

Event Report

First Regional Forum on Communication and Migration

 August 24, 2022 - San Salvador, El Salvador

Fulfillment of the objectives of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) is closely related to processes of communication and access to information between States, migrants and various stakeholders. However, the enormous diversity of information and interlocutors involved, the social, cultural and linguistic barriers, the technological and access gap, among other factors present in the region, such as lack of credibility, prejudice, fake news and rumors, increase the challenges to ensure access to truthful information and coordination among key actors.

In such a complex context, it is more than necessary to have a strategic approach to communication that allows a critical reading of the context, knowledge of the audiences, the creation of alliances, as well as the planning of timely and relevant actions that guarantee the fulfillment of the right to access information.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), in coordination with the Pro-Tempore Presidency (PPT) of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) and the Working Group on Irregular and Mass Migration, held the First Regional Forum on Communication and Migration in order to highlight the strategic role of communication in human mobility, specifically in the management of migration and compliance with the GCM.

Objective of the Forum

Generate a space for learning and regional dialogue among key actors to jointly develop agreements and inputs for the publication of a guide of regional recommendations on communications and human mobility.

Participants

Participants included representatives of the delegations of the member countries of the RCM (Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the United States), regional organizations, ILO, SICA, ICRC, the Regional Network of Civil Organizations for Migration (RNCOM) and representatives of civil society with experience in the issues discussed.

Structure of the Forum

The Forum was held in El Salvador and was divided as follows:

- Inaugural lectures
- Thematic panel
- Simultaneous working groups
- Plenary of conclusions, priorities and recommendations on communication and migration in the region.



One of the expected products of the Forum is to generate agreements and inputs for the publication of a guide of regional recommendations on communications and human mobility. The following is the report of agreements and inputs:

Inaugural Lectures



The Role of Communication in the Fulfillment of Global Development and Migration Frameworks, with Emphasis on the Global Compact on Migration.



The Forum began with an inaugural lecture on the importance of the role of communication in the fulfillment of global frameworks, mainly the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), which was given by Florence Kim, Director of Strategic Communication for the United Nations Migration Network. She began by highlighting the importance of the Forum, since it is necessary to generate interactive and inclusive communication. This is possible by involving all stakeholders, listening to their concerns and perceptions and involving them in decision making. To this end, she emphasized the need to begin to conceive that communication is not only about generating public information and raising awareness; it is about generating advocacy by communicating with impact to achieve a change in policies; mobilizing all sectors of society to become generators of change; creating and disseminating narratives and life stories as they are key to understanding the reality of the migratory context; and finally fostering public trust in communications.

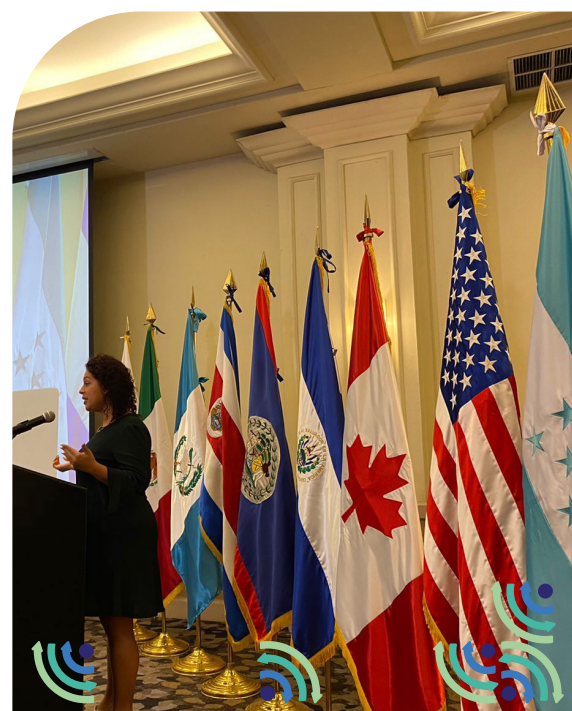


*Regional Overview:
Communication Needs and Trends on Migration*



Tatiana Chacón, Regional Officer for Communication for Development, presented the main findings detected in a series of reports carried out by the IOM, in order to contextualize and highlight the needs and trends in communication in migratory contexts. Among the trends, she highlighted the growing use and access to the Internet in the region and among migrants; the main sources of information on migration used by them; and the main barriers identified, such as the centralization of information and messages and the lack of trust in official channels. She also pointed out existing information needs related to migration procedures, human rights and services.

Both conferences served as a frame of reference for addressing the topics that were developed throughout the sessions.



Thematic Panel



The panel was developed as a discussion in which each participant shared the main challenges they have identified in their countries in accessing information on migration.



Panel: *Regional Outlook on Communication and Migration: Challenges and Perceptions from Civil Society*



Moderated by IOM's Regional Communications Officer, the panel was attended by representatives of civil society from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico and Panama who have closely experienced migration processes. A Nicaraguan migrant also participated and shared her experience of migrating to Costa Rica.

Some of the findings presented by civil society were:

- Community-based and locally participatory communication processes should be developed to address the forms and codes of communication that exist in each community. Currently, migrants are informed through family, friends, smugglers and social networks to join the caravans, and refer to the "smugglers" as "family guides".
- Civil society representatives who provide direct assistance to migrants in rural areas consider that it is a challenge to get closer to governments, especially at a central level. Similarly, it is considered that in rural areas, counselors or community leaders should be included to a greater extent in communication strategies, since they are key to providing information to migrants on how to migrate regularly.
- It has been considered extremely important to promote communication channels managed by migrants themselves.
- In countries of origin, transit and destination, a public policy is needed to include topics related to human mobility in basic school curricula in order to prevent risks and avoid the generation of discrimination and xenophobia in the classroom.
- In the area of labor, efforts should be made to ensure that employers are aware of the procedures for hiring migrants in their countries. In addition, trade workshops are considered essential for returnees to have a process of social inclusion when they return to their communities.
- It is necessary to generate more information regarding migrants' rights. It has been noted that the lack of documentation required to access migration processes, prevent migrants from having access to basic rights (education, health, justice, employment) in the host countries and it is difficult to find information on solutions and alternatives.
- It is considered that greater efforts should be made to ensure that the materials and offices that provide information on migration processes have adequate universal accessibility for people with disabilities.



Working Groups



Six group work groups were held in which participants generated concrete recommendations for strategic communication based on their experiences and knowledge.

The working groups were divided into the following thematic areas:

- Communication with extra-regional and in-transit populations.
- Communication on migration policy and procedures.
- Communication with vulnerable populations.
- Communication on raising awareness of migrant smuggling and human trafficking.
- Communication for the inclusion of migrants and the elimination of xenophobia.
- Communication for the prevention of irregular migration.

Each working group was moderated by a representative of an international organization, who provided a context on the topic and on the needs and barriers included in the communication processes, so that participants could present good practices and identify strategies to solve the challenges identified.

The main findings of each working group are detailed below:





Working group: Communication with extra-regional and in-transit populations

At this working group, it was explained that Mesoamerica is one of the most important migratory corridors in the world. The extra-regional population transits the region in a sustained manner over time, so that the States and organizations must prepare for their attention and seek to make their passage through the countries as humane and less risky as possible. It was also emphasized that this attention means understanding that communication is not synonymous with a video or a flyer. The fact that a person knows how and where to access essential services such as health or food, in which country he/she is or what transportation he/she can use, are communication actions of great impact in reducing the vulnerabilities of the population. Therefore, the main recommendations of the working group were:



- **Strengthen information and orientation work at official borders.**

It is necessary to strengthen the communication capacities and resources of personnel working in institutions, reception centers, shelters, among other places, who have direct contact with migrants so that this passage through an official border also represents a source of reliable information and guidance. Otherwise, misinformation, fake news and trafficking networks are encouraged.



- **Recognize the diversity of migratory flows.**

It is necessary to understand that it is not enough to think of communicating with migrants if they are conceived as something homogeneous. There are people of different nationalities, ages, schooling levels, and with different gender identities and cultures that must be considered when creating messages.



- **Recognize vulnerabilities in mixed flows.**

When creating messages, it should be taken into account that refugees, children and adolescents, as well as women, the elderly and the LGBTIQ+ population are more vulnerable to the conditions of the route, crimes and access to information. As a result, it is important to have graphic messages and ideally have trained staff that can attend to these populations.



- **Create simple messages and use a variety of media.**

It is necessary to generate simple messages and use multiple formats to increase the chances that the message will be received. It is important to keep in mind that digital media can become a valuable complement to reach populations in transit countries from a preventive approach.





- **Generate a regional manual with timely information.**

It is suggested that information on the rights, services and duties of migrants in different countries be integrated, compiled and updated by UN agencies, governments and civil society.



- **Promote inclusion and peer-to-peer communication.**

It is necessary to include migrants in the information processes, as peer-to-peer communication is fundamental in contexts surrounded by uncertainty or distrust.



- **Raise awareness among host communities.**

Host communities should be aware of the rights, needs and services required by migrants through various means of communication.



- **Generate strategic alliances.**

It is necessary to generate alliances with different sectors and identify strategic areas where migrants transit are in order to place and disseminate information; the usefulness of public transportation has been emphasized for this purpose.





Working group: Communication on migration policy and procedures.

During the plenary session, it was stated that many challenges related to this issue must be addressed in terms of legislation changes and migration policy, since they are not within the communications area. Likewise, it was stated that there are programs and mechanisms that are not being properly promoted or facilitated. In this sense, this working group and these conclusions were specifically framed in the needs of communication and information on the subject, since information on immigration procedures and policy is one of the most needed by migrants, but it is one of the most difficult to access for many reasons. Therefore, the main recommendations of the working group were as follows:



• Centralize and provide a step-by-step approach to migration procedures.

It is necessary to centralize the paperwork and information on migration procedures and look for different formats to facilitate it. Migratory procedures should be written in simple language, that is, understandable to people with basic schooling. Emphasis was also placed on the need to disseminate information in spaces that are closer to migrants, such as activities or community centers, meeting points and social networks, avoiding that information remains only on web platforms or in institutional spaces.



• Plan actions based on empathy and non-discrimination of migrants.

It should be considered that migration procedures are often accompanied by feelings of mistrust and misinformation. Actions undertaken to communicate about migration procedures should take into account these barriers and try to build trust with civil society, community leaders and other approaches.



Strengthen the capacities of the staff.

The personnel who receive and process cases must have the skills and resources to guide migrants in an assertive, clear and empathetic manner. Likewise, priority should be given to person-to-person service whenever possible. It is also considered necessary for them to know in detail the processes, including the existing exceptions to improve services.





Train and raise awareness among institutional communicators.

Efforts should be made to ensure that institutional communicators are aware of migration policies, regulations and procedures, as well as of the diversities and vulnerabilities of the population, in order to improve the content, they generate.



• Recognize that digital is important, but it is not everything.

It is of vital importance to provide more accessible and user-friendly information on migratory procedures in digital platforms. However, there must always be a backup for dissemination in other formats for those who do not have access to digital information.



• Improve trust relations with the institutions.

It is necessary to change the approach with which information on migratory procedures and policies is presented in order to counteract the idea of complicated or inaccessible processes and to emphasize the benefits for people in terms of access to essential basic services and more secure employment sources.



• Strengthen communication between the different government levels.

In order to make the responsibility of communicating about procedures and policies a shared responsibility and as a way to ensure that it always reaches the local level.



• Create sustainable communication processes.

It is frequent that efforts are made to provide information at specific times that are not sustainable over time or that are difficult to adapt as certain procedures change (e.g., posters, banners, videos). As a result, it is necessary to look for channels that can be updated quickly and economically, in order to provide consistent information in all media.





Working group: communication with vulnerable populations people in vulnerable conditions

During the working group, it was explained that communication and information processes with vulnerable populations should be carried out jointly with professionals in the area of protection. A symbiotic relationship should be established, where communication efforts will make possible many protection actions and vice versa. It should then be kept in mind that communication is not particularly a product; and that access to information is one of the principles of protection. Therefore, the main recommendations of the working group were as follows:



- **Avoid generalizations at all costs.**

Vulnerable populations are very diverse and each one of them has different particularities and information needs that should be taken into account when developing communication products.



- **Follow the principles of protection in all communication actions.**

Human rights approach should be considered, seeking to provide information and support for migrants to know and claim their rights; the principle of do not harm, understanding that support to migrants should not cause any harm to migrants or to the community that welcomes them; the principle of non-discrimination, avoiding reinforcing stereotypes or prejudices based on origin, age, ethnicity, gender, etc.; and self-determination and participation, including migrants in the design, validation and dissemination of messages.





- **Create guidelines and trainings on how to address the issue of people in vulnerable conditions in the media and communication campaigns.**

It is essential to address the media and communication campaigns' treatment of people in vulnerable conditions, since in many cases the identity is not protected or there is double victimization. It is recommended that guidelines be created for the representation and inclusion of people in vulnerable conditions in communication products, considering protection principles.



- **Build reliable channels to communicate with people in vulnerable conditions.**

People in vulnerable conditions require reliable channels to access information; therefore, strategies and alliances should be sought to enable this approach. It is also important to consider the importance of generating community communication channels and the use of digital native media to reach indigenous communities. New information technologies should also be considered to disseminate messages.



- **Inform about rights and available services.**

It is important for people in vulnerable conditions to know their rights and the services available to them. Unfortunately, this information is not always available or accessible.



- **Raise awareness and strengthen the capacities of government workers.**

In addition to building channels of trust and providing information on rights and available services, it is essential to guarantee dignified treatment in all government agencies, including communication areas, at all levels and in consular networks that have direct contact with migrants.





Working group:

Communication on raising awareness of migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

There was a discussion on how migrant smuggling and human trafficking are two closely connected crimes, as the vulnerability in which migrants are placed when they are smuggled is often exploited by human trafficking networks. It could go from abandoning people in dangerous areas to exploitation, identity theft and money laundering. A wide variety of criminal acts proliferate on the margins of migrant smuggling. It was therefore considered necessary to address these issues in the field of communication so that people have the tools to identify these crimes and avoid falling victim to them. As a result, the main recommendations of the working group were as follows:



- **Create education efforts on the crimes of trafficking and smuggling.**

It is necessary to educate on both topics and explain the differences between the two crimes using language that is simple for audiences, as well as to eliminate myths and incorrect terms. To this end, it is necessary to carry out training efforts in schools, community spaces, with government workers and the media, and to complement these efforts with public information campaigns.



- **Develop guidelines for the dissemination of testimonies and representation of victims to avoid reproducing stereotypes.**

It is necessary to generate a series of recommendations for representing and interviewing the victims of these crimes, in order to ensure that the principle of confidentiality is not infringed, and stereotypes are not reproduced in the construction of any communication product.



- **Design reliable channels for consultation and reporting.**

There are barriers to report these crimes. To improve communication on these issues, governments should provide safe, accessible, confidential and close channels for consultations and complaints.





- **The cultural factor, mainly associated with migrant smuggling, should always be taken into account.**

In many of the countries in the region, the figure of the smuggler is very close to them because they have a family member who has traveled with one or because someone in the community is dedicated to this work. Therefore, it is necessary to opt for an alternative narrative that shows the implications of migrating in an irregular manner.



- **Generate specific strategies for the diaspora.**

Considering that, on many occasions, they are the ones who finance travel through smugglers, specific content should be generated to raise awareness of the implications and risks.



- **Diversify the narrative of campaigns and communication products on human trafficking.**

It is considered relevant to have other narratives and approaches to talk about human trafficking, for example, targeting also the "consuming" sector.





Working group: Communication for the inclusion of migrants and the elimination of xenophobia.

In this working group, xenophobia was discussed as a phenomenon that is part of the region's societies and how the discourses that have been developed and that portray the other person as a threat to the host communities have helped to create feelings of rejection towards migrants. Those feelings and acts of rejection and xenophobia can make social inclusion of migrants in the communities impossible. Therefore, the main recommendations of the working group were:



- **A narrative of cohesion rather than one of accusation.**

Communications should avoid using resources such as finger-pointing, denunciation and accusations against the host communities. It is important to remember that sometimes, these same communities are going through situations of exclusion and inequality; so, a focus on cohesion, integration and social development is more advisable.



- **Develop community activities to promote inclusion.**

It is recommended to identify topics that bring together migrants and locals: food, music, places and common experiences, and based on this, propose activities that allow for coexistence and reinforce the idea of community.



- **Increase the importance of the representation of migrants in official discourse.**

The way in which migrants are included and represented in national governmental discourse and public opinion is important. If migrants are only mentioned when talking about migration or are only mentioned in terms of vulnerability, it contributes to a separatist vision. Including migrants, both literally and symbolically, highlighting their contributions to the country, reinforces a vision of integration.



- **Recognize that the media is a key actor.**

Sometimes the narratives they use help to create imaginaries, where the use of terms such as "waves of migrants" reinforce the idea that they are a threat to host communities. In this sense, it is necessary to raise the awareness of the media and press offices of government institutions, since in most cases, the institutions are the official sources of the media. It is also necessary to consider anchors, columnists and other people involved in transmitting information about migrants.





- **Create actions to eliminate xenophobia in social media.**

Xenophobia has been enhanced in social media, which, through anonymity, allow people to express messages without facing the consequences.



- **Explore new approaches that highlight the contributions of migrants to countries of origin, transit and destination.**

It is important to talk about migration not only when it is linked an emergency. Position messages based on solidarity and empathy can be an effective source: the idea of "putting oneself in the other person's shoes".



- **Generate evidence and share it with key stakeholders.**

Evidence to identify the level of xenophobia and discrimination present in the communities and to disprove the most common prejudices and stereotypes with which migrants are usually associated. To this end, it is vital to work with the press offices of the institutions and the media.



- **To make migration visible as part of the history of humanity.**

It is considered that approaches that make "genealogy" visible can work to show that "we are all migrants" and facilitate identification with migrants.





Working group: Communication for the prevention of irregular migration

The prevention of irregular migration entails the need to address important structural changes, which are generated from many other aspects, however, it was stated that these must be accompanied by communication processes that inform and promote informed decision making on migration. Therefore, the main recommendations of the working group were:



- **Generate actions that guide and show the options that exist to achieve regular migration.**

Guidance and accompaniment in regular migration processes, especially those related to labor mobility, are of vital importance. In some cases, regular migration options are not diverse or accessible; however, there are contexts where mechanisms exist, but they are not disclosed or brought closer to the population.



- **Raise awareness of the risks of regular migration and make rights known.**

It is important to consider the knowledge and attitudes of the population regarding the risks of irregular migration; in many cases the risks are known, and people are willing to assume them; in other cases, there is no knowledge of the risks, and they should be informed. In addition, it is important for the population to be aware of their rights and current legislation.



- **Combat misinformation and rumors about migration.**

There is a lot of misinformation and rumors (sometimes created by trafficking networks) regarding migration policies that encourage regular migration. Having government communication that combats misinformation is key.



- **Provide information on local alternatives.**

If local alternatives for work, study or entrepreneurship are being developed, they should be disseminated and facilitated as part of prevention strategies.



- **Consider community spaces to disseminate messages.**

In addition to the mass media, community spaces should be included in order to provide information on the advantages and options for irregular migration.



Conclusion



During this First Regional Forum on Communication and Migration, the importance of starting to talk about communication as a transversal axis of migration and not as an isolated topic was recognized.

It was also an opportunity to generate a learning space among key actors on the diverse needs, barriers and considerations present in the communication processes on human mobility in the region.

The agreements and conclusions of this Forum will serve to generate the specific guidelines for the regional recommendations guide on communications and human mobility; and will serve to influence the inter-institutional actions of the RCM member countries, observing organizations and civil Society.






Conferencia Regional sobre Migración
Regional Conference on Migration



**Regional Conference
on Migration 2022**
El Salvador • Presidency Pro-Témpore



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