



Submission on behalf of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to the Senate of Canada Standing Committee on Human Rights

5 December 2023

1. Introduction:

The challenges and needs of people on the move are multifaceted, demanding our collective attention and compassion. The **International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** is a membership-based organization made up of 191 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. Our members provide essential services and assistance to people on the move throughout their migratory journey. Meeting people where they are, with assistance grounded in our fundamental humanitarian principles.

2. Context:

From IFRC's perspective, we would like to highlight five key trends that we are currently seeing in the Europe Region, recognizing that these are trends and issues that we are seeing in regions around the world:

- One of our most pressing concerns is **the perilous journey that migrants face crossing the Mediterranean**, which has become one of the deadliest migratory routes in the world. Sadly, it is not the only dangerous route and we can share countless other examples in Africa, in the Americas and in Asia with too many lives lost in the search of safety. The lack of safe pathways not only places individuals at risk of losing their lives, but also results in many being separated from their families.

Tragically, these circumstances make migrants vulnerable to exploitation by smugglers, including risks of sexual and gender based violence, trafficking and abuse. In Europe, the absence of a coordinated international search and rescue mechanism is perpetuating this crisis.

- Unfortunately, **people on the move are facing more and more barriers in accessing protection in Europe**. The erection of walls and fences at borders reflects a troubling trend of heightened security measures along migratory routes. This not only impedes the progress of those seeking safety but also raises questions about the humanity of such deterrents, further underscoring the urgent need for a humane and comprehensive approach to migration.
- Adding to these difficulties is the **limited access to information and essential services** for migrants, especially when on the move. The impact of this restriction is particularly acute for those who have suffered abuse, exploitation, or lack proper documentation. This can also further undermine trust with authority figures, further exacerbating vulnerability and exclusion for people on the move.
- In **destination countries, migrants and refugees encounter numerous barriers**, including language difficulties, insufficient knowledge of rights, legal and administrative challenges, and limited access to essential services like health, education, or the labor market.
- Perhaps equally distressing is the **stigmatizing rhetoric surrounding migrants in Europe. This negative framing** fails to recognize the capacities, skills, and assets that migrants bring to communities.

3. Global Cooperation and Responsibility Sharing:

The **IFRC network, collectively, ensures the provision of essential services to meet the diverse humanitarian needs of migrants, both along migratory routes and in displaced communities**. Our route-based approach is realized through Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs) – neutral, safe, and welcoming spaces - managed by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. These HSPs, strategically located across major migratory routes, from the Balkans to Greece, Slovakia, and even on the rescue ship, the Ocean Viking in the Central Mediterranean Sea, serve as crucial hubs for providing information and humanitarian assistance. But we cannot do this work alone.

In the face of complex migration challenges, **global cooperation and solidarity is not merely a choice but an imperative**. Unfortunately, as we witness in too many places, global solidarity falls short of what is urgently required. In Europe, we have seen how

global cooperation can be hampered by overseas development assistance eligibility criteria preventing even willing donors from supporting countries along the migration routes.

The world's response to the refugee crisis resulting from the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine offers some hope for what is possible when there is shared political will and global cooperation and solidarity. We saw swift and decisive action was taken as nations opened their borders, providing refuge to those fleeing the conflict. Humanitarian aid and resources poured in, showcasing a united front in supporting the displaced. The collaborative efforts of the world showcased the power of empathy and shared responsibility. As a continent, Europe stood together, exemplifying the true spirit of solidarity and compassion in times of dire need.

The IFRC is looking to Canada to continue to play a leadership role in the international community on this important topic through its participation in global forums, such as the Global Refugee Forum.

4. Recommendations

We would like to offer the following key recommendations for the Government of Canada as it considers how it can continue to advance refugee protection and assistance around the world.

- We recommend that Canada advocate for **amendments to Official Development Assistance eligibility criteria** to enable support to countries facing large-scale population movements along migratory routes.
- We encourage Canada to work with the EU and its Member States to advance efforts to establish operation and maintenance of **adequate, coordinated, and effective search and rescue operations** covering the entire Mediterranean Basin. We would ask that Canada encourage member states to ensure that individuals, companies, and organizations which provide support or assistance to migrants in distress must not be obstructed or penalized for their efforts to help people on the move at sea.
- **Invest in local responders**, including refugee-led organisations and ones with expertise in protection, who are well placed to identify and address cultural and other barriers to the safety of women, girls, and other marginalised groups.
- **Safe pathways** are key to reducing the number of people who take enormous risks to reach Europe. We encourage Canada to work in close collaboration with the EU to share experience and lessons on the development of additional opportunities for dignified and safe migration. Canada has a key role to play in sharing its experience

in resettlement and the EU should be encouraged to urgently set up more pathways for people in need of protection to seek safety, including through resettlement, humanitarian visas, community sponsorship and family reunification procedures.

- The **EU Migration and Asylum Pact**, currently under negotiation, offers an opportunity to reinforce protection and assistance for people on the move. The outcomes of this legislative reform are critical. It will determine how human beings are treated when entering EU territory and what space humanitarian actors will have to deliver assistance to migrants. We encourage Canada to work in close collaboration with its EU partners to advocate for a EU Migration and Asylum Pact that reinforces fair, accountable and high-quality migration and asylum procedures and dignified reception facilities throughout the EU. This, instead of Pact proposals that focus disproportionately on strengthening border controls, increasing the use of detention including for children, and enhancing returns.