drawing on both the real issues that face migrants, as well as relevant principles and guidelines that already introduce practical examples, the global compact can provide concrete guidance to states and other stakeholders on how and where they can better support migrants caught in a crisis situation.

Support in the longer-term: can the GCM address this gap?

Longer-term responses supporting crisis-displaced migrants represent an important lacuna in the policy sphere, according to our research. This is particularly true for those migrants who have returned to their country of origin following a crisis. For these migrants, and their

families, the drivers and characteristics that led to their initial migration journey are often still present: low income, unemployment, food insecurity, and even conflict. Upon a migrants' return, their families not only lose any potential benefits they gained from remittances sent by their family member, but also now experience additional burdens. This applies not only to the increased cost of feeding and housing an additional person, as well as any potential financial costs of the migration journey they may still owe, but also health and psycho-social issues from which the return migrant may suffer due to their experience with the crisis and potential shame at their failed migration journey.

Training programmes, recognition of health and psycho-social needs, access to land for farming, and support for the development of small and medium sized enterprises, aimed at return migrants and local populations in the home country, can be important tools to support migrants and their communities in the long run. MICIC Guidelines 14 and 15 already outline a number of good practices that when implemented can better support migrants and their communities post-crisis, by states, private sector actors, intergovernmental organisations, and civil society. In Burkina Faso, for example, migrant families, private landowners and local chiefs worked to provide plots of land for returnees, to encourage their re-integration upon return: *"For returnees, we did our best. We asked landowners to find fields for some of them and it was done. For those who wanted to stay in town, we helped them to find plots. I clarify that help in some cases was individual but mostly it was collective."* (Traditional chief in Burkina Faso engaged in supporting returnees from Côte d'Ivoire)

Without tangible and forward-looking support upon return, returnees are unlikely to have a successful re-integration experience, which may lead to another migration journey, including to still-risky countries of destination. This has been particularly seen in Libya, where lack of meaningful re-integration in home countries such as Egypt, Niger and Ghana has led to re-migration to Libya, despite the serious security concerns that continue.

The global compact can and should address this gap – as a key driver of migration, environmental and human-made crises intersect with economic and demographic drivers, with the potential to exacerbate migrants' vulnerability to violence and other human rights violations. Moreover, the global compact process should engage migrants and their advocates, eliciting migrant voices throughout the process, to ensure that it speaks to their very real and at times urgent needs.

Our research with migrants and stakeholders responding to them during crises was conducted for the EU-funded project "Migrants in Countries in Crisis: Supporting an Evidence-based Approach for Effective and Cooperative State Action". We delve even further into the

responses of migrants to crisis, as well as policy responses, across six specific crisis cases. This week, we launch our research publications with the Lebanon case study, focused on migrant domestic workers' experiences of and responses to crises, in particular the 2006 war. More information on upcoming publications, including comparative reports drawing out the main convergences and divergences across the six case studies, as well as potential policy priorities for the future, is available on the MICIC project website.

On the 22-23 May 2017, UN Member States, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector will discuss how to address drivers of migration in the second thematic session of the global compact for migration. In our Expert Voice Series we aim to draw out significant lines of inquiry that can and should be addressed within the global compact process.

Related Links:

[New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#)

[Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration](#)

[Annex II of the New York Declaration](#)

Contact Information

For more information please contact:

Policy Unit

International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
Gonzagagasse 1, 5th floor
1010 Vienna, Austria

Email: Policy_Unit@icmpd.org

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