



Meeting Migrants' Information and Communication Needs: Grassroots Experiences from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East

**Side-Event at the International Migration Review Forum
May 20th, 8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m., Room A (in-person event)**

Background

In 2022, nearly four years after the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), governments, stakeholders and the United Nations system will meet to discuss the successes and challenges of implementing this landmark cooperative framework. The first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) is being held under the auspices of the General Assembly, chaired by the President of the General Assembly, at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York from 17-20 May 2022, with a preparatory stakeholder hearing taking place on 16 May.

A series of IMRF side-events will be organized in the margins of the IMRF. They will provide an opportunity to discuss good practices, challenges and recommendations to further the implementation of the GCM. Side-events will take place on 16-20 May 2022.

Description of the Side-event

This event shares learnings and best practices derived from grassroots initiatives from the Philippines, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Jordan, Mexico, and Colombia seeking to meet migrants' communication and information needs, such as access to information, access to media technology and connectivity, fair media representation, their ability to exercise their right to free expression, and participating in their new communities. These unmet needs undermine migrants' ability to exercise their human rights. These initiatives are helping to enhance the capacity of migrant groups to engage in advocacy, build relationships with media houses, and produce a body of evidence to help raise public awareness about the issues they face.

This work is relevant because as migration and displacement have increased, so has media coverage, not all of them positive. Some coverage has led to increased hostility towards migrants, as well as misinformation and disinformation. The ability of migrants and refugees to make themselves heard in their host societies and to contribute to public discourse on migration is severely curtailed by linguistic, cultural, economic, and political factors.

These grassroots initiatives, supported by WACC, align with the goals of the UN Global Compact for Migration, particularly Objective 3- Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration (especially actions c and d), Objective 16- Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion (especially action a and f), and 17- Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration (especially actions b, c, f, and g)

Format: This event will take place in person and in English only.

Suggested agenda

May 20th, 2022

Time: 8:30 a.m. (New York)

Venue: United Nations Headquarters, Room A

5 minutes	<p>Opening Remarks</p> <p>Lorenzo Vargas, Manager for Migration and Communication Rights Programme, WACC (Colombia/Canada)</p>
35 minutes	<p>Panel discussion</p> <p>Panel discussion with representatives of ... will be discussing good practices; challenges; lessons learnt; and emerging priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carolina Martinez, Program Manager for Migration, Grupo COMUNICARTE, (Colombia) - Marie Pia Rieublanc, Manager, La Sandia Digital (México) - Daoud G. Kuttab, Director, Jordan Community Media Network (Jordan) - Rey Asis, Manager for Advocacy and Campaigns, APMM, (Philippines/Hong Kong) - Salma Sakr, Advocacy Officer, Anti-Racism Movement (Lebanon) <p>Moderator:</p>
15 minutes	<p>Discussion / Q&A</p>
5 minutes	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lorenzo Vargas, Manager for Migration and Communication Rights Programme, WACC (Colombia/Canada)

What agenda item is this event most relevant to, and how?

This event is relevant to the issues discussed as part of Roundtable Three, especially #16 Inclusion and Social Cohesion; and Roundtable Four, especially #3 Information Provision, #7 Reduce Vulnerabilities, and # 17 Eliminate Discrimination. Information and communication issues are cross-cutting and have a major impact on social cohesion, vulnerabilities, and discrimination because they affect how migrants are perceived in their host societies, their ability to make their voices heard, and the extent to which they can access vital information.

Plan of action (a brief description of the objectives and expected outcomes of the event)

Objectives:

- a. To enable international audiences to learn about best practices derived from grassroots efforts to address migrants' communication and information needs;
- b. To raise awareness about the critical link between communication rights and migrants' rights, which is tacitly recognized by GCM Objectives 3, 16, and 17;
- c. To encourage other stakeholders (civil society organizations, governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector, and media) to embrace communication rights as an essential dimension of the promotion of migrants' human rights.

Expected Outcomes:

- d. A group of stakeholders (civil society organizations, governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector, and media) willing to champion communication and information issues in the field of migration
- e. A public declaration on the critical link between communication rights and migrants' rights
- f. A public communications campaign to raise awareness about the above declaration

ANNEX 1- Summary of Grassroots Initiatives

Organization: Grupo Comunicarte

Country: Colombia (Venezuelan migration)

Project Summary: This project, launched in 2019, led to the establishment of a network, of 25 citizen reporters linked to community radio stations from both sides of the Colombia-Venezuela border and has an estimated reach of five million people in both countries. The network has collectively produced hundreds of media products focused on the needs of both migrants and host communities. It has become a key source of information for the 1.8 million Venezuelan migrants now residing in Colombia, particularly among those with limited access to digital platforms. The network has also entered into several partnerships with UNHCR, GIZ, local civil society, and academia that are enhancing its reach.

Still, many challenges remain. Colombia, despite being an upper middle income country, is facing a major economic and social crisis as a result of the pandemic as well as ongoing internal armed conflict. There is a real risk that the gains in migrants' rights could be eroded by xenophobic discourse and political changes.

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Organization: La Sandia Digital

Country: Mexico (Central American migration)

Project Summary: WACC and its partner La Sandía Digital launched “Emergency Exits,” a podcast about the lives and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Mexico.

The podcast, which features the voices and perspectives of people on the move, aims to strengthen their communication rights and to combat xenophobia. It is supported by WITNESS and narrated by Daniela Rea, from the Red de Periodistas de a Pie.

“Emergency Exits” offers a prologue and six episodes in which 15 men, women and adolescents from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela, explain why they had to flee from their countries of origin and how they were received in Mexico.

These stories were produced between October 2020 and April 2021 during script workshops organized in two shelters: the House for the reception, training and empowerment of migrant women (CAFEMIN), and the Casa Mambré, coordinated by Scalabrinianas: Mission with migrants and refugees.

“The protagonists came together to weave the stories they have in common and the paths that led them to seek a better future here, where they enrich our society with their knowledge and dreams,” La Sandia Digital explains.

In these podcasts, refugees and asylum seekers “speak about their own experiences without an intermediary; they don’t answer to any journalist, they are not being interviewed, they just talk about themselves, so that they become more than a number and a report,” said Marie-Pia Rieublanc, project manager at La Sandia Digital, a Mexico City-based civil society organization focused on gender justice, environmental justice, and communication for social change.

The stories focus on what each of them brings from their home country – from their education, their cultural heritage, their inner strengths and what they would like to provide, what dreams they have for their future in Mexico or in the United States.

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Organization: Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN)

Country: Philippines

Project Summary: The Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) was established to develop cooperation among alternative research centres of non-government organizations (NGOs) and social movements that work on current development issues affecting the people across the region.

The precarious living and working conditions of migrants have made them extremely vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic and the abuses resulting from policies implemented during the pandemic. Many returned migrants in their home countries find themselves without work. Migrants in destination countries, meanwhile, experience overwork, especially migrant domestic workers who are mostly women. Not one government from these countries has included migrant workers in financial assistance schemes.

Information is not readily available to migrants due to hindered access to official channels and the language barrier issue. Racism, stigmatization and discrimination are also on the rise. The “new normal” necessitates the adaptation of strategies for empowerment and advocacy of grassroots migrants. Crucial to this is the capacity to utilize the potentials of new and social media in order for grassroots migrant organisations to assist their members and fellow migrants as well as address emerging concerns (e.g., racial profiling, social

exclusion). Limited access to technology in terms of facilities (hardware, internet access) and skills poses a challenge to migrants attempting to successfully navigate new online spaces.

The worsening socio-political and economic crisis that has exacerbated the global health struggle against the CoVid-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in poverty, displacement, heightened fragilities, and forced migration. Given these circumstances, the active participation of the people in exposing their situation and pushing for social change is critical and highly necessary. The sudden shift to the digital era, however, has restricted the access of workers and migrants to platforms that enable them to assert their democratic rights.

Project objective(s) →

APRN's proposed project aims to address the gap between the knowledge and skills of migrants on the use of new and social media. This need was identified by migrant participants during the subregional trainings that APRN conducted in partnership with APMM (Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants) last year. As far as APRN knows, no online training for migrants on the use of new and social media has been conducted yet.

APRN's project answers the need of migrants during the pandemic to raise awareness and aid in advocacy to promote in their visibility, social inclusion and solidarity.

APRN's project will empower migrants through knowledge-building and skills development in news and social media to further facilitate their efforts in knowledge-sharing, influencing public policy to include migrants through raising awareness regarding existing and new vulnerabilities.

Build solidarity among migrants and locals in the pandemic and post-pandemic era.

Organization: Community Media Network

Country: Jordan (Syrian migration)

Project Summary: When the coronavirus pandemic is over, and researchers look back on how Syrian refugees not only struggled under its weight, but also demonstrated resilience, a good source of information would be "Syrians Among Us," a radio program developed by Community Media Network (CMN) in Amman, Jordan.

CMN has expanded on the radio program with a WACC-supported project, Empowering Syrians Among Us, that recently trained 15 citizen journalists (including refugees from Zaatari camp).

The participants have produced 30 stories so far about Covid-19's economic, social and psychological impact on Syrian refugees living in and outside camps, according to an interim report submitted by CMN. The stories – which range from loss of jobs, to the plight of Syrian women refugees, to Marwan Zoabi, a camp-made "robot that can disinfect automatically" – have been aired on Radio Al-Balad, Jordan's main community radio station. They have also been broadcast through partner radio stations (Yarmouk FM, Voice of Karak, New Voice of Maan, Farah al Nas Radio) and online channels, including WhatsApp chats used by Syrians in Jordan.

The project "seeks to empower the Syrian community living in Jordan by providing them with skills and resources to share their community's stories with other community members and with the broader Jordanian society," said Daoub Kuttab, CMN director general. "Ultimately, the project seeks to create an alternative narrative of migration in Jordan by raising

awareness about the plight of Syrian refugees and by enabling key members of that community to develop a public voice.”

There are about 1.2 million Syrian refugees who reside in Jordan, and most “have little say about policy decisions that affect them and have next to no vehicles to participate in the public conversation on migration and integration in Jordan,” said Lorenzo Vargas, program manager of WACC’s Communication for Social Change. “There is general disregard and ignorance in mainstream Jordanian society about the rights of and challenges faced by Syrian refugees living in Jordan, which is leading to growing xenophobic discourse, accentuated by a general sense that Jordan does not have the resources to absorb the Syrian population.”

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Organization: Anti Racist Movement (ARM)

Country: Lebanon (domestic migrant workers from various countries)

Project Summary:

“Domestic workers are sick and tired of working round the clock, non-stop in a kafala system.”

This was one of the sentiments raised in Hear Us, a photo essay by migrant workers in Lebanon who participated in a series of citizen journalism trainings as part of a WACC-supported project implemented by the Anti-Racism Movement’s (ARM) Migrant Community Center (MCC), a Beirut-based civil society organization.

The project, Challenging Discrimination in Lebanon: Migrant Workers’ Newsroom, also received research support from the Institute of Media Research and Training (IMRT) at the Lebanese American University (LAU).

According to migration and communication rights activists, Lebanese media often publish news that reflect bias towards migrant workers in the country, the majority of whom are women from countries such as Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines.

News reports tend to misrepresent the needs and rights of migrant worker, he said. “This occurs in a legislative context where systemic racism, sex discrimination, and gender-based violence are upheld through the Kafala (or sponsorship) system. Media coverage tends to deny migrant workers’ agency by privileging the perspectives of government officials, police, and sponsors.” [See related story, Negative portrayals of migrant workers on the rise in Lebanese news]

The project sought to establish a Migrant Workers’ Newsroom that would enable migrant workers to challenge dominant discourses around migration.

At least 69 migrant workers, 50 of them women, benefitted from trainings on multi-media journalism, social media, photography, videography, podcasting, video editing, strategic communications, and media bias, which were conducted in 2021. ARM noted that at the start of the training, many participants’ computer literacy was very low. “We were teaching them from scratch, like how to use the mouse.”

Participants later tried their hand at blogging via “Migrant Community Newsroom,” where they shared their photos and experiences. They also produced, “Away From Home,” a podcast where participants shared their daily life as migrant workers. They also produced a best practices/ethical guidelines manual for reporting on migrants.

“MCC is a big help for migrant domestic workers because it gives us a safe space to increase our media skills and express our feelings by engaging in journalistic activities so that we could be heard,” said one participant.

Another participant, said the training was useful to him and his plans to create an organization that will bring together migrants from Afrique Noire (Black Africa). The Adobe Photoshop training “allowed me to develop my creativity and the possibilities of crafting different posters to promote this organization,” he said, adding that he now feels “more confident going forward” with its launch.

All trainees were interested in attending more workshops in the future, said ARM in its project report to WACC. The most common suggestions were for more trainings on social media (Facebook, Instagram), English language classes, and additional photography/videography classes.

ARM said the project has “seriously shifted the perception on media, advocacy, and the news among migrant communities at MCC” and has had a positive impact on its ongoing programs.

It noted that 22 out of 24 attendees in a training program “felt more connected to people from different migrant communities after the trainings. This is an important insight about what is achieved through these trainings beyond technical skills.”