

Migrants in Disaster Risk Reduction Practices for Inclusion



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MIGRANTS IN COUNTRIES
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Editor

Lorenzo Guadagno, Mechthilde Fuhrer and John Twigg

Graphic Design

Claire Bonnet

International Organization for Migration

17 Route des Morillons
1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Tel.: +41 22 717 91 11
Fax: +41 22 798 61 50
E-mail: hq@iom.int
Internet: www.iom.int

Council of Europe

Avenue de l'Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex,
France
Tel-Fax. +33 (0)3 88 41 20 00
E-mail: publishing@coe.int

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Migrants in Disaster Risk Reduction: American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois

Catherine Rabenstine¹

The work of the American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois is rooted in the preparedness, response and recovery of communities affected by disasters as geographically vast as tornadoes and as isolated as home fires. The mission is carried out by a workforce of whom 90 per cent are volunteers who see a need in their community and who are driven to respond. The most common disaster response in this region is to home fires. By definition of who is doing the work (local community members) and how it's done (on the ground), the work is localized.

Though it may be the largest humanitarian organization in the world, the Red Cross is grass-roots in its service delivery. The Red Cross is everywhere — in elementary school classrooms teaching children how to practice fire drills at home,

going door-to-door to install smoke alarms in homes with volunteers speaking the language of the residents, and at the sites of home fires, assisting families with their immediate needs during a dark moment.

The Red Cross is committed to the resiliency of all communities in the face of disaster, in particular vulnerable migrants. Therefore, addressing the needs of migrants is woven into each aspect of the organization's service delivery.

Localizing migrant issues: Chicago and northern Illinois

The American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois covers a diverse region encompassing both the third largest city in the United States and farming communities in rural Illinois. Migrants make up a significant part of the population of Chicago (approximately 21%, according to the United States Census Bureau) and are relatively well integrated into life in the city, but this is not the same in rural parts of the region.

Particularly vulnerable migrants, including the elderly, children, women, victims of trafficking and asylum seekers, are a critical community for the Red Cross to know and serve. Their vulnerability is exacerbated in the event of an Executive Order or policy change that tightens immigration regulations, a state budget crisis that decreases funding availability, or a tenuous sanctuary city status that creates uncertainty in the lives of migrants.

When it comes to risk reduction, the Red Cross has identified ways in which migrants are more vulnerable than other populations. For example, people familiar with the weather in their home country may find a tornado or winter storm an unfamiliar and frightening experience. Migrants who primarily work outdoors may not know where to find safety in the case of a disaster. Heating one's home during a frigid winter in the Midwest necessitates using safety measures with which a newly arrived migrant may not be familiar. The consequences of losing everything in a home fire are dire to a family who lacks the support of local friends and extended family members. And moving across the world, especially if it is precipitated by an emergency, could break apart families who find it difficult to locate each other once separated. This is just a snapshot of the challenges migrants in this region face.

¹ Regional Marketing Programs Manager, American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois. Contact: Catherine.rabenstine@redcross.org

The work of one Red Cross region: Disaster cycle

Prevention and preparedness

The data are clear: there is an overall savings when funds are invested before disasters occur. Relevant pre-disaster interventions include localizing mitigation projects, implementing forecast-based financing, initializing community-wide alerts, and providing education that increases vocational and financial literacy. The Red Cross maintains strong relationships with local government officials and emergency management professionals in order to collaborate towards reducing the impacts of hazards. Recognizing the importance of focusing on migrant communities, the Red Cross also actively seeks out partnerships and guidance from the community itself. For example, the American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois joined the Marshall Square Resource Network in 2016, a membership-based collaborative on Chicago's south-west side, where the immigrant population is very high. The network focuses on building the capacity

of member agencies, creating integrated solutions and organizing for community change. The group is led by Latinos Progresando, an agency that has long been a leader in the neighbourhood. The Red Cross is continually growing its diverse partner base, and has a strong relationship with the Illinois Migrant Council.

Risk reduction and preparedness also include working directly with individuals, for instance teaching classes and disseminating life-saving skills to both children and adults. Jessika Hernandez, a Red Cross CPR instructor and AmeriCorps volunteer, teaches CPR/first aid classes in Spanish to migrant communities throughout Chicago. One of her recent classes was for a group of mothers who volunteer to provide free day care to parents working to complete their General Educational Development (the high school diploma equivalent).

“These classes teach life-saving skills, for free, to people in their mother tongue,” said Hernandez. “It helps them fulfil job requirements and makes them more employable. And it puts at their fingertips skills that may help them save a life: even calling an emergency service line, like 911, is a daunting task in a second language.”



Ruido Fest Table. © 2016 American Red Cross



Ruido Fest Crew. © 2016 American Red Cross

Response

It is not always possible to prepare someone for an emergency. The American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois responds to three to four home fires daily. Migrants are one of the many populations affected by this type of local disaster.

One of the services primarily used by migrants, including refugees and their families, is offered in the event a family is unexpectedly separated or all means of communication have been interrupted. Through their Restoring Family Links (RFL) programme, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies can help reconnect loved ones around the world after disasters, armed conflicts or other humanitarian emergencies, as well as after a migrant's arrival abroad, even weeks or years after the separation. Recently, RFL personnel in the region helped Ricardo, a young teen from Honduras, contact his mother to let her know he was safe. During his journey to the United States to escape domestic violence and poverty, his backpack was stolen and with it his mother's phone number. RFL personnel worked together with Ricardo to collect details about his home and family, including having him draw

maps that depict familiar schools and neighbourhoods. This information was sent through the global Red Cross network to the Honduran Red Cross to pursue the search for his mother. Though the process of finding Ricardo's mother was complex, eventually the Red Cross located her. She was finally able to call her son, hear his voice and know that he was safe. In fiscal year 2016, the RFL programme of the American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois helped nearly 50 families like Ricardo's to reconnect.

Recovery

The American Red Cross is committed to meeting the recovery needs of those affected by disasters long after the event itself. Specifically, caseworkers work with clients to create a long-term recovery plan and address issues such as housing stability and mental health. The Red Cross is able to provide these services in any language using a language line (a service that provides translators), allowing migrant populations to work with highly qualified clinical social workers to fully recover from a disaster.

Importance of convening conversations

As an organization fuelled by fundamental principles that include impartiality and neutrality, the Red Cross plays an important role in the complicated dynamics of supporting migrants. These principles afford the Red Cross access to help all people, and in the same vein, allow the Red Cross to be a convener of conversations.

The Red Cross regularly assembles representatives from government, advocacy and community organizations, and

universities, as well as first responders and others, to discuss disaster risk reduction, including issues that have a specific impact on the migrant community, as mentioned above. All of these stakeholders play an important role in ensuring the resiliency of migrant communities in the face of disaster. As the head of external relations for the American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois says: “It doesn’t matter who feeds the people, as long as they are fed.”

Lessons learned

The Red Cross has learned an important lesson: even in cases where a conversation isn’t directly mission-related, it is valuable to attend, listen and learn. Engaging in these conversations allows the Red Cross to better serve communities. Without the input of local agencies and people on the ground, the Red Cross cannot identify local disaster risk, build the buy-in of stakeholders needed to implement programmes, or transcend local political or funding barriers.

The Red Cross values a data-driven response. The region collects data through the course of a response so that it can be mapped and analysed to aid in future responses. For example, due to data collection, the Red Cross is able to easily identify which neighbourhoods are the most affected by home fires, thereby allowing the region to target risk reduction in those hyperlocal areas. This type of preparedness could involve partnering with the local fire department to organize a smoke alarm installation event.

The red cross and red crescent symbols are globally recognized emblems that link migrants to the places they come from and to the help they may need in their new homes. The main message the American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois wants communities in the region to know is: “No matter your language, religion or legal status, we’re here for you.”

Further reading

Brown, R.
2013 Protecting vulnerable migrants. IOM Kingston. Available from www.unhcr.org/51dc011a0.pdf.

Websites

American Red Cross: Mission and values
www.redcross.org/about-us/who-we-are/mission-and-values

City of Chicago’s official site: Facts and statistics
www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/about/facts.html

United States Census Bureau: QuickFacts – Chicago, Illinois
www.census.gov/quickfacts/map/1PE120213/1714000/accessible

trainings for health-care providers on diagnosis, treatment and reporting of pesticide-related illness; working on state and national pesticide policy change; and participating in community-based participatory research projects on farmworker health issues. She is also Coordinator of the Lake Apopka Environmental Health Project and the Lake Apopka Farmworker Memorial Quilt Project of the Farmworker Association of Florida.

Chapter 9: Germany's THW

Monika Lieberam is the Head of Research on non-police security at Germany's Bundesanstalt Technisches Hilfswerk (THW).

Chapter 10: Domestic Workers in Lebanon

Maegan Hindow is a research officer with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, with an interdisciplinary background in global studies. Her research focuses on irregular migration, border control and fundamental rights.

Dina Mansour-Ille is a senior research officer at the Overseas Development Institute and has a background in the political economy of human rights, migration and refugee studies, and gender. She holds a PhD in Politics, Human Rights and Sustainability and is the co-editor of *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*.

Sally Youssef is an MA student in migration studies at the Lebanese American University, with a focus on gender, religion and race in relation to the construction of citizenship and states' public policies. She is a deputy managing editor of *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* and teaches Arabic to migrants in Lebanon.

Chapter 11: American Red Cross

Catherine Rabenstine is part of the communications team at the American Red Cross of Chicago and Northern Illinois. Currently based in Chicago, Catherine has worked in India, Italy and the Palestinian Territories over the course of her non-profit communications career. She is a One Million Degrees Associate Board member. Catherine received her BA in English and peace studies at Loyola University Chicago and her MS in journalism at Northwestern University.

Chapter 12: Australian Red Cross

John Richardson is National Resilience Adviser, Emergency Services, for Australian Red Cross. He is an honorary fellow of the University of Melbourne. He has over 19 years of extensive policy and operational experience in preparedness and recovery, both nationally and internationally, being involved in, among other things, the Bali bombings in 2002, the alpine fires in Victoria, Australia, in 2003 and 2006, hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005, the Black Saturday fires in Victoria, Australia, in 2009, and floods in Queensland, Australia, in 2011. He is a published author.

Collin Sivalingum is Acting State Manager, Emergency Services, Queensland, Australian Red Cross. He joined the Red Cross in 2011, performing many key roles in the Queensland flooding and cyclone Yasi recovery. Since then, he has been Regional Coordinator for South-East Queensland. Collin has extensive management, consultancy and project management experience and has worked in most countries in Africa, including all countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Europe. Much of his humanitarian and aid work has been in communities, where he has witnessed first-hand human suffering and highly displaced communities.

Vicki Mau is National Manager, Migration Support Programs at Australian Red Cross. The Migration Support Programs assist in the community, people who have been trafficked, people held in immigration detention, and families who have been separated by war, disaster or migration, as well as a range of social cohesion and community development programmes.

Jess Van Son is a member of the Migration Support Programs team at Australian Red Cross. She is also Administrator at the Asia Pacific Migration Network, the network of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Asia Pacific.

Chapter 13: DRM in Diverse Societies

Malte Schönefeld is a research associate at the Institute of Public Safety and Emergency Management at the University of Wuppertal in Germany. From 2013 to 2016, he worked for the Institute of Psychology at the University of Greifswald, Germany, where he was part of the team that developed the training concepts at hand. He further worked for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief. He holds an MA in Political Science.

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organization. It comprises 47 member States, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

Created in 1987, the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) is a platform for cooperation between European and Southern Mediterranean countries in the field of major natural and technological disasters. Its field of action covers the knowledge of hazards, risk prevention, risk management, post-crisis analysis and rehabilitation. It has up to date 25 member States.



In today's increasingly globalized and mobile societies, internal and international migrants, refugees and asylum seekers represent a significant share of the population of cities and countries. This publication presents experiences from researchers and practitioners from a variety of geographical contexts on how they have been included and have participated in disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities. It aims to highlight the importance and benefits of, as well as options for, integrating migrants into decision-making, policy-setting and implementation of disaster risk reduction initiatives.

This publication builds upon the knowledge and experiences gathered through the Migrants In Countries In Crisis (MICIC) Initiative, a global state-led process for which IOM has been serving as Secretariat, and the Council of Europe's EUR-OPA programme on "Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the context of major risks prevention and management".

