



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

IFRC Africa Position - Empowering Local Communities as Key Partners in addressing Growing Migration Needs in Africa

Statement to the Africa Review meeting on the Global Compact on Migration 31 August 2021

Three months ago, the internet was awash with images of a young Spanish Red Cross volunteer hugging a Senegalese migrant who was among many others that had been rescued in Ceuta, a coastal town in Spain. The hashtag #IstandwithLuna made headlines. For the wrong reasons even. For us as a Red Cross Movement, that image simply symbolized the very essence of what the Red Cross stands for. Humanity!

According to the International Organisation of Migration, **2020** has already seen 258 **deaths** in the **Mediterranean**. UNHCR estimates a **death toll** of about 20 000 migrants since the beginning of the migrant crisis in 2014. These are some of the graphic images we get to see on TV and social media. But there are thousands more, whose dangerous journeys on land, right here on the African continent are undocumented.

Conflict is no longer the solo driver of migration. Social instability, political tensions and intercommunal violence will escalate as inequality in society grows and economies struggle to recover from COVID19 economic shocks. Climate change impacts and the diminishing natural resources will further force migration and aggravate displacement across Africa.

The number of migrants has reached record levels in recent years. According to the Africa Migration Data Network, Africa recorded some 24.5 million migrants in 2020. All over the world, **migrants face significant challenges in accessing essential services** and getting the protection they need from States to ensure their safety, dignity and human rights.

We have great policies in place, but the narrative from the Stakeholder Consultations is clear- we need to do more to implement these frameworks.

We must shift our perceptions on migration and see it as a trend offering countries and communities opportunities. Business activity, investment, development initiatives and foreign relations will be greatly hindered if Africa continues to criminalise migration. The continued challenges highlighted by stakeholders on this platform the last few months of consultations undermine the trust and solidarity necessary to achieve the true potential of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, which explicitly calls for increasing economic integration by enhancing people's freedom of movement.

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1965) forbids States from discriminating against anyone based on race, colour, national or ethnic origin and guarantees Economic, social and cultural rights – including the right to work, the right to housing, the right to public health, medical care, social security and social services, and the right to education and training. With the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the overwhelming majority of UN Member States also committed to “ensure that all migrants, regardless of their migration status, can exercise their human rights through safe access to basic services.”

The Multi-stakeholder consultation have revealed the opposite of this ambition. Many challenges remain in providing a safe, orderly and regular migration. At this juncture though, we take the opportunity to thank member States, including my own country Zambia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Niger that have shared positive developments on how they are obliging to the commitments of the GCM and other frameworks.

It is both a humanitarian imperative and a States’ responsibility to ensure that all migrants, irrespective of legal status, can access essential services. Relevant authorities must address the barriers preventing migrants from accessing essential services and provide them with reliable information about how and where to access essential services.

As the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, our key messages and asks to Member States are clear: -

- **All migrants, irrespective of legal status, must be protected from harm and be able to access essential services.** Migrants have the same human rights as everyone else and must be able to live a life of safety and dignity.
- **Relevant authorities must address both formal and informal barriers to accessing essential services.** Formal barriers include restrictive national laws and policies, including those related to citizenship, arrests and detentions, and deportation; and informal barriers may be linked to gender, disability, age, language, culture and costs.
- **All migrants, irrespective of legal status, must have access to timely, accurate, reliable and culturally appropriate information on essential services.** Relevant authorities must tap into the communication channels most accessed and trusted by migrants, including digital channels, to disseminate information about availability of services, as well as proactively address misinformation against migrants in support of social inclusion and social cohesion, and not promote xenophobia.

- **National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are uniquely placed to support migrants, irrespective of legal status, to access essential services.** As part of the world's largest humanitarian network, National Societies are part of countless thousands of communities and can reach migrants in nearly every country.
- **As auxiliaries to public authorities in the humanitarian field, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies will continue to support States in providing migrants with access to essential services.** National Societies work on the basis of need alone and act in an independent, neutral and impartial manner, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the movement. We do not seek to directly or indirectly encourage, discourage or prevent migration – WE do not stand for or against migration. We stand for people.
- Through **Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs)**, National Societies provide a welcoming and safe environment for migrants along migratory routes and facilitate access to information, protection, health and care, psychosocial support, restoring family links, promote social inclusion and cohesion and provide livelihoods support for migrants.
- **COVID19 has impacted everyone of us. Now imagine being a migrant that has to dodge Government officials because you are too scared for them to discover your status. All migrants, irrespective of legal status must be effectively included in local and national COVID-19 response plans,** including testing, treatment, and vaccines.

I want to end by highlighting a few examples of our National Societies across the continent that are involved in day to day operations that serve the migrant community: -

- In Agadez, Niger, the **Red Cross Society of Niger** (with support from the French Red Cross) offered services for migrants and returnees in its office. Services included restoring family links, psychosocial support, first aid and referrals to hospital.
- The **Egyptian Red Crescent Society** provided direct cash assistance to migrants and refugees, shifted livelihood and health education activities online and translated and disseminated government COVID-19 information in five languages. It also provided e-vouchers via mobile phone for food and hygiene materials and produced four different videos in eight languages as well as 10 COVID-19 myth-busting awareness messages in five languages.
- For over two decades, the Kenya Red Cross has worked with migrant communities in the camps and with host communities on livelihoods, health and water and sanitation and social cohesion.
- National Red Cross Societies in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, The Gambia are all active in family tracing and reunification.
- Our partnerships go beyond the continent. The **Italian Red Cross Society** and Spanish Red Cross are key partners in responding to African migrant issues. They have set up Safe Points to provide

legal assistance, information on rights, first aid, basic health care and orientation, psychosocial support and restoring family links to vulnerable migrants.

These are but a few examples.

As auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, **National Societies support public authorities to ensure that all migrants have effective access to essential services** and receive the protection they are entitled to under different legal frameworks.

The needs-based and principled approach of the IFRC Network, and our continental and global presence along migratory routes, mean that **we are uniquely positioned to bridge assistance and protection gaps** and reduce the suffering of vulnerable migrants at all stages of their journey.

Our strength lies in the strong trusting partnerships we build with local communities where our volunteers come from and the heart of response to disasters, including migration issues.

I thank you for your time.

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