

HUMANITARIAN SERVICE POINTS FOR VULNERABLE MIGRANTS

Summary Brief

WHAT ARE HUMANITARIAN SERVICE POINTS?

The IFRC concept of humanitarian service points refers to initiatives aiming to **provide essential services** to vulnerable migrants¹ during their journeys – irrespective of status - without fear of arrest or being reported to the authorities.

A humanitarian service point is a **neutral space along migratory routes** that provides a **welcoming and safe environment** for migrants to access essential services. This requires an absence of violence, abuse or further harm in the process of accessing and receiving humanitarian assistance, as well as the absence of fear of interference by authorities when doing so. While National Societies cannot fully prevent violence or abuse by those determined to use it, nor can they guarantee authorities will respect their humanitarian access, they must do their best to facilitate 'safety' through agreement/understanding with the relevant parties and through strict adherence to their humanitarian mandate. It is therefore strongly recommended that National Societies seek to conclude **formal agreements with relevant authorities** to ensure the ability to operate according to the Fundamental Principles is respected at all times.

Humanitarian service points may include **fixed or mobile initiatives**, reaching migrants wherever needs exist. The key objective is to contribute to the safety, dignity and protection of vulnerable migrants at all stages of their journey and to promote resilience. There is no one-size-fits-all model of operation: in certain locations humanitarian service points may simply provide critical information; in others healthcare might be provided. Services will depend on migrants' needs and the resources and capacity of the National Society.

WHY ARE HUMANITARIAN SERVICE POINTS NEEDED?

It is the experience of many National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that migrants face significant challenges in meeting basic needs and accessing essential services during their journeys, often experiencing abuse, exploitation and harm. Irregular migrants, in particular, are often denied access or fear approaching service providers due to the possibility of arrest or being reporting to authorities. As outlined in the IFRC *'New Walled Order Report'*² there is an urgent need to address both formal barriers to accessing essential services, such as laws limiting access based on migration status, as well as informal barriers, such as language, culture, cost and lack of awareness as to what services exist.

The scope for humanitarian access is also narrowing. There are suggestions that activities of humanitarian organizations should be curtailed, for instance, by banning food distribution to migrant camps or discouraging rescues at sea. This trend of *"criminalizing compassion"* puts lives at risk and restrictive legislation continues to hinder access to life-saving support.³

HOW WILL HUMANITARIAN SERVICE POINTS HELP?

Humanitarian service points would contribute to saving lives and reducing suffering along migratory trails by helping ensure all vulnerable migrants, irrespective of legal status, are able to access critical humanitarian assistance, which may include emergency and maternal healthcare, shelter, food, psychosocial support, information about their rights and processes, and/or services that help them to restore family links.

¹ In order to capture the full extent of humanitarian concerns related to migration, the IFRC description of migrants is deliberately broad: Migrants are persons who leave or flee their habitual residence to go to new places – usually abroad – to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects. Migration can be voluntary or involuntary, but most of the time a combination of choices and constraints are involved (IFRC Migration Policy, 2009). This includes, among others, labour migrants, stateless migrants, and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities. It also concerns refugees

and asylum seekers, notwithstanding the fact that they constitute a special category under international law.

² IFRC (2018) *New Walled Order: How barriers to basic services turn migration into a humanitarian crisis*: <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document/new-walled-order-barriers-basic-services-turn-migration-humanitarian-crisis/>

³ See, for example, *'Stop Soros'* legislation in Hungary: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/20/hungary-passes-anti-immigrant-stop-soros-laws>

By being strategically located along migratory trails – in countries of transit, destination and upon return – these points would offer humanitarian assistance where public services may otherwise be unavailable or inaccessible, improving health and safety outcomes for both vulnerable migrants and the communities that host them. Moreover, humanitarian service points would provide an avenue for National Societies to confidently deliver essential services to all migrants - without discrimination and irrespective of status - without risk of interference from authorities.

Through coordination and cooperation – based on a mutual understanding of the auxiliary role of National Societies – humanitarian service points would support States in meeting their obligations under international law and ultimately save lives and ensure dignity. They would allow National Societies and the IFRC network to “package” existing and new services in a way comprehensible to migrants and partners and would promote consistency of support across migratory trails.

FROM WORDS TO ACTION – OPERATIONALIZING POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND COMMITMENTS

Humanitarian service points are strongly aligned with the **IFRC Global Migration Strategy 2018-2022**⁴, including Strategic Aim 1: Save Lives, Ensure Dignity and the Strategy’s five Priority Areas. Strategic Aim 1 seeks to ensure that “*people migrating, irrespective of their legal status, receive the necessary humanitarian assistance and protection at all stages of the journey, including addressing the specific needs of the most vulnerable migrants.*”

Establishing humanitarian service points supports Key Outcomes of Strategic Aim 1, including: to ensure that migrants - particularly those in an irregular situation - have meaningful access to assistance, information and referrals to other services at key points on migration routes; are able to restore and maintain contact with their families;

and have access to medical assistance and other health services according to their needs.

Humanitarian service points are also aligned with the Movement’s past and present priority areas on migration, as outlined in **Resolution 3 on Migration: Ensuring Access, Dignity, Respect for Diversity and Social Inclusion**,⁵ the Council of Delegates **Call for Action on the Humanitarian Needs of Vulnerable Migrants**⁶ and Movement recommendations on humanitarian priorities in the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration** (GCM), namely Movement Priority Area 2: Guarantee that all migrants, irrespective of legal status, have effective access to essential services.⁷

Given the significance of the adoption of the GCM by the majority of UN Member States in December 2018⁸, humanitarian service points also present an opportunity for National Societies to contribute to GCM implementation, particularly as relates to **Objective 15** (provide access to basic services to migrants) - in which States commit “*to ensure that all migrants, regardless of their migration status, can exercise their human rights through safe access to basic services*”.

States further aim to “*ensure that cooperation between service providers and immigration authorities does not exacerbate vulnerabilities of irregular migrants by compromising their safe access to basic services or unlawfully infringing upon the human rights to privacy, liberty and security of person at places of basic service delivery*” and to “*establish and strengthen holistic and easily accessible service points at local level, that are migrant inclusive, offer relevant information on basic services in a gender- and disability-responsive as well as child-sensitive manner, and facilitate safe access thereto.*”⁹

The Movement’s role in supporting GCM implementation is explicitly noted in paragraph 44.

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⁴ IFRC Global Migration Strategy 2018-2022.

https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/12/IFRC_StrategyOnMigration_EN_20171222.pdf

⁵ Resolution 3 – Migration: Ensuring access, dignity, respect for diversity and social inclusion. 31st International Conference of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Geneva, Switzerland, 28 November-1 December 2011.

⁶ *Call to Action on the Humanitarian Needs of Vulnerable Migrants*, Council of Delegates, 2017

⁷ *The Global Compact for Migration: From words to action – Recommendations on humanitarian priorities from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement* (December 2018)

⁸ 152 Member States voted in favour, 5 voted against (Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, United States and Poland), with 12 abstentions (Algeria, Austria, Australia, Bulgaria, Chile, Italy, Latvia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Romania, Singapore, Switzerland). See; <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1028941>

⁹ GCM, Objective 15, para. 31