



NGO Committee on
Migration

WE ARE ALL
MIGRANTS!

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MIGRANTS IN CRISIS IN TRANSIT: 2015 NGO PRACTITIONER SURVEY RESULTS

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I. Introduction

Disturbed by the ever-growing number of migrants in crisis in transit worldwide, the NGO Committee on Migration initiated in the spring of 2015 a Survey of “on-the-ground” practices among non-governmental organizations serving migrants in crisis in transit (MICIT) around the world. The goal was to look directly at the experiences and specific needs of the people they assisted; the challenges the organizations faced in meeting these needs; and their recommendations to governments and Civil Society on the most urgent actions needed to save the lives and protect the human rights of migrants and their families worldwide.

39 non-governmental organizations responded to the Survey. Their responses to Question 1 of the Survey identified most of them as faith-based, all of whom work directly on-the-ground in 39 locations worldwide: 13 in Europe, 13 in Asia, 1 in the Near East, 1 in Africa, 9 in Latin America and 2 in North America. The vast majority of respondent organizations are local community organizations with small staffs of 1-8 persons; the rest have somewhat larger staffs: 4 up to 25; and another four up to 60. Most of the local community organizations are part of national or international organizations; one is binational. Two organizations consist entirely of volunteers, while others are supported by volunteers.

All of the 39 work first-hand with migrants in transit, including refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, victims of trafficking or torture, vulnerable children and women, and victims of violence or trauma in transit. For a majority of the organizations, working with this highly vulnerable population is their number one priority; for the rest, working with them is among the organizations’ top priorities.

Responses to the Survey are summarized in Part II, immediately below. Recommendations from the Survey respondents, both to governments and NGOs, are presented in Part III.

II. Survey responses, with NGO practitioner snapshots

1. **Questions 2, 3 and 4 of the Survey** asked about the reasons why the migrants in transit whom the organization serves left their country of origin, the kinds of crisis situations these migrants were experiencing, and the protection needs the organizations

most often encountered in their service to these migrants.

The answers to these 3 queries were clearly interconnected: the kinds of crises migrants experienced were related to why they left; and, their protection needs depended on the kinds of crises they were experiencing.

As the replies of the respondent organizations indicated, the 2 main reasons **why these migrants left home** were 1) poverty and the search for a better life; and 2) conflict and fear for their personal safety. Occasionally, there was also mention of family reunification, educational opportunities, and climate change. The reasons given were, for the most part, the same across the board, with some variations in emphasis. Some **slight patterns emerged between reasons for leaving home and region of origin**. The Latin America replies focused more on violence and fear of personal safety, while the Asian ones emphasized the role of poverty and unemployment

From the data gathered through the Survey, it was possible to get a rough picture of their origins: for example, the European organizations reported serving migrants from Africa, asylum seekers from the Middle East; migrants from Asia, including Tibetan asylum seekers, and some Roma from Eastern Europe. The Latin American and Asian organizations, on the other hand, reported serving mainly migrants-in-transit from their own countries and regions.

2. Interwoven with the reasons which led to their migration were **the crises the migrants had experienced or were still experiencing**: for the vast majority of migrants the crisis was lack of work, followed closely by smuggling, and/or conflict. Open-ended responses elaborated these themes. According to the organizations serving these migrants **in Europe**, the crisis situations facing the migrants were finding work as well as political abuse in their countries of origin, and irregular status as well as restrictive immigration laws in the receiving societies. For migrants **in Latin America**, specific crisis situations they were experiencing were gang warfare and racial abuse; and **in Asia**, recruiter abuse and employer exploitation.
3. The **protection needs encountered most often by the on-the-ground organizations** in their service to migrants in transit were closely related to the crisis situations facing the migrants, namely: protection from political persecution and unsafe migration; protection from traffickers and corrupt officials; asylum, non-refoulement and regularization; changes in restrictive national laws preventing access to work and services; protection from abuse by employers, slumlords, and police; and psychological counselling.
4. **Promising practices** identified by the organizations serving the migrants in transit included:
 - Pre-Departure Information;
 - Legal assistance, especially with immigration documentation and access to services;
 - Medical Facilities, including availability of doctor(s);
 - Language skills training;
 - Education and vocational training;
 - Cultural orientation;
 - Recreational activities;

- Psychological counselling, especially for trafficking victims;
- Shelter facilities, especially for victims of trafficking;
- Establishing contact with families;
- Networking, partnering, providing referrals;
- Coordinating agencies and services;
- Organizing advocacy actions, lobbying for release from detention and/or for non-refoulement.

Snapshots 1 & 2

“Various practices have been very helpful. Offering the migrants care workers almost round the clock in their residence, social workers to help them with documentation, employment, education, housing, resettlement, return issues, a clinic with a doctor a few days a week, education in and outside the center on English, the local and European culture and basic computer skills, recreational facilities, football tournaments, movie nights and music festivals are some of the many practices we have implemented.”

“Our practice is to receive, listen, advise, and assist migrants in their administrative process until obtaining the residence permit. If arrested and put in the Administrative Detention Center for deportation, we organize the legal defense of the people, and especially, what is most effective, we mobilize people—as many as possible—to lobby the authorities by petition, fax, any means to bring about the release of the detainees.”

5. Most organizations responding to the survey have fostered **partnerships on behalf of the migrants they serve with local and provincial authorities**, on such matters as education, health, and legal assistance. Some were in contact with local authorities on human rights issues, such as children crossing borders. Others mentioned participation in interagency campaigns against trafficking, locally and nationally, with NGOs and governments.

Snapshot 3

“We have participated with Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice in identifying issues related to the increasing number of persons, especially children, crossing borders. CLUE has brought various groups to the table, including government and law enforcement, to address this human rights issue.”

The **organizations also collaborated with the national governments, sometimes together with other NGOs**, on matters connected with local issues. Most frequently mentioned, by organizations in all parts of the world, was cooperation in campaigns to stop human trafficking and to assist victims of trafficking. Some governments concerned with border questions sought the perspectives and suggestions of local NGOs serving migrants in transit. One respondent organization in France reported being in contact with the Directorate of Immigration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to change or abolish the Dublin Regulation.

Snapshot 4

“Yes, (we have fostered partnerships) against trafficking. We work closely with the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and with the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA).”

A few organizations also had **partnerships with other Governments, and/or with international organizations**, such as UNHCR and IOM, for example on matters of relocation, resettlement, and voluntary return.

6. Across the board, **the biggest challenge respondent organizations said they faced in assisting migrants in crisis situations** was barriers at the governmental level such as bureaucratic delays, lack of training, corruption, etc. A close second challenge was legal barriers such as lack of laws or limitations in existing laws, and thirdly, the need for organizational funding. Other challenges were discrimination, difficulty in identifying those who needed assistance, lack of coordination in provision of services, and need for more organizational staffing.

Open ended follow-up comments supported and elaborated on the **challenges** faced by the organizations in protecting and assisting the migrants.

- Barriers at the governmental level involved bureaucratic delays; not enough efforts to stop human trafficking; corruption of local authorities; and legal loopholes.
- Legal barriers mentioned were laws which denied access to the labor market and to health services;
- Discrimination challenges included anti-immigrant sentiments, and the creation of prejudice based on political interest.
- Funding challenges were lack of funds to train staff, to pay lawyers, and to cover the cost of documents.
- Staffing challenges included the need for more staff, and for more staff training.
- A couple of organizations underlined the challenges involved in serving the large number of refugees and their needs; and coping with migrants' lack of language facility.

Snapshots 5 & 6

“Political interests in the management of the migration situation; the tremendous utilization of the media about this reality; the formation of rumors and prejudices based on these two phenomena.”

“It is hard to ask people who have no way to share the cost, knowing that for them, they have to pay the stamps for regularization... plus all photocopies; and when the document is ready, they will be asked to pay nearly 500 Euro. When one appeals to lawyers, they are professionals, they are paid. For the moment, they may have “a special help for a lawyer” but all of the lawyers do not accept low tariffs. As for some associations specialized in legal aid, they sell documents to buy, but these expenses have to be supported by the volunteers themselves. We do not receive subsidies.”

7. The Survey's last question was: Based on your organization's experience in serving migrants, what is **the most significant action, change, resource, tool, etc. that would facilitate better assistance and protection to migrants in crisis situations?**

The responses included numerous recommendations—addressed to governments and NGO's respectively—covering significant areas of policy and practice for ensuring better protection and assistance to migrants in situations of crisis and/or transit. They underscore the urgency of recent calls by policy experts for new approaches to protection which deploy both development resources and mobility options (*Migration Policy Practice*, vol. V #2 2015). These recommendations are summarized in the next, final section of this report.

III. Respondents' Recommendations to Governments and to NGOs

Recommendations to governments covered several critical areas of policy and practice:

A. Recommendations to prevent forced migration by:

- Preventing the causes, especially conflict and poverty;
- Upholding the right to freedom of movement and
- Facilitating mobility of people between countries;
- Issuing more visas for humanitarian reasons;
- Abolishing the Dublin Regulation;
- Ensuring that domestic and foreign policies do not strip people of their means of livelihood;
- Working towards a fairer distribution of wealth

Snapshot 7

"(This country) is most often a destination country; but thinking of the North African countries, of the Mediterranean ones, Eastern Europe, it seems that our embassies in rich countries should issue more visas for humanitarian reasons and to avoid so many human disasters."

B. Recommendations to provide better protection en route by:

- Providing pre-departure information and training for migrants;
- Establishing safe-houses;
- Protecting shelters from persecution by organized crime;
- Providing staff capacity training for better care for migrants;
- Having clear procedures for the accompaniment of migrants;
- Fighting human trafficking.

Snapshot 8

"Networking with Government agencies and other NGO's working against human trafficking and violations of human rights to be able to provide the needed legal and psychological help."

C. Recommendations to ensure a positive management of diversity by:

- Establishing people-centered policies;
- Formulating plans to accommodate refugees;
- Helping traumatized peoples;
- Providing funds and tools for the economic empowerment of refugees;
- Avoiding delays in implementing existing migrant friendly laws, and ensuring that these laws are respected;
- Fostering awareness of migrants' rights;
- Maintaining a direct relationship with local authorities

Snapshot 9

“To work on aspects of coexistence and citizenship, to generate spaces for knowledge and close personal relationships. To facilitate movement of peoples among various countries, supporting readjustment of migratory movements. To establish long term, people-centered policies that do not promote or increase inequality.”

D. Recommendations for specific types of practices including:

- A Hotline service in destination countries;
- A Welfare Center;

E. Recommendations on employment issues, such as:

- Creating laws permitting easier access to the labor market;
- Revamping the entire hiring process of migrants by companies, including issuance of visas and terms and conditions of employment;
- Ensuring employment terms are just and fair;
- Having embassy staff engage in workplace monitoring.

Snapshot 10

“Revamp the entire hiring process of migrants by companies, including issuance of visas, terms and conditions of employment, etc. Engage employers in combatting human trafficking by ensuring that employment terms are just and fair...Cooperation (among) sending, receiving, and transit countries to protect the rights of migrants as people move from one country to another in search of better living conditions.”

The recommendations to NGOs focused on providing support in areas such as:

- educational and cultural adaptation of migrants, including language training;
- training for, and gaining access, to work; and, in that connection, understanding the work ethic in the receiving society;
- a fast track for voluntary organizations working with migrants in accessing services such as police, immigration, health services, etc.
- legal support, such as accompanying migrants to prefectures, and providing them with legal advice before a possible deportation;
- health care;
- links to the local inhabitants.

Snapshot 11

“Education, as with education, they will know what their real and not perceived rights are, and they will know better how to communicate according to the culture they are in and manage to achieve their goals. Also, education on cultural adaptation needs to be two ways even with the host country nationals. The next most important things would be employment, possibly social cooperatives that can employ these people till they gain skills and understand the work ethic of the country to save money and to move on, as work gives everybody dignity and lack of work robs everybody of their dignity.”

What is striking throughout the responses of the 39 on-the-ground organizations is how closely and specifically they relate to the 5-year Action Plan for follow up to the 2013 UN HLD on International Migration and Development. Point 3 of that Plan calls for the creation of mechanisms to address the assistance and the protection needs of migrants in crisis, and to close the egregious gaps in the protection of women and children.

The NGO Committee on Migration is ready and eager to partner with governments, civil society, and all concerned stakeholders in a prompt and generous response to the urgent recommendations made by the respondent organizations on behalf of migrants and their families in crisis and in transit worldwide.

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