**REGIONAL WORKSHOP OF EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES**

**ON ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR THE VOLUNTARY RETURN OF MIGRANTS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS IN THE MEMBER COUNTRIES OF RCM (REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION)**

City of Panama

July 16-17, 2018

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**BACKGROUND**

Mesoamerica is characterized as a region of origin, transit, destination and return of migrants. Several factors, largely related to the use of irregular migration channels, expose migrants to situations of vulnerability in the migration process and in the country of destination, which render them victims of violations, abuses, kidnappings, extortions and diseases. Natural disasters can also turn migrants into very vulnerable people. Whether in transit or in countries of destination, these situations can drive migrants to seek assistance, among other issues, in returning to their country.

Since 2010, the United Nations Migration Agency (IOM) has been implementing the Mesoamerica Regional Program, whose main objective is to contribute to the development and implementation of strategies in the region for the promotion of regular, orderly and safe migration by seeking the appropriate protection of the most vulnerable migrants.

Under this program, and with the objective of developing capacity for a comprehensive migration governance that includes the protection and assistance to migrants in situations of vulnerability throughout the migration process, IOM is mapping assistance programs for the voluntary return of vulnerable migrants that have been implemented by the member countries of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) in order to assist their fellow citizens abroad, and/or to provide assistance to immigrants who are in their territory.

Within the framework of this regional study, IOM proposes a workshop to exchange best practices and experiences in order to socialize and encourage discussion on the preliminary findings of the mapping of existing programs, initiatives or funds for assistance to migrants in situations of vulnerability, with an emphasis on voluntary return programs.

In a broad sense, “return” is understood by IOM as "the act or process of returning. The return can be within the territorial limits of a country (...) or, from the receiving country (transit or destination) to the country of origin[[1]](#footnote-1) ".

Different categories of return can be identified correspondingly:

* Voluntary: The independent or assisted return to the country of origin, the country of transit or to a third country based on the free will of the person who returns.
* Forced: The involuntary transfer of persons or groups to the jurisdiction of a State outside of their habitual residence, as part of a government policy.
* Assisted: The return, with logistical and financial support, of rejected asylum seekers, trafficked migrants, homeless students, qualified nationals and other migrants who cannot or do not want to stay in the host country and who want to return to their country of origin.
* Spontaneous.

This workshop will focus on voluntary returns. And in particular, special emphasis will be placed on cases that require State assistance for these voluntary returns, defined by the IOM as Assisted Voluntary Return.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The workshop will focus on the funds and programs implemented by the States (or local governments if applicable) in the region, as well as on the study of regional funds, such as the "Reserve Fund for the return of highly vulnerable migrants" of the RCM and the “Assistance and Assisted Voluntary Return Fund” implemented by IOM in the region through the Mesoamerica Program.

In addition, the workshop will be attended by representatives of other countries that will present other experiences that are being developed not only in the region but also at the international level. The workshop will also promote dialogue and exchange of experiences to draw on the initiatives that contribute to improving the protection of migrants in vulnerable situations who require or decide to voluntarily return to their countries of origin.

**OBJECTIVE**

**Overall objective**

To share experiences, existing good practices and lessons learned on assistance to migrants in vulnerable situations with special emphasis on assisted voluntary returns that take place in the countries of the RCM.

**Specific objectives**

* Contribute to knowledge base of the actions that are carried out in the countries of the RCM in the field of assisted voluntary returns;
* Identify opportunities for reinforcement and regional synergies associated with assisted voluntary returns;
* Receive feedback and complement the preliminary results of the diagnosis of existing assistance programs for vulnerable migrants, with special emphasis on assisted voluntary returns;
* Exchange regional and international experiences of assisted voluntary returns;
* Promote information exchange and good practices that contribute to offering effective responses to the needs of migrants in vulnerable situations.

**PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS**

The workshop will be addressed to officials of Foreign Affairs Ministries, in particular to the Liaison Officer Network for Consular Protection of the RCM, Departments of Migration and Foreigners, personnel of other governmental entities specifically related to assistance to migrants in situations of vulnerability and/or returns, whether they be nationals abroad or migrants in the countries of the RCM.

**They are kindly requested to coordinate internally with the institutions concerned in order to send a consolidated list of participants.**

The organizers will cover participation costs of a maximum of three delegates per country.

Furthermore, an invitation will be extended to the observer organizations of the RCM and to the Regional Network of Civil Organizations for Migration (RNCOM).

**METHODOLOGY AND CONTENTS**

The workshop will use a mixed methodology, including presentations by international experts who will share success stories and good practices, group work and sessions, and interventions of the facilitators for the introduction and conclusion of each agenda item. There will also be plenary exchange sessions. The IOM facilitation team will contact the different representatives of the invited countries to prepare the interventions according to their corresponding sessions.

Given that a mapping is presented, time will be given for the following activities:

* Presentation of standards applicable to assisted voluntary return processes and analysis of what can be considered as good practice, highlighting relevant aspects that may be useful for the institutions of the participating countries.
* Presentation of existing regional funds for voluntary returns.
* Presentation of the programs or funds in those countries where they exist.
* Presentation of relevant experiences from countries that are not part of the RCM.

The above contents will be discussed during both group and plenary sessions.

**Preliminary AGENDA**

**Monday 16 July 2018**

**08:00 – 08:15 Registration of participants**

**08:15 – 08:30 Opening Remarks**

*Technical Secretary of the RCM*

*IOM Representative*

*Representative of the RCM Pro Tempore Presidency, Government of Panama*

**08:30 – 08:45 Session 1: Presentation of the participants and the facilitating team**

* Ice breaker activity
* Presentation of the participants and the expectations of the workshop
* Presentation of the agenda
* Presentation of the objective of the diagnosis

Facilitator: IOM

**08:45 – 09:30 Session 2: Brief review of the migratory situation in the region**

* Regional migratory situation: Dynamics, Population Groups and Statistics

Facilitator: IOM

**09:30 – 09:45 Coffee break**

**09:45 – 10:30 Session 3: Migrants in situations of vulnerability, existing profiles and applicable standards**

* Concept of assisted voluntary return
* Profiles to identify migrants in situations of vulnerability
* Statistics on voluntary return
* Standards applicable to voluntary return processes

Facilitator:IOM

**10:30 – 11:30 Session 4: Assistance and voluntary return programs for global and regional migrants: the experience of the Reserve Fund for the return of highly vulnerable migrants of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM)**

* Profiles of the migrants assisted through the RCM fund
* Procedures for voluntary return assistance

Facilitator: IOM

**02:00 – 03:45 Session 4.b: Assistance and voluntary return programs for global and regional migrants: the experience of IOM (HASM Fund, Mesoamerica Program)**

* Migrants in situations of vulnerability assisted through IOM funds
* Procedures for voluntary return assistance

Facilitator: IOM

**12:30 – 01:30 Lunch**

**01:30 – 03:30 Session 5: Presentation of the programs of the member countries of the RCM:**

* Presentation per country:
* Programs, projects or funds they have
* What does it consist in
* Target population
* Lessons learned
* Plenary session

Facilitator: IOM

**03:30 – 03:45 Coffee break**

**04:00 – 05:00 Session 6: Presentation of programs of extra-regional countries:**

* Presentation per country:
* Programs, projects or funds they have
* What does it consist in
* Target population
* Lessons learned
* Plenary session

Facilitator: IOM

**Tuesday 17 July 2018**

**08:00 – 08:45 Session 6 (continuation) – Presentation of programs of extra-regional countries:**

* Presentation per country:
* Programs, projects or funds they have
* What does it consist in
* Target population
* Lessons learned
* Plenary session

Facilitator: IOM

**08:45 – 09:30 Session 7: Specific programs of some countries that send emigrants who transit the region**

* Specific programs of countries that send emigrants who transit the region
* Identification of good practices for RCM member countries

Facilitator: IOM

**09:30 – 09:45 Coffee break**

**09:45 – 11:40 Session 8: Identifications of key elements, challenges of existing programs, projects and funds**

* Group work
* Plenary session

Facilitator: IOM

**11:40 – 12:30 Dialogue, plenary session and conclusions**

* ¿Which aspects must be strengthened?
* What are the main conclusions?

Facilitator: OIM

**12:30 – 12:45 Evaluation and closure of the workshop**

1. IOM, *Glossary on Migration*, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibidem. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)