

Notes UNHCR Monthly online Consultations with NGOs

Date	7 December 2020
Session Title	Mixed movement and the COVID-19 response
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vincent Cochetel, Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean situation, UNHCR • Roberto Forin, Global Programme Coordinator, Mixed Migration Centre • Jeffrey Labovitz, Director, Department of Operations and Emergencies, IOM
Moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annika Sandlund, Head of Partnership and Coordination Service, UNHCR
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70, mostly NGOs and UNHCR staff
Executive summary	
<p>The consultation focused on mixed movements data and trends, with particular reference to the Central & Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes. Drivers of mixed movements were also considered, highlighting some of the impacts, challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants particularly brought up inputs related to policies addressing mixed movement in the COVID-19 context and specific protection dimensions related to rescue at sea and groups such as unaccompanied minors, women on the move, victims of human trafficking, and people with disability. The discussion stressed the need to rethink and renew the humanitarian focus on service delivery, including access to quality safe shelters, the need to strengthen collaboration between partners, particularly in the area of joint or complementary advocacy among the UN and NGOs, while enhancing dialogue with States.</p>	
Major points arising from speakers	
<p>IOM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on the Central, Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes taken to reach Europe and related trends. In 2020, on the Central Mediterranean route, arrivals of migrants increased by 214%, approaching 35,000. On the Western Mediterranean route, arrivals decreased by 23%, reaching over 16,000. This year, there was also a notable reduction in the proportion of deaths at sea. • Libya is still a key destination and transit country for migrants, as of August 2020, 584,000+ migrants were estimated to be in Libya, 2,000 in detention centers, 7% lower compared to earlier this year. 75,000 migrants are estimated to have left Libya since March. About 40% of arrivals to Italy had departed from Libya. • In Libya, migrants continue to face many risks including related to trafficking, arbitrary detention, abuse, exploitation, and lack of access to basic services. COVID-19 has brought new protection risks and important economic issues. 27% of migrants were unemployed in August, compared to 17% in February. 69% of migrants report limited or no access to health and care services. • Unemployment puts migrants in a much more vulnerable situation. Migrants are exposed to unhealthy living conditions: living in overcrowded, inadequate housing, being at risk of cross-contamination, with an average of 21 migrants living per collective housing site. Increases in violence, abuse and excessive use of force against migrants were recorded, including in some coastal cities and detention centers. • The security situation in Tunisia is more stable and the drivers of migration are more related to economic factors, but not exclusively. Between January and October 2020, there were 12,243 arrivals in Italy from Tunisia, double the number of arrivals at its highest peak in 2017. The impacts of COVID-19 on the economy and mobility restrictions have affected the income of Tunisians and migrants. Up to 53% of migrants lost their jobs as result of the pandemic, a major durability factor. • The arrivals from the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands has grown by 682%, 67% of arrivals in October and November. The Atlantic route is extremely dangerous: between January and mid-November there were 40 shipwrecks along this route. UNHCR and IOM visited in November the Canary Islands and there is hope that, by January 2021, a focal point will be in place in Las Palmas. • Despite lack of data, COVID-19 exacerbated challenges, including protection issues for those taking those routes. <p>MMC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MMC approach takes an inclusive look, irrespective of status, focused on risk and vulnerability. • Data collection started in 2014 in a few countries, usually done face-to-face, with surveys, looking at many aspects, e.g. profile, access to information, decision-making processes, journey conditions, aspirations for destination. 	

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- Since the beginning of the pandemic, MMC switched to different modalities, to remote data collection, for the safety of monitors and respondents. Starting in March 2020, MMC also focused more specifically on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants, including where they were, in terms of access to services, discrimination, understanding of the virus and preventive measures.
- On West Africa & North Africa, MMC is trying to understand the different aspects of mobility, looking at respondents that left after April, when most of countries started putting in place measures such restrictions of movement and partial/total lockdown. Approximately one-third of respondents that left declared their decision-making were influenced by COVID-19 and this will probably increase. The majority reported economic reasons being at the root of their decision to migrate, but other factors also played a role.
- Survey looked at the aspirations to move from the country of origin and capabilities to do so. Most of the respondents reported increased difficulty moving inside the country, e.g. 45% in Libya. MMC observed a combination of increased aspiration to move with decreasing capabilities.
- Looking at the future raised questions: what is COVID-19 going to lead to? Will it lead to increased mixed movements and will this be cross-regional or South to North movements? Will we see more people stuck in their country of origin, unable to move? In transit and destination countries, what will be the impact on migrant smuggling? Often, when there are aspirations to migrate and a decreased capability to do so regularly, this leads to an increase in dangerous journey but also an increased in demand for smuggling.

UNHCR:

- 54% of people who embark on journeys at sea in the Mediterranean are from North Africa.
- Algeria is a concern, as we witnessed increasing departures since the beginning of 2020, with particularly 17,000 young people. They are mainly disillusioned by lack of political change in the country and by the economic situation. Algeria is heading towards difficult times due to lack of financial reserves.
- There are still gaps in measuring willingness to move or what MMC called measuring “involuntary immobility”. One of the key questions is: where we had an increase in terms of internal displacement (Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger with 30% more internally displaced in the Western Sahel), will IDPs move across borders? We do not have data on their intentions, whether they have already moved or not. Data is missing also for those who have lost their job: how quickly will they recover their jobs, how long will it take? Are we equipped to measure it?
- On migration drivers, the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and the loss of illusion in many refugee and migrant’s communities is clear, coupled with increased xenophobia and racism in a number of countries. In countries of origin, disillusion continues on political processes, in relation to pre-/post-election violence. Lack of change or the perception of lack of change are still migration drivers.
- The lack of legal pathways remains on the agenda. It is not new, but the difficult dialogue, in particular between the European and African regions, is likely to remain. We have seen absolutely no progress on legal pathways for refugees and this year, resettlement numbers are historically low.
- It is important to highlight future potential impacts of COVID-19 on trafficking on smuggling: For an Ivorian, today it is easier to get on a boat from Tunisia to Italy rather than buy a ticket to go back home. Smugglers and traffickers – using both expressions interchangeably even if there is a legal difference – adaptation and flexibility has been swift. Probably 70% of departures to the Canary Islands originate from the Western Sahara territory, a place where it is complicated to operate for humanitarian actors. It is clear that smugglers have understood how to use those zones of exclusion to make their business profit.
- Severe gaps in the response includes humanitarians’ inability, so far, to respond to the fact that people had to move to shelters that are less safe or ended up in the street. It is even more complicated in mixed movements situations because there is a lack of adequate programming. Without safe-shelter, no one can take informed decisions about the future. It is unfair to put people in this situation. Often people have been victim of trafficking before arriving in a country and anything that we could do on service provision starts with quality safe-shelters.

Major points arising from discussions

- **Human trafficking:** Among people from West Africa moving via the Mediterranean route, many women are subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse and are trafficked by organized groups, also when reaching Europe.

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- In Libya, displaced populations continue to be extracted money and exploited in detention facilities and warehouses. All those trafficking dynamics are aggravated and very acute in location such as Libya.
- **Migrants access to COVID-19 vaccination campaigns:** Each country will determine its national plan. The UN and civil society organization have an advocacy role to play to ensure that nobody is excluded from access to the vaccines in the pipeline, but this will not extend to prioritizing migrants, refugees or IDPs. They will be considered in terms of needs, vulnerabilities and level of inclusion/exclusion from national systems.
- **UNHCR 10-Point Plan in Action and collection of good practices:** Pending eventual next edition of the Plan, UNHCR is continually monitoring the state of practice, e.g. in relation to the UN Migration Network Working Group on alternatives to detention, as well as with the follow-up to UNHCR's Global Strategy.
- UNHCR uses the good practices to stimulate replication in other places: there may sometimes be limited results or impact due a lack of capacity and resource difficulties. NGOs are strongly encouraged to share their good practices online through the specific platform (see below background section).
- Good practice examples emerged during the pandemic in several European countries, which maintained the capacity to apply for asylum remotely and issued temporary documentation. If technology could be used on all the routes in West and North Africa, people's need to take irregular routes would decrease. We have to use technology to facilitate access to documentation, procedures, quality referrals for different services. There are good lessons learned that we need to operationalize in a number of countries. If there were NGO partners willing to work on this with UNHCR, at the interagency level, a big difference on some of these routes could be made.
- **Rescue at sea:** There is a direct relation between the decreasing numbers of deaths at sea and the number of humanitarian actors helping to look at distressed ships and vehicles across the oceans. The assumption is that one of the reasons why the Atlantic route is so dangerous is probably linked to the lack of program/system for rescue at sea, to help people when they are in distress at sea. The ability to rescue and having actors ready, prepared, trained, and allowed to rescue is vital.
- **Challenges.** People are likely to continue to take risky migration routes. Another aspect that might increase is the number of people being stuck in transit or in destination, e.g. Libya. It is not new but might become more complicated in the future. Lack of access to services for refugees and migrants with a disability is also a challenge.
- We lack understanding of how expectation trends evolve overtime. There is not enough thinking about the implication of changes or trends in term of protection responses and the advocacy and policy responses needed.
- Improvements should be highlighted in terms of training and standard operating procedures within the humanitarian community. However, there is no improvement on services available to people on the routes. On the contrary, the humanitarian community is less mobile, has more difficulties to reach borders and to reach people. E.g., most of the victims of trafficking do not get services, they have no access to justice, no compensation, no solution beyond return. There is a need for clear thinking within the humanitarian community on how we respond to protection risks if we cannot prevent them.
- We need also more search and rescue capacity on land, many border areas are totally out of reach, e.g., Northern Mali, South of Algeria, North of Niger, North West of Chad, North West of Sudan. All those routes that people take are out of reach for the humanitarian community today. We need the support of local authorities, of traditional leaders, of community-based organization, people who are living on those routes, to provide some services, to help humanitarians with quality referrals.

Follow-up/Action points

To NGOs:

- NGOs are encouraged to share good practices for the 10-Point Plan of Action [here](#).
- NGOs can support a renewed focus on service delivery along the mixed movement routes, outside capital cities and on key hubs used by asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees; assist in operating protection safety nets such as emergency shelters, quality referrals; improve outreach with civil society to inform people on effective alternatives to dangerous journeys.

To IOM, UNHCR, and NGOs:

- Complementary and/or joint advocacy for predictable and robust rescue at sea, capacity on all seas, predictable disembarkation mechanisms (expect for Libya because there is no safety there). States have defaulted on their

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obligations in the Central Mediterranean Sea. They should be reminded that if they continue being unwilling to assume their responsibility, a minimum is to let NGOs at sea operate those services needed to save lives.

- We need to engage more effectively in a dialogue with States to talk about what can be done to assist them, to manage refugees and migrants in ways that respect and can safeguard public health but at the same time can be consistent with their rights.
- We should think differently to adapt and work more through innovative ways, including for our outreach, our access to analysis and to understand the phenomenon so as to strengthen our responses. We need to be looking at ways we can strengthen our capacity to provide support. Positive examples need to be disseminated and to encourage States to think about whether they can adapt and improve their actions. E.g., States looking at innovative ways to address some of the issues in the detention and asylum procedures areas.
- We need to do more to identify a collective collaboration with these partners.

Background documents/reports/guidance/websites

- UNHCR, *10-Point Plan of Action*, 2016 Update: <https://www.unhcr.org/the-10-point-plan-in-action.html>
- UNHCR webpage, *Good practices to share for the 10-Point Plan of Action*: <https://www.unhcr.org/good-practices-for-the-10-point-plan-in-action.html>
- MMC, *Quarterly Mixed Migration Updates*: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource-type/quarterly-mixed-migration-update/>
- MMC, *COVID-19 Global Thematic Update #3, impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants with children*, November 2020: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/covid-19-global-thematic-update-3/>
- The Global Protection Cluster, *Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement Contexts*, 2020: https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Introductory-Guide-on-Anti-Trafficking-in-IDP-Contexts_2020_FINAL-1.pdf
- UNHCR, *Compilation of good practices and practical recommendations for European States*, April 2020: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/75453>
- UNHCR portal, for more information on arrivals to Europe from Mediterranean and Canary Islands including factsheets: <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>
- To subscribe to UNHCR Regional Bureau of Europe mailing list and received trends and factsheets on a monthly basis: <https://unhcr.us12.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=32dfed89e178070cc28c63534&id=fde5434c17>
- UNHCR, *The COVID-19 crisis: key protection messages*, April 2020: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/75555>
- UNHCR portal, *COVID-19 Platform on Temporary Measures and Impact on Protection*: https://im.unhcr.org/covid19_platform/
- IOM, *Refugee and migrants children in Europe, Overview of trends for 2019*, June 2020: <https://migration.iom.int/reports/europe-%E2%80%94-refugee-and-migrant-children-europe-overview-trends-january-%E2%80%94-december-2019?close=true>
- IOM & UNHCR, *COVID-19 and mixed population movements: emerging dynamics, risks and opportunities*, May 2020: <https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/covid19-response/emergingdynriskopp76474.pdf>
- UN Network on Migration, *Policy brief, COVID-19 & Immigration Detention: What Can Governments and Other Stakeholders Do?*, April 2020: https://migrationnetwork.un.org/sites/default/files/docs/un_network_on_migration_wg_atd_policy_brief_covid-19_and_immigration_detention.pdf
- UN, Policy brief, *COVID-19 and people on the move*, June 2020: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-covid-19-and-people-move>