



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

***Statement of Anne de Riedmatten, Senior Officer
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*Thematic consultation on the Global Compact on Migration:
Irregular Migration and regular pathways, including decent work, labour mobility, recognition of
skills and qualifications and other relevant measures*

Geneva, 12-13 October 2017

Mr Chair,

The Global Compact on Migration provides an important opportunity to ensure that the safety and dignity of labour migrants is at the centre of our discussions. More broadly, this process can also help us to solidify bilateral, regional and global agreements on the best ways to support all migrants, including irregular migrants, as they often find themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability.

To assist in ensuring safe migration, a significant number of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies offer training for prospective migrant workers prior to departure, including first aid training, and information of support organisations to access abroad, and on restoring connections with loved ones.

Nepal Red Cross has established information centres for migrants, as well as broadcasting messages about safe migration nationwide via the radio, to enhance public awareness about legal processes and documents required for staying safe while working abroad. Cambodian Red Cross has instituted trained community volunteers to be migration focal points, and Philippines Red Cross, with support of the IFRC, will be launching the Virtual Volunteer this November with its aim to provide information to Filipino migrants and to those planning to migrate to keep them informed on all stages of migration.

The purpose of these activities is to equip migrants with the information they need to be able to keep themselves safe and not fall prey to unscrupulous brokers or people who would seek to exploit or traffic them, as well as to support them when they do encounter challenges.

This Global Compact process is an opportunity to the safety of labour migrants, ensuring they do not suffer from exploitation, discrimination and harm and can access the services they need. Unfortunately, irregular migrants are inherently more at risk than regular migrants during their migratory journey and are particularly vulnerable to abuse in countries of transit and destination.

It is worth noting that for many migrants, irregular entry is not the only way to fall into an irregular status. Migrants may become irregular due to rejection of an application for asylum; bureaucratic failures in processing residence or work permit applications; withdrawal or loss of status.

Irregular migrants are often not eligible for state-provided services that can be of life-or-death importance, or fear approaching service providers due to the possibility of arrest or deportation. As a result, irregular migrants may become extremely vulnerable to destitution or fundamental rights violations such as physical or sexual violence, forced labour, servitude or debt bondage, with the most vulnerable migrants being low-skilled, women and children.

Even when essential services are available in theory, in practice, migrants often experience barriers linked to language, gender, location or affordability.

For this reason, we need to scale up protection activities, ensuring that the vulnerabilities of particular groups are recognised, that all migrants irrespective of legal status have access to services and support they need, and are aware of their fundamental rights. We call upon States to provide access to legal aid as well as timely and accurate information on how to seek support, particularly if migrants have experienced inhumane and criminal treatment.

In addition, we need to ensure essential services are provided to all in need, irrespective of their status. Some of our Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies have established “safe spaces” where migrants can receive essential services such as health care, information about their rights, access to legal advice and services to restore family links, without fear of arrest. We will soon be releasing a report detailing how these work, with associated policy suggestions for states.

We know that fear of arrest is a significant barrier to access for essential services. We therefore recommend that there should be a clear separation in law and practice between migration law enforcement authorities and social services. In particular, a “firewall” between health care providers, and immigration authorities is necessary in guaranteeing access for all migrants to basic health services without the risk of being reported, arrested, detained or returned. This separation is also important for humanitarian service providers, and data protection laws should ensure personal data acquired through the provision of humanitarian services is not shared with migration law enforcement authorities.

In their auxiliary role to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies stand ready to facilitate dialogue with public authorities and other stakeholders in the humanitarian field to address migrants humanitarian needs if required.

Ultimately it is only by working together that we can ensure the safety, well-being and dignity of of all migrants, in particular those in the most vulnerable situations who really need our support.

Thank you Mr Chair.
