

# From commitments to reality

British Red Cross humanitarian priorities for the International Migration Review Forum



# Acknowledgements

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# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Executive summary   | 5  |
| Introduction  | 11 |
| 1. Effective humanitarian assistance and protection for migrants in situations of vulnerability         | 14 |
| 2. Ensuring access to essential services for all migrants, irrespective of status                       | 24 |
| 3. Climate change and mobility  | 34 |
| 4. Beyond the International Migration Review Forum: a 'whole-of-society' approach to track GCM progress | 42 |



*Mother and child at a Niger  
Red Cross support centre.*

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# Executive summary

As United Nations Member States from around the world meet for the first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) in New York, this policy report outlines insights on humanitarian priorities. Drawing on policy and practice dialogues, Red Cross and Red Crescent research and learnings from operational experience since the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), this report highlights key considerations relating to humanitarian assistance and protection, access to essential services and climate change and mobility.

Alongside Red Cross and Red Crescent insights from around the world, it explores the role of the UK Government in these humanitarian priority areas and highlights recommendations for future action to deliver the GCM commitments. Examples from North Africa and the Sahel to the UK highlight how humanitarian assistance can mitigate but not prevent vulnerabilities, which are often created or exacerbated by laws, policies and

practices. Elsewhere, evidence from Sudan and Mali emphasises how climate change is likely to exacerbate existing challenges and vulnerabilities for people on the move.

Four years on from the adoption of the GCM, the IMRF serves as the main inter-governmental platform to discuss progress on its implementation. The IMRF provides a key opportunity to reaffirm commitments and principles of the GCM and a critical moment to take stock of progress.

The UK Government has played an important role at the multilateral level since it endorsed the GCM in 2018. At times, the UK has taken on a leading role on the international stage in priority areas and, at the national level, has participated in discussions with UK civil society. As this policy report highlights, significant areas remain where further progress is needed, particularly in terms of the domestic implementation of the GCM in the UK context.

# Effective humanitarian assistance and protection for migrants in situations of vulnerability

The UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM<sup>1</sup> makes clear that far too little progress has been made since the GCM was adopted in translating its commitment to save lives, and to assist and protect migrants in situations of vulnerability, into meaningful action.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement works alongside local and international partners to provide humanitarian assistance and protection for migrants in situations of vulnerability around the world. Drawing on examples from West, North and East Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and the UK, the following insights are highlighted:

**Insight 1: Flexible humanitarian assistance is needed to reflect the complexity of migration journeys and wide-ranging needs.**

Migrants are not one homogenous group and their situations vary widely, as do their needs for support.

**Insight 2: The people who are most vulnerable can often be among the most difficult to reach – including survivors of trafficking, abuse and exploitation.**

Shame, stigma and fear of repercussions often pose critical barriers to accessing support.

**Insight 3: Humanitarian assistance can only mitigate, not prevent, vulnerabilities – which are often created or exacerbated by laws, policies and practices.**

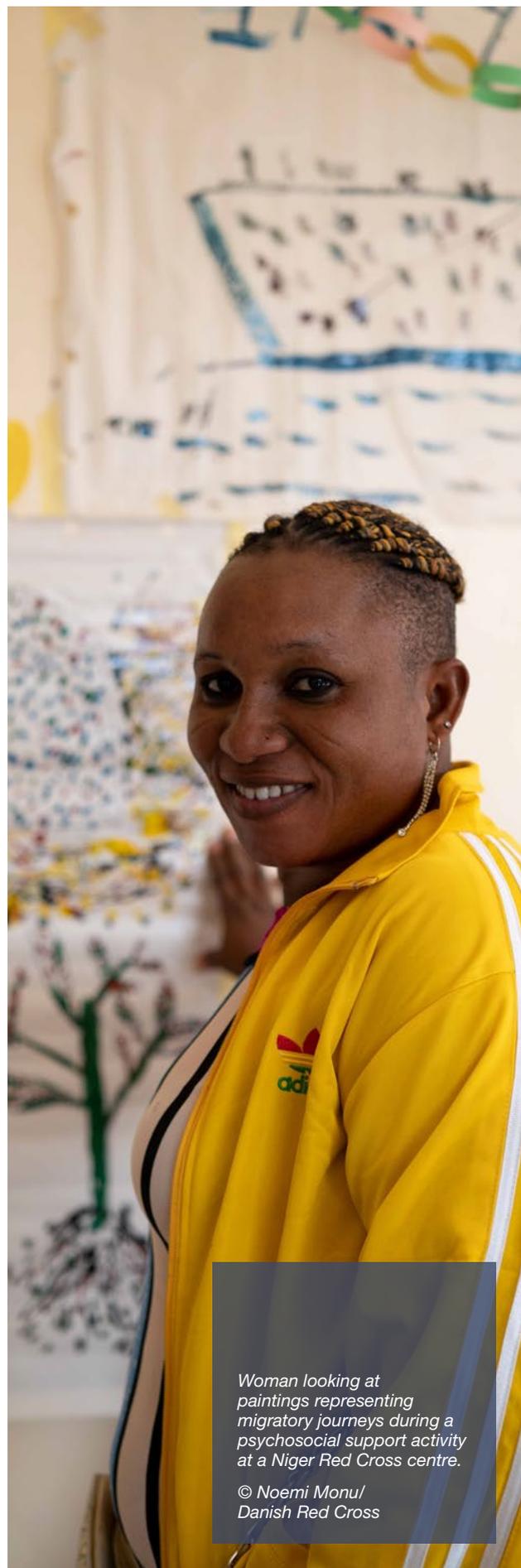
Examples include increasingly stringent immigration enforcement practices in the Sahel region and various aspects of UK immigration policy and practice, including the recent UK and Rwanda migration partnership.

Internationally, the UK has made significant funding available to provide support to vulnerable migrants – in particular, through the Safety, Support and Solutions Phase II (SSSII) programme in West, East and North Africa – and has mobilised international diplomacy on issues such as trafficking and modern slavery. However, cuts to the UK's official development assistance and the review of strategic international priorities have created uncertainty around the scope of future work. The UK's international role on issues such as trafficking and modern slavery has also at times been undermined by domestic policies and practices. The UK's domestic immigration policies have in many cases led to or exacerbated vulnerabilities, prioritising the enforcement and management of national borders above humanitarian assistance and protection.

<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly (2022) [UN Secretary-General's report on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(A4776/642\)](#), 27 December 2021 (UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM). The report was launched in February 2022.

**The following recommendations are proposed to the UK Government (and may also be of interest to other governments and donors):**

- 1. Ensure flexible, needs-based and sustainable funding for international humanitarian assistance and protection to migrants in situations of vulnerability, irrespective of status,** including through flexible models of assistance; longer-term funding cycles; and by strengthening links between humanitarian assistance to migrants in situations of vulnerability, migration policy efforts and broader humanitarian and development plans and programmes at global, regional and country levels.
- 2. Ensure that humanitarian assistance and protection is available to people who may be particularly difficult to reach, including survivors of trafficking,** including by prioritising good practices to address shame and stigma; ensuring that support is separated from immigration enforcement; and mobilising diplomatic efforts to build consensus on their protection and needs.
- 3. Address laws, policies and practices that contribute to vulnerabilities experienced along migration routes,** including by ensuring that migration laws, policies and procedures conform to obligations under international law and align with wider international humanitarian and protection commitments; assessing the humanitarian impact of relevant laws, policies and practices – including in the UK; and supporting migrants to restore and maintain contact with family members.



*Woman looking at paintings representing migratory journeys during a psychosocial support activity at a Niger Red Cross centre.*

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# Ensuring access to essential services for all migrants, irrespective of status

Since 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the central importance of migrants' access to essential services, both to their own safety and wellbeing, and that of their wider hosting communities. However, despite commitment in the GCM to ensure that all migrants, regardless of status, can exercise their human rights through safe access to basic services, migrants continue to face many barriers.

Supporting migrants' access to essential services is a key area of work for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world. Drawing on examples from East, West and North Africa, Australia, Sweden and the UK the following insights are highlighted:

## **Insight 1: Informal barriers mean that rights on paper often are not realised.**

Even where access to basic services is guaranteed to migrants by legal frameworks, they often remain unable to access services due to informal barriers, including discriminatory practices, prohibitive costs and fear of immigration enforcement.

## **Insight 2: Information is an essential service – but making it accessible relies on building trust.**

Information can unlock access to other essential services. However, negative experiences with authorities may mean that migrants lack trust in official information sources, particularly where these also seek to discourage migration.

## **Insight 3: Mental health and psychosocial support is critical in the context of migration.**

Migrants very often need mental health support, especially where they have experienced trauma during migration journeys. However, it is not always perceived as essential care and is often not readily accessible.

Access to essential services has been a core focus of programmes funded by the UK as an international donor, through support to migrants in situations of vulnerability. Domestically, the UK Government is also a direct provider of essential services. However, while all migrants are entitled access to basic services in the UK, such as emergency healthcare, in practice barriers are often experienced in accessing appropriate care.

## **The following recommendations are proposed to the UK Government (and may also be of interest to other governments and donors):**

- 1. Ensure that migrants, irrespective of status, have access to essential and life-saving services at all stages of their journeys, consistent with the principle of non-discrimination.** This includes ensuring that laws, policies and practices are inclusive of migrants; and that State policies do not obstruct humanitarian efforts aimed at providing essential services.
- 2. Acknowledge and address informal barriers that mean that migrants' rights to access essential services are not realised in practice,** including through comprehensive mapping of informal barriers, implementing measures to address them, and providing reliable and accessible information.
- 3. Recognise mental health and psychosocial support as a key essential service for migrants and take steps to encourage its accessibility,** including through the use of good practices. States should also address aspects of immigration policies and practices that create or exacerbate trauma.

## Climate change and mobility

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's experience – confirmed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>2</sup> – demonstrates that climate change is already contributing to humanitarian crises in vulnerable contexts, and increasingly driving displacement in every region of the world. While the UN Secretary-General's report highlights significant steps taken, it also makes clear that efforts must be strengthened to fully address the implications of climate change for migration.

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are at the forefront of responding to the climate crisis. Drawing on examples from the Sahel, Ethiopia, Yemen, Angola and Honduras, the following insights are highlighted:

**Insight 1: The climate crisis is happening now – creating new patterns of mobility and interacting with existing patterns.**

Connections between climate change and mobility are, however, complex, with this movement of people encompassing the full spectrum of mobility, ranging from displaced persons to those more proactively choosing when, where and how to move.

**Insight 2: Climate change will exacerbate, and bring to the fore, existing challenges and vulnerabilities for people on the move.**

This includes secondary displacement, precarious legal status, existing challenges impacting migrants (such as difficulties meeting basic needs) and those overlapping with wider vulnerabilities (for example, distinct humanitarian needs among women and girls).

**Insight 3: Some people may choose to move to adapt to climate-related hazards.**

While sometimes associated with negative impacts, particularly in situations of displacement, mobility can also present a valuable option for climate-vulnerable communities. For example, people in the Sahel region and Ethiopia are moving increasingly as a form of resilience and adaptation in the face of slow-onset environmental changes.

In recent years climate change has been high on the agenda of the UK Government. The UK has played an important role in international diplomacy for cooperation on climate change and as a donor to key initiatives. The UK has focused on building evidence to better understand the links between climate change and migration, and has drawn connections between drivers of migration and its work on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

<sup>2</sup> IPCC (2022) Sixth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability.

**The following recommendations are proposed to the UK Government (and may also be of interest to other governments and donors):**

- 1. Anticipate future impacts and support resilience strategies in climate-vulnerable communities – so that mobility remains a choice, but is not the only option.** This includes investing in evidence to understand how climate change and mobility interact in specific contexts, and continued funding for locally led humanitarian assistance to enable safe and dignified choices in climate-vulnerable communities, and by scaling up anticipatory action to minimise and avert loss and damage.
- 2. Address vulnerabilities associated with climate change and mobility,** including by promoting the integration of climate-related mobility and disaster displacement into relevant frameworks, investing in addressing the impacts of climate change on humanitarian needs in the context of migration, and addressing wider vulnerabilities that impact people on the move (for example protection needs).
- 3. Build awareness and recognition that mobility can be an important resilience and adaptation strategy in climate-vulnerable communities,** including by building international acknowledgement and consensus, and by ensuring that this is recognised in relevant national frameworks.

## Beyond the International Migration Review Forum

The IMRF provides an opportunity to reaffirm continued commitment to the GCM and its principles. However, the true marker of success for the GCM will be found in States' ability to translate commitments made at the multilateral level into meaningful action in reality. In the UK, the British Red Cross has welcomed government officials' engagement with civil society on the GCM. This should be seen as the first step in a longer process that ultimately forms part of a meaningful 'whole-of-society approach' behind implementation of the GCM, at the centre of which should be migrants themselves.

Looking to the IMRF and beyond, the following recommendations are proposed to the UK Government (and may also be of interest to other governments and donors):

- 1. Put in place mechanisms and dialogue to track national-level progress against the GCM on an ongoing basis.** In the UK, this should include the identification of specific areas of focus for GCM implementation over the next four years, with shared metrics to assess progress in policy and practice.
- 2. Ensure that migrants' lived experience is central to a whole-of-society approach for the GCM,** including by involving migrants and migrant-led organisations in the IMRF itself and wider GCM processes; through outreach by well-placed civil society, diaspora or migrant-led organisations; and by generating opportunities for migrants to lead discussions and influence policy and practice.

# Introduction

In May 2022 United Nations Member States from around the world will meet in New York for the first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF). Four years on from the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), the IMRF serves as the main intergovernmental platform to discuss progress on its implementation. Today, the GCM remains a landmark framework, as the first intergovernmentally negotiated agreement of its kind, covering all aspects of international migration through 23 wide-ranging objectives.

The recent UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM reflected how States and stakeholders have made progress in implementing the GCM's 23 objectives since its adoption, with many showing foresight in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic and other crises.<sup>3</sup> Even so, migrants around the world continue to face death, abuse, deprivation and indignity. The IMRF provides a key opportunity to reaffirm commitments and principles of the GCM, as a crucial platform for global cooperation, and to support global commitment to GCM implementation. It also provides a critical moment to take stock of progress and, in doing so, identify actions that are needed to ensure meaningful implementation of the GCM in practice.

The UK Government can continue to play an important humanitarian role to protect vulnerable people on the move, building on its efforts at the multilateral level, including since it endorsed the GCM in 2018. The UK was one of the first countries to commit resources to the

Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the first UN inter-agency pooled funding instrument for migration, which forms part of the Capacity Building Mechanism introduced in the GCM. The UK has engaged actively with the UN Migration Network and multilateral processes around the GCM, including the first regional review in 2020.<sup>4</sup> At times, the UK has taken a leading role on the international stage in priority areas. For example, as a co-initiator of a call to action on remittances in crisis in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> At the national level, the UK Government has also participated in various discussions with UK civil society around the GCM.<sup>6</sup> As this report highlights, significant areas remain where further progress is needed, particularly in terms of the domestic implementation of the GCM in the UK context.

Since the initial consultations towards the development of the GCM in 2017, and throughout the first years of its implementation, the British Red Cross has engaged with the UK Government and other partners on humanitarian priorities. This engagement has built on the GCM's acknowledgement of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as a crucial stakeholder in GCM implementation and the first-hand experience of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world.<sup>7</sup>

Since the GCM was adopted, the work of the British Red Cross and partners from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has provided substantial insights

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly (2022) [UN Secretary-General's report on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(A/4776/642\)](#), 27 December 2021 (UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM). The report was launched in February 2022.

<sup>4</sup> UK Government (2020) [The Global Compact for Migration European Regional Review: Submission by the United Kingdom, November 2020](#). This policy report draws on the UK regional review submission, while the UK voluntary GCM review submission for the IMRF was not available at the time of writing.

<sup>5</sup> UK Government (2020) [UK calls for global action to protect vital money transfers](#).

<sup>6</sup> British Red Cross (2020) [Policy into practice: Implementing humanitarian priorities in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#); International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (2022) [UK Consultation on the Global Compact for Migration \(GCM\) Event Report](#) (unpublished).

<sup>7</sup> [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(the GCM\)](#), paragraph 44. The GCM was endorsed by 152 member states at the UN General Assembly on 19 December 2018.

into the implementation of key commitments. These include drawing from the British Red Cross' own convening of policy and practice dialogues, research and learnings from programmatic experience around the world and in the UK. In particular, they include insights from British Red Cross work in the Sahel region in West Africa, implemented as part of the UK-funded Safety, Support and Solutions Phase II (SSSII) programme.<sup>8</sup> Ahead of the IMRF, this policy report brings together Red Cross and Red Crescent insights in three priority areas for the British Red Cross:

- effective humanitarian assistance and protection for migrants in situations of vulnerability
- ensuring access to essential services for all migrants, irrespective of status
- climate change and mobility.

In addition to sharing key insights, this policy report also explores the role of the UK Government in each area and highlights recommendations for future action to deliver commitments in the GCM. It concludes by assessing next steps beyond the IMRF, exploring how a 'whole-of-society' approach to the GCM, and international migration more

broadly, can be better supported to ensure more effective monitoring of national-level progress in the years to come. In particular, ensuring the place of migrants' own voices, expertise and experience at the heart of future progress and decision-making.

It is noted that the GCM is intended to cover a relatively narrow scope of migration, specifically spanning voluntary mobility across international borders, while people forced to flee are covered by the separate Global Compact on Refugees. However, examples from this policy report draw on the wide spectrum of human mobility, in recognition of the significant overlap between these categories of persons and their vulnerabilities in practice, as well as the policies and practices that shape their experiences. Migration can be voluntary or involuntary, but most of the time a combination of choices and constraints is involved. The term 'migrant' is used here in line with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)'s 2009 Policy on Migration, with a broad definition of migrants as persons who leave or flee their habitual residence to go to new places – usually abroad – to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> British Red Cross' work in the Sahel was implemented through the Action for Migrants: Routes-based Assistance (AMiRA) programme. From 2018 to 2020, the AMiRA programme provided humanitarian assistance to migrants in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Sudan.

<sup>9</sup> This definition includes migrant workers, stateless migrants and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities. It also concerns refugees and people seeking asylum, who constitute a special category under international law and are entitled to specific international protection under international refugee law.

## The British Red Cross approach to migration

The British Red Cross provides trusted principled humanitarian assistance for migrants, irrespective of their legal status, and focuses on needs, vulnerabilities and potential. Our vision is to ensure that all vulnerable people on the move are appropriately supported at all stages of their journey, their basic needs are met, their fundamental rights are protected and they are treated with dignity and respect. Our approach is based on our Fundamental Principles – in particular humanity and impartiality – which require us to bring assistance, without discrimination, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. We do not seek to encourage, discourage or prevent migration.

The British Red Cross' technical expertise, knowledge and experience in migration is grounded in lessons learned from programmes, evidence-based research and lived experience of migrants. The British Red Cross, along with the International

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, has consistently leveraged this operational experience and advisory capacity to inform the development and implementation of the GCM. As a humanitarian auxiliary to the UK Government, the British Red Cross stands ready to support the UK to assist, protect and empower migrants in vulnerable situations, and to realise the vision and promise of the GCM for all migrants.

We are a member of the IFRC, a global humanitarian network with a permanent presence in 192 countries. As such, we coordinate closely with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, for example across Europe on family separation, reuniting migrant adults and children and anti-trafficking. The British Red Cross is also the largest independent provider of services to refugees and asylum seekers in the UK and we continue to address the vulnerabilities of migrants in the context of Covid-19.



*British Red Cross volunteer, Anisa, packs food packages, Hackney Destitution Centre, London.*

*© David Shepherd/  
British Red Cross*

# 1. Effective humanitarian assistance and protection for migrants in situations of vulnerability

Since 2014, over 47,000 migrant deaths have been recorded by the International Organisation for Migration's Missing Migrants Project.<sup>10</sup> In 2021 alone, more than 5,750 people worldwide died during dangerous migration journeys.<sup>11</sup> Many more people have simply gone missing, unheard of by anxious family and friends. Others face sexual and gender-based violence, become victims of human trafficking, experience abuse or become destitute during their journeys. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement works alongside local and international partners to provide humanitarian assistance and protection for migrants in situations of vulnerability around the world.

The GCM contains several relevant commitments, including to address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration (objective 7), to save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants (objective 8) and to prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration (objective 10). These are supported by guiding principles championing an approach to international migration that is people-centred, gender-responsive, child-sensitive and that aims to protect and fulfil migrants' human rights. However, as the UN Secretary-General's report explains, far too little progress has been made since the GCM was adopted in translating its commitment to save lives into meaningful action.<sup>12</sup>

## Red Cross and Red Crescent Insights

### Insight 1: Flexible humanitarian assistance is needed to reflect the complexity of migration journeys and wide-ranging needs

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's experience of working with migrants in situations of vulnerability in over 100 countries has highlighted the need for flexible humanitarian assistance for migrants that can respond to their complex needs. In recent years, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have implemented a 'humanitarian service point' model to provide assistance and protection along land and sea-based migration routes, with 275 humanitarian service points in action across 42 countries worldwide. While these humanitarian service points vary based on needs in different contexts, they aim to provide a neutral, welcoming and safe space along migratory routes for all migrants and people on the move to access essential humanitarian services, irrespective of status and wherever they are in their migration journey.

Core to this work is an understanding that migrants are not one homogenous group and that their situations vary widely, as do their needs for support.<sup>13</sup> For example, programmatic learning undertaken as part of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' work with migrants across the Sahel region highlighted how, at any one location,

10 See Missing Migrants Project. [Data](#). (accessed 8 April 2022).

11 Ibid.

12 See paragraph 75 of the UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM.

13 This also emerged as a key theme in roundtable discussions convened in 2020–2021 as part of a British Red Cross–FCDO Platform on Migration. See British Red Cross (2020) Roundtable Summary. British Red Cross Roundtable. Turning Policy into Practice: Reviewing the First Two Years of the UK's Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (unpublished); British Red Cross (2021) Roundtable Summary. British Red Cross roundtable: Spotlight on migration in the Sahel region (unpublished).

each migrant is at a different stage on their own personal ‘route’ or journey.<sup>14</sup> As such, multiple people may be present in the same location and receiving services at the same point, but in vastly different circumstances and with widely ranging needs for support. They may be just starting out on their journey within their country of origin, in transit, or returning after having not realised their goal of reaching a particular destination, or after experiencing a traumatic event. Vulnerabilities may also change over time and affect migrants differently at different stages in their journeys, based on their individual circumstances.<sup>15</sup> Migration routes themselves can be dynamic and shift significantly over time.

A rapid migration context assessment commissioned by the British Red Cross found that international funding to migration programmes in Africa has, however, often been premised on providing assistance along a singular linear migration route. In particular, it has focused on key routes towards Europe (most notably the Central and Western Mediterranean routes), with less attention paid to the needs of migrants moving as part of intra-regional circular migration patterns or people who are destined elsewhere, for example towards countries in the Gulf (such as Saudi Arabia) or towards Southern Africa.<sup>16</sup> The assessment highlighted the importance of humanitarian assistance being targeted based on needs alone and for international funding – and the humanitarian assistance it supports – to better reflect the realities of complex and wide-ranging migration patterns across the African continent.

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**Vulnerability is feeling like I have no voice of my own. Feeling like I am not being treated like a human being. I should be protected and respected regardless of personal characteristics because I am just a human.**

A migrant representative at a British Red Cross–Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) roundtable discussion<sup>17</sup>

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### **Insight 2: Migrants who are most vulnerable can often be among the most difficult to reach – including survivors of trafficking, abuse and exploitation**

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies often experience challenges identifying and accessing migrants in situations of vulnerability in order to provide support. For example, a British Red Cross study, based on experiences in the Sahel, highlighted barriers including individuals’ high mobility, volatile security contexts and a lack of trust in humanitarian actors.<sup>18</sup> National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have used different strategies to overcome such difficulties. For example, in Egypt migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have been recruited as Red Crescent volunteers, helping to gain trust among migrant communities, overcome language barriers and better understand vulnerabilities along migration routes.<sup>19</sup> In Burkina Faso, mobile kiosks providing humanitarian assistance, for example in transit stations, have been used to reach a migrant population congregating in different locations at different times. A British Red Cross study on reaching the ‘invisible’ highlights the importance of expanding the network of formal and informal partners

14 INTRAC (2021) AMiRA Thematic Brief: The Route-based approach (unpublished analysis for British Red Cross).

15 INTRAC (2021) Understanding vulnerability and reaching the most vulnerable migrants (unpublished analysis for British Red Cross).

16 Hargrave and Anderson (2021) AMiRA Programme Migration Rapid Context Analysis (unpublished analysis for British Red Cross).

17 British Red Cross (2020) Policy into practice: Implementing humanitarian priorities in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

18 British Red Cross (2020) Reaching the ‘invisible’: vulnerabilities and accessibility along migratory routes (unpublished).

19 INTRAC (2021) Understanding vulnerability and reaching the most vulnerable migrants (unpublished analysis for British Red Cross).

beyond the ‘classic’ partnerships; for instance, formalising the collaboration with diaspora associations, religious institutions and community leaders as well as local community members.<sup>20</sup>

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**We cannot go out of the house to access services because if the police arrest us we will be sent back to our home countries**

Migrant in transit, Niger<sup>21</sup>

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Migrants who are most at risk can often be among the most difficult to reach. For example, a roundtable convened by the British Red Cross – that focused on saving lives in the Sahel region – highlighted how migrants in situations of acute vulnerability may be reluctant to come forward for support due to stigma or fear of repercussions.<sup>22</sup> Such shame and stigma may be particularly acute for groups such as sex workers, victims of gender-based violence (both men and women), LBTQ+ migrants, persons with mental health conditions and returned migrants. IFRC research in West Africa has highlighted how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, returnee women in Niger and Guinea suffered the added stigma of being viewed as dirty or contaminated, on top of the shame of a ‘failed’ migration journey, which in turn rendered them reluctant to seek assistance.<sup>23</sup>

Survivors of trafficking are another group that often prove particularly difficult to reach.<sup>24</sup> For example, a British Red Cross assessment of labour migration and trafficking in Myanmar identified various barriers that prevent survivors of trafficking from accessing support, including fear of repercussions, language barriers, shame, stigma and marginalisation. Women and girls were identified as being particularly unlikely to make disclosures about trafficking due to gender stereotypes of vulnerability and lack of awareness among communities.<sup>25</sup> Such difficulties are often exacerbated in contexts, such as in the UK (see Box 1), where authorities’ responses to trafficking – and support available to survivors – are closely intertwined with immigration enforcement. In such cases, survivors of trafficking may be unwilling to trust authorities, or may be reluctant to access assistance for fear that this may result in punitive measures.

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**It is very difficult to resume the course of your life after a failed adventure, because when you return to your home, society thinks of you in a different way than before. You become something of a scapegoat and you are excluded from community activities. This makes returnees afraid of asking for assistance or getting a job. And the pandemic has only increased these difficulties.**

Focus group discussion with female returnees, Guinea<sup>26</sup>

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20 British Red Cross (2020) Reaching the ‘invisible’: vulnerabilities and accessibility along migratory routes (unpublished).

21 Ibid.

22 British Red Cross (2020) Policy into practice: Implementing humanitarian priorities in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

23 Ibid.

24 INTRAC (2021) Understanding vulnerability and reaching the most vulnerable migrants (unpublished analysis for British Red Cross).

25 British Red Cross (2019) Study of the humanitarian consequences of labour migration and trafficking in Myanmar (unpublished).

26 IFRC (2020) Risks and Resilience: Exploring migrants’ and host communities’ experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic in West Africa.

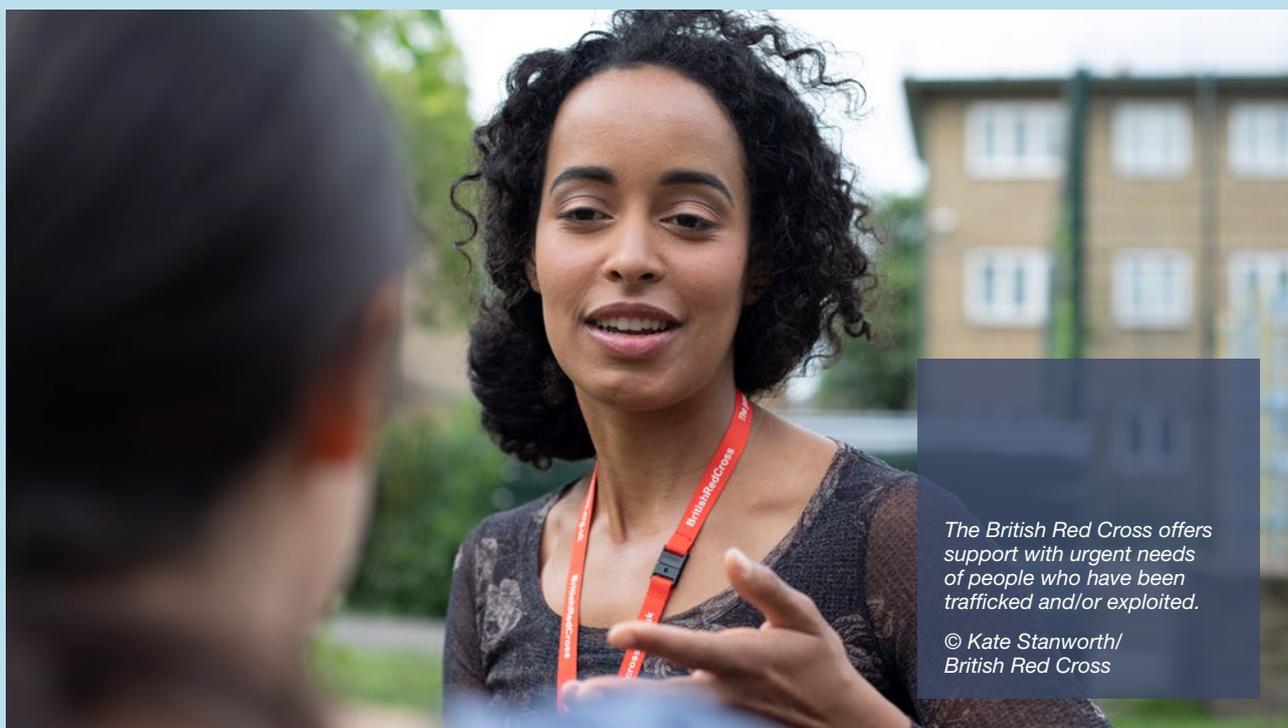
## Box 1: Experiences of survivors of trafficking at temporary reception centres in the UK<sup>27</sup>

In the UK, temporary reception centres play an increasing role in anti-trafficking operations. These centres provide a place for the police to speak to people they suspect may be victims of trafficking and for people to receive emergency support such as food, clothing and first aid – provided by organisations including the British Red Cross – following a police welfare check or a raid on a location where they suspect people are being exploited.

In 2020 the British Red Cross published a research report, *First steps to safety?* based on observations at ten of these reception centres and in-depth interviews with a range of people involved in running them. The research looked at people's experiences of reception centres, the support on offer – and what support was accepted – and referrals from reception centres into the National Referral Mechanism, the UK Government's system for determining whether it believes a person is a survivor of trafficking. The research concluded that while reception centres offered immediate respite,

limited resources, conflicting priorities and the lack of onward support after the reception centre meant that people were often taken to centres that were experienced as being time-pressured, confusing and ultimately did not offer a route to safety.

At most of the reception centres the researcher observed, investigating and prosecuting crimes appeared to be the priority. Issues of fear and trust were the biggest barriers stopping people taking up the help that was on offer. Survivors of trafficking, slavery and exploitation were often afraid of both the people exploiting them and the authorities. It was particularly difficult for the police, local authority teams and staff from other agencies to build trust with people in the reception centre and the presence of immigration officials there made some people more afraid. Most worryingly, most people taken to a reception centre either returned to their previous situation or were arrested by officers from Immigration Enforcement.



*The British Red Cross offers support with urgent needs of people who have been trafficked and/or exploited.*

© Kate Stanworth/  
British Red Cross

27 British Red Cross (2020) [First steps to safety?](#)

### **Insight 3: Humanitarian assistance can only mitigate, not prevent vulnerabilities – which are often created or exacerbated by laws, policies and practices along migration routes**

Core to the GCM is a commitment not just to address vulnerabilities in the context of international migration, but to take action to reduce them. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies provide life-saving support around the world and in many cases the humanitarian assistance can only mitigate vulnerabilities, rather than prevent them altogether. Policy dialogues convened by the British Red Cross have repeatedly emphasised how in many contexts the vulnerabilities experienced by migrants are created or exacerbated by laws, policies and practices along migration routes.<sup>28</sup>

For example, in recent months there have been reports about the treatment of third-country nationals – for example, students and foreign workers from African countries – fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. With people waiting hours and sometimes days at border crossing points, in sometimes tense situations, there have been reports of discriminatory practices and approaches in neighbouring countries, including the detention of people unable to prove their residency in Ukraine before the outbreak of conflict. Elsewhere, since 2015 increasingly stringent national laws and practices across the Sahel region and North Africa, largely implemented as part of migration management partnerships with Europe, have contributed to migrants facing heightened risks. As a result, migrants have been pushed into more difficult, dangerous and less visible journeys, as they seek to evade detection by authorities.<sup>29</sup>

In the UK, the British Red Cross has witnessed first-hand the multiple ways in which immigration policies and practices have created or exacerbated vulnerabilities. Recent research has highlighted the challenges experienced by people in UK Home Office asylum accommodation, finding that isolation, poor facilities and barriers to accessing support, particularly healthcare, were having a serious, negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The research documented people living in the same clothes for weeks; survivors of trafficking placed in large, mixed-gender hostels where they were afraid to leave their rooms; and people who were feeling suicidal and had attempted suicide.<sup>30</sup>

“

**Even now, when I sleep in my own bed, my mind jumps all the way back to being in that [asylum] accommodation. I can't sleep as I think about people who are there now.**

Refugee and British Red Cross staff member, UK<sup>31</sup>

”

The British Red Cross has also highlighted the potential humanitarian impacts of recent policy developments in the UK. Routes and processes in place for people seeking asylum to travel safely to the UK are reducing, with the exception of some situation-specific schemes (such as those for Afghan citizens and displaced Ukrainians).<sup>32</sup> In April 2022 the UK Government passed a new Nationality and Borders Act, through which access to refugee family reunion is limited for refugees who arrived irregularly into the UK and are subsequently classified as ‘group 2’ refugees.

28 British Red Cross (2020) *Policy into practice: Implementing humanitarian priorities in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*; British Red Cross (2020) *Roundtable Summary*. British Red Cross Roundtable. *Turning Policy into Practice: Reviewing the First Two Years of the UK's Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* (unpublished).

29 IFRC (2020) *Risks and Resilience: Exploring migrants' and host communities' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic in West Africa*; Hargrave and Anderson (2021) *AMIARA Programme Migration Rapid Context Analysis* (unpublished analysis for British Red Cross).

30 British Red Cross (2021) *Far from a home*.

31 *Ibid*

32 In 2021 only 1,587 people were resettled to the UK, including 120 people from Iraq, 45 from Sudan, 10 from Eritrea and 4 from Iran.



*Abdul Karim Adamou, a Niger Red Cross facilitator and volunteer, sews masks with migrants.*

© Noemi Monu/  
Danish Red Cross

Without safe routes, refugees forced to flee and in need of protection are more likely to undertake dangerous journeys, facing heightened risks of exploitation, human trafficking and other abuse.



**We agree that the asylum system is broken, but it is broken for the people who have gone through it. In fact, it breaks us... Their new immigration plans will make our problems and suffering much worse.**

VOICES Network ambassador, UK<sup>33</sup>



In April 2022 the UK Government also announced a UK and Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership.<sup>34</sup> This agreement with the Government of Rwanda would see the relocation to Rwanda of an uncapped number of people whose asylum claims have been deemed inadmissible to the UK asylum process. People who are transferred will no longer be the responsibility of the UK Government and will be expected to go through the Rwandan asylum system. This is likely to increase the length of family separation and may pose risks to their protection, health and wellbeing.<sup>35</sup> A similar programme between Israel and Rwanda resulted in transferred refugees leaving Rwanda, becoming at risk of trafficking and exploitation as they moved on once again.

## Role of the UK Government

The UK Government's submission to the first GCM regional review emphasises the UK's "whole-of-route approach to addressing

irregular migration, at each stage of the migrant journey with the aim of protecting vulnerable migrants and reducing dangerous irregular migration to Europe and the UK".<sup>36</sup> The submission also states the UK's commitment to "minimising the structural factors that drive irregular migration and reducing migrant vulnerabilities". Internationally, a core component of this approach has been the £70 million (SSSII) programme. Over three years (2018–2021) the UK-funded programme provided funding to various partners, including a consortium of Red Cross and Red Crescent partners led by the British Red Cross, implementing a range of activities with migrants across 14 countries in West, East and North Africa. Although focusing on migration routes towards Europe, the programme prioritised flexible and adaptable approaches and provided life-saving humanitarian assistance to vulnerable migrants. Substantial cuts to UK official development assistance since 2021 and the review of strategic priorities since the merger of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have meant that the scope of future programmes remains unclear.

The UK has also played a key role internationally in terms of trafficking and modern slavery. Alongside a focus on enforcement activities, the UK's international efforts have also emphasised the needs of survivors. This includes significant international diplomacy, supported in 2019 by the appointment of the UK's first Migration and Modern Slavery Envoy and in 2021 by the UK's Presidency of the G7.<sup>37</sup> The UK has also dedicated significant funding streams including the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery and the Home Office's Modern Slavery Innovation Fund, although these have been

<sup>33</sup> VOICES Network (2022) VOICES Network Briefing: The Nationality and Borders Bill. The VOICES network is a collective of refugees and people seeking asylum, supported by the British Red Cross, that speaks out about issues that affect them.

<sup>34</sup> UK Government (2022) Home Secretary's speech on UK and Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership.

<sup>35</sup> For more detailed British Red Cross comment on the UK and Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership see British Red Cross (2022) Statement responding to Rwanda offshoring deal.

<sup>36</sup> UK Government (2020) [The Global Compact for Migration European Regional Review: Submission by the United Kingdom](#), November 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid; IOM and ODI (2022) UK Consultation on the Global Compact for Migration (GCM): Event Report (unpublished).

impacted by official development assistance cuts and, more recently, strategic reviews. A recent UK civil society consultation on the GCM, however, highlighted how domestic policies and practices around trafficking and modern slavery – which emphasise immigration enforcement over protection measures – have undermined the UK’s good work internationally.<sup>38</sup> As already outlined, new provisions introduced in the Nationality and Borders Act are likely to exacerbate these challenges.

Some UK Government initiatives have made attempts to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to migrants in vulnerable situations in the UK. For example, a new pilot

project to be run in collaboration between the British Red Cross and the UK Missing Persons Unit (a bureau of the National Crime Agency) will enable the families of people who are believed to have died in tragedies at sea while travelling on migratory routes to Greece to use DNA to identify their loved ones. The initiative addresses a current lack of services for families of missing migrants in the UK.<sup>39</sup> However, as illustrated above, UK domestic immigration policies have in many cases created or exacerbated vulnerabilities for migrants in the UK, largely prioritising the enforcement and management of national borders above the humanitarian assistance and protection of individuals in situations of vulnerability.



*Amina Hamidou, a Niger Red Cross Psychosocial Support Coordinator, speaks to a migrant who just arrived at a support centre in Niamey.*

© Noemi Monu/  
Danish Red Cross

38 IOM and ODI (2022) UK Consultation on the Global Compact for Migration (GCM): Event Report (unpublished).

39 IOM (2021) Families of Missing Migrants: Their Search for Answers, the Impacts of Loss and Recommendations for Improved Support. Country Report: United Kingdom.

## Recommendations

Drawing on these insights, as well as recommendations in the UN Secretary-General's report and the GCM, the following recommendations are proposed to the UK Government (and may also be of interest to other governments and donors):<sup>40</sup>

- 1. Ensure flexible, needs-based and sustainable funding for international humanitarian assistance and protection to migrants in situations of vulnerability, irrespective of status.** This should include:
  - funding to flexible models of assistance that enable humanitarian service providers to meet shifting and wide-ranging needs at different points in migrants' journeys. The UK Government can build on lessons learned and successful approaches during the SSSII programme in West Africa to ensure these continue to be reflected in future funding
  - longer-term funding cycles, for example spanning five years or more, to enable the delivery of meaningful, trusted and sustainable humanitarian assistance and protection
  - funding that allows assistance and protection to be targeted based on needs alone rather than political objectives, including dynamic needs and geographic hotspots along shifting routes. For example, in the context of Africa, enabling programmes to take a wider humanitarian focus on migrants in situations of vulnerability, including in the context of intra-regional circular movement, rather than an emphasis on preventing irregular migration towards Europe and the UK
  - strengthening links and coordination to ensure that humanitarian assistance to migrants in situations of vulnerability and migration policy work are more fully aligned and mainstreamed across broader humanitarian and development plans and programmes, as well as cross-government. This can build on the UK's experience and relevant humanitarian frameworks and expertise at global, regional and country levels.
- 2. Ensure that humanitarian assistance and protection is available to people who may be particularly difficult to reach, including survivors of trafficking.** This should include:
  - ensuring that the funding and delivery of assistance incorporates good practices to address shame and stigma that may prevent people from coming forward to access support. For example, collaboration with trusted local diaspora and migrant-led organisations, mobilisation of well-trained staff and volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds, and proactive outreach and information on available services
  - Ensuring support is focused primarily on individuals' humanitarian needs and protection, and is separate from immigration enforcement. For example, in the context of survivors of trafficking in the UK, this should include changes to support in the early stages of identification, so that it is focused on protection, separated from immigration enforcement, guided by minimum standards and properly resourced<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See for example paragraphs 74–78 and 10–107 of the UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM and GCM objectives 7, 8 and 12.

<sup>41</sup> For more detailed recommendations see British Red Cross (2020) [First steps to safety?](#)

- diplomatic efforts to build international consensus on the protection and needs of survivors of trafficking as a starting point of support. This includes ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are aware of trafficking from a trafficked person-centred perspective, to ensure that any trafficked person encountered is treated sensitively and appropriately.

**3. Address laws, policies and practices that contribute to vulnerabilities experienced along migration routes.** This should include:

- ensuring that migration laws, policies and procedures conform to obligations under international law, and align with wider UK Government international humanitarian and protection commitments and approaches. This includes respect for the principle of non-refoulement at borders and guaranteeing people needing assistance and protection, including international protection, access to fair, effective and timely services and procedures
- assessing the humanitarian impact of relevant laws, policies, practices and migration partnerships with other countries on a regular basis and revising them, as necessary, to ensure they do not heighten or create risks of death, disappearance, exploitation, increased vulnerability or family separation. For example, the UK should provide international protection and safe routes, rather than transferring people whose asylum claims have been deemed inadmissible to other countries, especially those in which they do not have any connections and where protection risks may increase
- protecting against family separation, and enabling migrants and their families to establish, restore or maintain contact along migratory routes and at destination, and promptly reunite with family members in cases of forced separation. This should include all possible measures to ensure the dignified treatment of people who have died in the context of migration, and to analyse data in accordance with applicable legal frameworks to try to identify deceased persons and provide answers to their families.

## 2. Ensuring access to essential services for all migrants, irrespective of status

Migrants face many barriers in accessing essential services throughout their migration journeys. These include access to shelter, food, healthcare (including emergency services and maternal and paediatric care), psychosocial support services, water, sanitation and hygiene services, information, legal assistance and protection services. In some circumstances, migrants are not eligible for State-provided services. In others they face informal barriers, including a lack of information about their rights and entitlements, or barriers due to language and costs. Supporting migrants' access to essential services is a key area of work for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world. In some cases, this support is provided directly. In others, National Societies support referrals to government services or those provided by other partners.

Migrants' access to essential services is addressed in objective 15 of the GCM, which establishes a commitment to ensure that all migrants, regardless of status, can exercise their human rights through safe access to basic services. Other relevant commitments include those on access to information (objective 3), addressing and reducing vulnerabilities (objective 7), trafficking (objective 10), inclusion and social cohesion (objective 16) and return and reintegration (objective 21). Since 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the central importance of migrants' access to essential services, both to their own safety and wellbeing, and that of their wider hosting communities. Yet the UN Secretary-General's report highlights how, despite promising practices in numerous countries, in too many cases "migrants struggled to access basic

services, such as health care, despite being disproportionately exposed to Covid-19".<sup>42</sup>

In particular, irregular migrants' access to services, which proved a controversial area in negotiations in the lead up to the development of the GCM, has continued to be a polarising topic among different actors as attention has moved to implementation.<sup>43</sup> Commitments in the GCM explicitly allow discretion among States to limit more comprehensive services to nationals or regular migrants. However, the GCM is clear that "safe access to basic services" should be available regardless of migration status and that any differential access must be based on law, proportionate and pursue a legitimate aim, in accordance with international human rights law.<sup>44</sup>

### Red Cross and Red Crescent Insights

#### Insight 1: Informal barriers mean that rights on paper are often not realised

A key insight from National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' work with migrants in countries around the world is that, even in situations where access to basic services is guaranteed to migrants by legal frameworks, they often remain unable to access services due to informal barriers. Many of these obstacles were exacerbated – and took on new relevance – during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Box 2).

42 See paragraph 50 of the UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM.

43 British Red Cross (2020) Policy into practice: Implementing humanitarian priorities in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

44 See paragraph 31 of the GCM.



*In Ethiopia violence has destroyed houses and infrastructure. Many people have returned to their communities where they have received cash assistance from the Swiss Red Cross.*

*© Johannes Chinchilla*

## Box 2: Migrants' experiences accessing essential services during Covid-19

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Since early 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has caused far-reaching impacts around the world, with health systems under strain across numerous countries and regions. Communities have been impacted by the primary toll on people's health and wellbeing, as well as significant secondary impacts, including the economic consequences of measures taken by governments to mitigate the virus' spread.<sup>45</sup> Migrants have been no exception. Indeed, in many cases they have been among those people most highly vulnerable to such impacts: being stranded by border closures, facing precarious – and sometimes dangerous – living and working conditions, and experiencing significant difficulties in accessing appropriate care when falling ill.<sup>46</sup>

In 2021 the Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab published a report, *Locked down and left out?*, documenting migrants' challenges accessing basic services during the pandemic, drawing on research conducted by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Australia, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Sudan, Sweden and the UK.<sup>47</sup> Key barriers identified to accessing basic services, such as treatment and vaccination for Covid-19, included exclusion based on legal migration status. However, numerous informal barriers were also identified, including inaccessible information – both in language and channels of dissemination;

insufficient or unavailable services; financial barriers; inconsistent application of relevant laws and policies fear, health and safety concerns; lack of relevant documentation; and digital exclusion.

In Sudan, over three-quarters of migrants surveyed reported lack of funds to obtain health and mental health services during the pandemic. Similarly in West Africa, an IFRC study found that, reflecting challenges before the pandemic, a sizeable proportion of migrants in the region felt unable to access healthcare for Covid-19, due to factors including prohibitive costs, fear of being reported to authorities or otherwise penalised, lack of knowledge about available services and fear of stigmatisation.<sup>48</sup> In Egypt, migrants, including refugees, welcomed the government's decision not to charge fines for expired residency permits and to extend the period for renewal and allow expired permits to be used to register for some services – such as education or healthcare. However, many noted authorities in different locations were not aware of the policy change and did not always mirror the national government's flexible approach. In the UK, migrants faced challenges in accessing medical appointments during the pandemic, lacking the smartphones or phone data required to access telehealth<sup>49</sup> or other online support services.

45 IFRC (2021) [Drowning just below the surface: The socioeconomic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic](#).

46 IFRC (2020) [Least Protected, Most Affected: Migrants and refugees facing extraordinary risks during the Covid-19 pandemic](#).

47 Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab (2021) [Locked down and left out? Why access to basic services for migrants is critical to our Covid-19 response and recovery](#).

48 IFRC (2020) [Risks and Resilience: Exploring migrants' and host communities' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic in West Africa](#).

49 Telehealth refers to healthcare support provided remotely.

Migrants were also found to have frequently been excluded from socio-economic support policies put in place for nationals or permanent residents. This was despite migrants playing key roles in response and recovery efforts, being over-represented in employment sectors hard-hit by the pandemic and being impacted by the same prevention and control measures as host communities. For example in the UK the Covid-19 pandemic made extremely visible how vulnerabilities are exacerbated for

individuals within the UK immigration system with ‘no recourse to public funds’, who were left unable to access mainstream government support during the pandemic.<sup>50</sup> In Australia, migrants on temporary visas were, for the most part, ineligible for Covid-19-related income support from the national government; however, limited emergency relief support was subsequently provided following advocacy from humanitarian actors.



*The Malaysian Red Crescent Society vaccinated 400 migrants with a targeted approach, working together with the state of Pahang health department and local communities.*

© Nazir Safari

<sup>50</sup> Individuals with no recourse for public funds are unable to access most welfare benefits available to people in the UK, including income support, housing benefit and homelessness support. A list of categories to which no recourse for public funds currently applies can be found at: [NRP Network. Immigration status and entitlements.](#)

Research conducted by IFRC and the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, exploring migrants' access to services in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) found that although there were no legal barriers to migrants receiving healthcare (regardless of status), several barriers existed in practice.<sup>51</sup> Where healthcare was supposed to be free, migrants were sometimes being charged, or where nationals did have to pay, migrants could be charged more. These costs were prohibitive, especially when charged up-front, leading migrants to delay or avoid treatment altogether, worsening their health conditions. In some cases, migrants were refused treatment altogether due to their status – even in emergency, life-threatening situations. Additional research by the British Red Cross in Niger and Burkina Faso also documented challenges due to the strict enforcement of migration management and anti-trafficking enforcement policies, preventing migrants from feeling comfortable coming forward to access critical services.<sup>52</sup>



**When we are sick, we don't want to go to the health centre because we are discriminated against and they charged us more than what they ask a Niger citizen**

Migrant, Niger<sup>53</sup>



In the UK, a 2019 British Red Cross roundtable focusing on access to basic services in the GCM highlighted various informal barriers. These include fear of arrest or deportation when accessing services; insufficient training and understanding among government departments, local authorities and frontline

staff concerning migrants' specific needs, experiences and entitlements; and language barriers, particularly where interpreters were not provided or not easily accessible.<sup>54</sup> British Red Cross research has documented how these challenges are experienced by people seeking asylum in the UK. For example, recent research found that despite entitlements to free healthcare, barriers were often faced in accessing appropriate care.<sup>55</sup> Registering with a GP – a requirement to receive the Covid-19 vaccine – is difficult for migrants living in temporary accommodation as they are unable to provide proof of address. While proof of address is not in theory necessary to complete registration, in reality many practices request this before agreeing to register new patients.

Another recent report by the British Red Cross and the VOICES Network looked at experiences of women in the UK asylum system in particular.<sup>56</sup> It found that a lack of health and needs assessments when women enter the asylum process, and the additional barriers they face in accessing legal advice or healthcare, meant that, in many cases, women's needs simply were not recognised, recorded or met. Women described the lack of dignity they felt in relying on charities and community groups to access basic needs such as registering with a GP, finding a place to sleep and accessing food, sanitary items or nappies for their babies.

**Insight 2: Information is an essential service – but making it accessible relies on building trust**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's work with migrants around the world has also highlighted the role of information as an essential service. In particular, the importance of reliable,

51 IFRC and UNHCR (2020) Access to essential services for people on the move in the ECOWAS region.

52 British Red Cross (2020) Reaching the 'invisible': vulnerabilities and accessibility along migratory routes (unpublished).

53 Ibid.

54 British Red Cross (2020) Policy into practice: Implementing humanitarian priorities in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

55 British Red Cross (2021) Far from a home.

56 British Red Cross and VOICES Network (2022) We want to be strong, but we don't have the chance: women's experiences of seeking asylum in the UK.

accessible and trustworthy information made available to migrants detailing their rights, available services and self-protection strategies. The Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab's research during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Box 2) found that a lack of accurate and up-to-date information on prevention, testing, treatment and support services posed a key barrier for migrants during the pandemic.<sup>57</sup> For example, in Ethiopia, returned migrants highlighted limited access to information on the virus and on where and how to access basic services and support, in addition to the inaccessibility of information (in person or online) for people with limited literacy. Whereas in Sweden, the lack of information available in languages spoken by migrants and delays in dissemination hindered access to support, including to testing and treatment.



**In the beginning I received very little information. I became infected [with Covid-19]... Since then I wear a mask, keep distance, and wash hands... I have nothing to do which leads to a lot of stress... I can't leave Sweden and have difficulty sleeping at night. I'm very anxious and feel like I am in a prison...**

Migrant in Sweden<sup>58</sup>



British Red Cross research in the Sahel highlighted migrants' lack of trust in official information sources, particularly where migrants have had negative experiences with authorities either in a host country or at other points during their journeys. In contexts such as Niger, government crackdowns on

migrants mean that this mistrust may extend to humanitarian actors, where they are perceived as cooperating with immigration enforcement authorities.<sup>59</sup> For this reason, Red Cross and Red Crescent programmes in the Sahel have aimed to build confidence among migrant communities by maintaining a neutral approach to information provision, ensuring that information provided does not aim to encourage or discourage migration, but instead provide factual information on risks, rights and opportunities. Indeed, research in West Africa by the Danish Red Cross and Danish Institute for International Studies found that information campaigns aimed at discouraging migration were generally not considered useful by migrants, failing to provide concrete, useful and risk-reducing information, while framed in terms portraying migrants as passive victims, conflicting with migrants' own self-identity as individuals with agency, strength and choices.<sup>60</sup>

### **Insight 3: Mental health and psychosocial support is critical in the context of migration**

The importance of mental health and psychosocial support in the context of migration has been a prominent theme emerging from policy dialogues convened by the British Red Cross in recent years and a key insight from operational experience. A roundtable convened by the British Red Cross in 2019, focusing on access to basic services in the context of the GCM, highlighted gaps in mental health services available to migrants around the world and disagreements over whether this constitutes 'basic' healthcare.<sup>61</sup> Mental health support may sometimes not be perceived as essential care by key stakeholders and often services are not readily available or accessible to migrants.

57 Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab (2021) [Locked down and left out? Why access to basic services for migrants is critical to our Covid-19 response and recovery.](#)

58 Ibid.

59 British Red Cross (2020) [Reaching the 'invisible': vulnerabilities and accessibility along migratory routes](#) (unpublished).

60 Vammen et al. (2021) [Does information save migrants' lives? Knowledge and needs of West African migrants en route to Europe.](#) Danish Institute for International Studies

61 British Red Cross (2020) [Policy into practice: Implementing humanitarian priorities in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.](#)



Two migrant women living in a temporary shelter in Niger.

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Danish Red Cross

This is despite the fact that migrants very often need mental health support, especially where they have experienced trauma during migration journeys, which can then be compounded by experiences with immigration systems in destination countries.<sup>62</sup> For example, research by the British Red Cross and the VOICES Network documenting women’s experiences of seeking asylum in the UK details the experiences of women who felt side-lined, dismissed, silenced or dehumanised by the UK asylum system. These mental health impacts were compounded by long delays with decisions, effectively leaving the women “in limbo” for long periods of time.<sup>63</sup>

“

**Because if you are seeking help, and you get such kind [of negative] response, you start doubting everything. That’s why [poor] mental health also comes, and plays a role, so it’s just not a good experience at all.**

Woman experiencing asylum in the UK<sup>64</sup>

”

Another British Red Cross roundtable in 2021 focused on migration in the Sahel and highlighted the many dangers and stresses of migratory journeys. These take their toll on migrants’ mental health and wellbeing: with common occurrences including robbery, extortion, trafficking, kidnapping, detention, sexual and gender-based violence, abandonment in the desert, fear of returning home, and a lack of contact

with friends and family.<sup>65</sup> During the Covid-19 pandemic a number of new stressors have compounded difficulties, such as fear of infection, forced immobility or ‘strandedness’ due to border closures and other restrictions, loss of livelihoods and savings, and worry about friends and family in countries of origin which may have been worse affected by the pandemic.

The discussion highlighted that, while a lack of awareness within the region and culture of stigmatisation meant that the need for mental health and psychosocial support services was not always recognised, including by migrants themselves, independent evaluations of services found that migrants considered them highly relevant and appreciated. However, a number of challenges were noted, including a lack of coordination between mental health and psychosocial support actors in the Sahel, migrants’ lack of awareness of where or how to seek care, and a lack of trained specialists within local healthcare systems. For example, during the period of implementation of the UK-funded SSSI programme, there was only one trained psychiatrist in Niger. The discussion cited various good practices for providing mental health and psychosocial support, including collaboration with public health authorities to integrate the support into primary healthcare, supporting community-based psychosocial support, and proactive outreach to identify migrants in need of this support and overcome stigma.

62 Ibid.

63 British Red Cross and VOICES Network (2022) *We want to be strong, but we don’t have the chance: women’s experiences of seeking asylum in the UK*.

64 Ibid.

65 British Red Cross (2021) Roundtable Summary. British Red Cross roundtable: Spotlight on migration in the Sahel region (unpublished).

## Role of the UK Government

Access to essential services has been a core focus of programmes funded by the UK as an international donor that have provided support to migrants in situations of vulnerability. In particular, as part of the UK Government's SSSI programme from 2018–2021 in West, East and North Africa (see section 2), implementing partners such as the British Red Cross provided various essential services to people on the move across the region, including basic health support, food support and non-food items (including cash and voucher assistance), mental health and psychosocial support, protection services and information.

Domestically, the UK Government also plays the role of a direct provider of essential services, including healthcare provided through

the UK's National Health Service (NHS). The government's submission to the first GCM regional review highlights that "upon arrival in the UK, all migrants are able to access basic services. For instance, access to urgent or immediately necessary health treatment is never withheld from migrants irrespective of immigration status, and GP consultations/ A&E facilities are free to all (including for irregular migrants). There are no immigration restrictions on children's access to compulsory education. Access to legal aid is means-tested and available for matters including criminal proceedings, asylum cases, and detention regardless of immigration status."<sup>66</sup> However, illustrating many of the issues outlined above, a recent UK civil society consultation on the GCM highlighted the stark difference between these legal entitlements and access for migrants in reality.<sup>67</sup>

## Recommendations

Drawing on these insights, as well as recommendations in the UN Secretary-General's report and the GCM, the following recommendations are proposed to the UK Government (and may also be of interest to other governments and donors). These include actions that can be taken domestically, as well as through international funding and diplomacy.<sup>68</sup>

- 1. Ensure that migrants, irrespective of status, have access to essential and life-saving services at all stages of their journeys, consistent with the principle of non-discrimination.** Recommended actions include:
  - ensuring inclusive laws, policies and practices that enable migrants to access essential services. For example, ensuring that all migrants, irrespective of status, are included in Covid-19 response and recovery frameworks and programmes, with equal access to Covid-19 testing, treatment and vaccines guaranteed, as well as appropriate socio-economic support and social protection
  - ensuring that State policies do not obstruct humanitarian efforts aimed at providing essential services to migrants, regardless of their migration status. For example, ensuring the separation of immigration enforcement activities from service provision.

66 UK Government (2020) *The Global Compact for Migration European Regional Review: Submission by the United Kingdom*, November 2020.

67 IOM and ODI (2022) *UK Consultation on the Global Compact for Migration (GCM): Event Report* (unpublished).

68 See for example paragraphs 49–59 and 98–100 of the UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM and objectives 3, 7, 15, 16 and 17 of the GCM.

**2. Acknowledge and address informal barriers that mean that migrants' rights to access essential services are not realised in practice.** This should include:

- host governments, including in the UK context, putting in place comprehensive mapping and feedback mechanisms on the barriers that migrants face accessing services, along with possible solutions. Migrants themselves should play a key role in informing this work and the design of service provision
- implementing measures to address informal barriers. For example in the UK, the Department for Health and Social Care should cease sharing data with the Home Office for the purposes of immigration enforcement so that people can feel safe accessing healthcare. To overcome existing barriers, the Home Office and its contracted asylum support providers should ensure everyone receiving asylum support can register with a GP and access specialist healthcare where needed in practice
- providing reliable and accessible information to migrants on their rights and available services. This should be based on a detailed understanding of the channels migrants already use to access information and which sources they trust, and should not be provided alongside information aiming to influence migration decisions.

**3. Recognise mental health and psychosocial support as a key essential service for migrants and take steps to encourage its accessibility.** This should include:

- using good practices to address key barriers. For example, strengthening coordination between mental health and psychosocial support actors, ensuring proactive outreach and information for migrants on where and how to seek care, supporting community-based psychosocial support and reinforcing capacity in local healthcare systems, based on learning from the Sahel
- addressing aspects of immigration policies and practices that create or exacerbate trauma. For example, in the UK addressing issues such as long delays in the asylum system and approaches among authorities that lead people to feel dismissed, silenced or dehumanised.

### 3. Climate change and mobility

The climate crisis is increasing the number and intensity of extreme weather events and affecting many more communities than before. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's experience – confirmed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – demonstrates that climate change is already contributing to humanitarian crises in vulnerable contexts, and increasingly driving displacement in every region of the world.<sup>69</sup> Connections between climate change and mobility are, however, complex, with this movement of people encompassing the full spectrum of mobility, ranging from displaced persons who have been left with no choice other than to leave their homes – for example, in communities completely destroyed by an extreme weather event – to individuals more proactively choosing when, where and how to move in response to the impacts of climate change, as one of multiple viable options for adaptation.

In 2020 weather-related disasters triggered more than three-quarters of new internal displacements recorded worldwide, accounting for 30 million.<sup>70</sup> Many other people have left their homes, though often temporarily, as a result of the slow-onset impacts of climate change, although data remains more limited.<sup>71</sup> Importantly, these trends are likely to deepen as the climate crisis intensifies: the latest scientific assessment confirms in unequivocal scientific terms that the window for concerted global action on climate change is rapidly closing.<sup>72</sup> The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement works with communities around the world to offer protection and

assistance in the context of climate-related mobility. This work spans resilience and disaster risk reduction, preparedness and anticipatory action, humanitarian response and recovery, and support to governments for strong legal frameworks including disaster risk management laws.

The commitment in the GCM to “minimise the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin” (objective 2) explicitly includes reference to disasters, environmental degradation and the adverse effects of climate change. This includes commitments to develop adaptation and resilience strategies, integrate displacement considerations into disaster preparedness strategies and address the vulnerabilities of persons affected by sudden-onset and slow-onset events. The GCM also contains a key commitment to strengthen solutions for migrants compelled to leave their countries of origin due to climate impacts, by building on and developing practices for their admission and stay, as part of a wider commitment to enhance the availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration (objective 5). While the UN Secretary-General's report highlights significant steps taken on both fronts in regions across the world, it also makes clear that these efforts must be further strengthened in order to fully address the implications of climate change for migration.<sup>73</sup>

69 This is supported and recognised by the IPCC report, see IPCC (2022) [Sixth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#).

70 IFRC (2021) [Displacement in a Changing Climate](#).

71 Traore Chazalnoël and Randall. (2022) [Migration and the slow-onset impacts of climate change: taking stock and taking action](#). In [World Migration Report 2022](#). IOM.

72 IPCC (2022) [Sixth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#).

73 See paragraphs 20–22 and 64 of the UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent Insights

### Insight 1: The climate crisis is happening now – creating new patterns of mobility and interacting with existing patterns

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are at the forefront of the climate crisis: they help communities prepare for, respond to and recover from climate-related stresses, in the context of both disasters and slow-onset environmental changes. Through this work it is clear that communities across the world are already experiencing the devastating humanitarian impacts of climate-related storms, floods, drought, extreme heat and sea level rises, most severely affecting people who are most vulnerable and marginalised. At present, the vast majority of people who are moving as a result of the impacts of climate change remain in their own country. However, smaller numbers of people and communities are also moving across borders. For example, in December 2020, Angolan citizens started crossing the border into Namibia in search of food, water, healthcare and employment because of the drought in their country.<sup>74</sup>

In some cases, particularly in connection to sudden-onset events, this is creating entirely new patterns of movement. However, the impacts of climate change also interact with existing patterns and drivers of mobility, including the search for sustainable livelihoods and opportunities. Research by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the British Red Cross focusing on the interactions between climate change and mobility in the Sudano-Sahel region, emphasises the complex relationship between the two.<sup>75</sup> Individuals' decisions and ability to move are shaped by multiple contextual factors and processes,

including gender inequality, age, education, fragility and conflict dynamics. Connections are overall difficult to disentangle and understanding of climate-related mobility patterns in the region remains nascent. The research highlights the potential for slow-onset climate stresses in the Sahel, such as rainfall variability, to contribute to both increased and decreased mobility, overlapping with long-standing regional mobility patterns, including seasonal agricultural movement. In some cases, with climate change leading people to migrate, usually temporarily, as a form of adaptation. In others – particularly among those people already most vulnerable to climate change impacts, such as poorer households or persons with disabilities – intensifying barriers to mobility, for example by depleting resources, and leaving people 'trapped' in situations of extreme vulnerability.

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**The impacts [of environmental changes] are different for the rich and the poor, because the rich get richer on the backs of the poor.**

Focus group discussion, Mali<sup>76</sup>

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Research in Ethiopia by the Danish Red Cross and Danish Institute for International Studies, focusing on climate change vulnerability and mobility among Ethiopian children and youth, also highlights the complex interplay between climate change and existing drivers of mobility, spanning both internal migration and movement across borders, including to destinations across Africa, the Middle East, North America and Europe.<sup>77</sup> For example, documenting the connection in Ethiopia between climate change and factors such as

<sup>74</sup> IFRC (2021) *Displacement in a Changing Climate*.

<sup>75</sup> Opitz-Stapleton et al. (2022) *Displacement, migration and mobility across the Sudano-Sahel: supporting today, preparing for tomorrow* (unpublished ODI briefing for the British Red Cross). A full report that also includes findings from fieldwork in Mali and Sudan is forthcoming.

<sup>76</sup> Forthcoming ODI and British Red Cross research.

<sup>77</sup> Mengiste and Sørensen (2021) *Climate change vulnerability and mobility among children and youth in Ethiopia: current policy dilemmas and recommendations*. Danish Institute for International Studies.

poverty, environmental degradation, land shortages, established migration traditions and family pressures. Elsewhere, Honduras was hit by two consecutive hurricanes in November 2020 – Eta and Iota – which caused massive displacement and significant damage and destruction to crops and harvests. Families already facing economic hardship due to the Covid-19 pandemic and endemic poverty saw their livelihoods undermined. These adverse impacts of climate change have contributed to people’s decisions to leave their homes and join the existing ‘migrant caravans’ headed north, primarily towards the USA, crossing Guatemala and Mexico.<sup>78</sup>

**Insight 2: Climate change will exacerbate, and bring to the fore, existing challenges and vulnerabilities for people on the move**

For people on the move, climate change exacerbates existing challenges and underlying vulnerabilities. Individuals already displaced as a result of violence, conflict or other factors may experience secondary displacement and wider negative climate impacts. For example, in Yemen more than 300,000 people, most of them internally displaced, were impacted by extreme flooding in 2020 and 2021, which devastated entire communities and fuelled the spread of diseases such as cholera, dengue, malaria and diphtheria.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, forthcoming ODI and British Red Cross research highlights the experience of people from South Sudan in Dabat Bosin camp in Sudan. After initially being displaced from South Sudan due to a devastating flood, they were then displaced twice more within six months in Sudan by heavy flooding. Having tried to rebuild their lives in Sudan with limited resources, these people once again found everything destroyed.

For individuals who move across borders due to the effects of climate change, there is

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**In our project sites there is deep poverty. In the lowlands people depend on smallholder agriculture and raising cattle. Rainfall variabilities (sometimes flooding and other times shortage of [the] raining season) cause drought and crop failure; many cattle die from water shortage leading to the impoverishment of communities and people get starved... Families, therefore, supplement household income by sending young members of the household, including children, to urban areas or abroad as labour migrants so as to get remittances.**

Staff member, Ethiopian Red Cross<sup>80</sup>

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a critical legal protection gap.<sup>81</sup> While many countries have laws and policies relating to climate change or disasters, issues relating to mobility, including the legal status of people moving as a result of climate change, are often poorly addressed or completely absent. Where present, climate-related mobility is often framed solely as a problem or negative consequence of climate change, that may be linked in policy frameworks to issues such as competition over land and water resources, conflict and instability, and environmental damage.

Climate-related migrants are also likely to face broader vulnerabilities, discussed elsewhere in this report. For example, forthcoming ODI and British Red Cross research – which among other aspects focuses on vulnerabilities associated with climate-related mobility – highlights difficulties experienced during migration journeys in Mali,

78 IFRC (2021) *Displacement in a Changing Climate*.

79 IFRC (2021) *Displacement in a Changing Climate*.

80 Mengiste and Sorensen (2021) *Climate change vulnerability and mobility among children and youth in Ethiopia: current policy dilemmas and recommendations*. Danish Institute for International Studies.

81 IFRC (2021) *Displacement in a Changing Climate*.

including a lack of resources and challenges in finding work, housing and food, and financial difficulties. In Sudan, the research documented the shame experienced by people who had been driven to move but who had failed to achieve their intended goal of finding new income to send back to their families. Respondents in Sudan also spoke of dangerous conditions for people migrating to work in remote gold mines and difficulties accessing communication channels to maintain contact with family members. Vulnerabilities experienced by people on the move as a result of climate change also intersect with wider challenges experienced in host communities.

For example, distinct vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls (see Box 3),

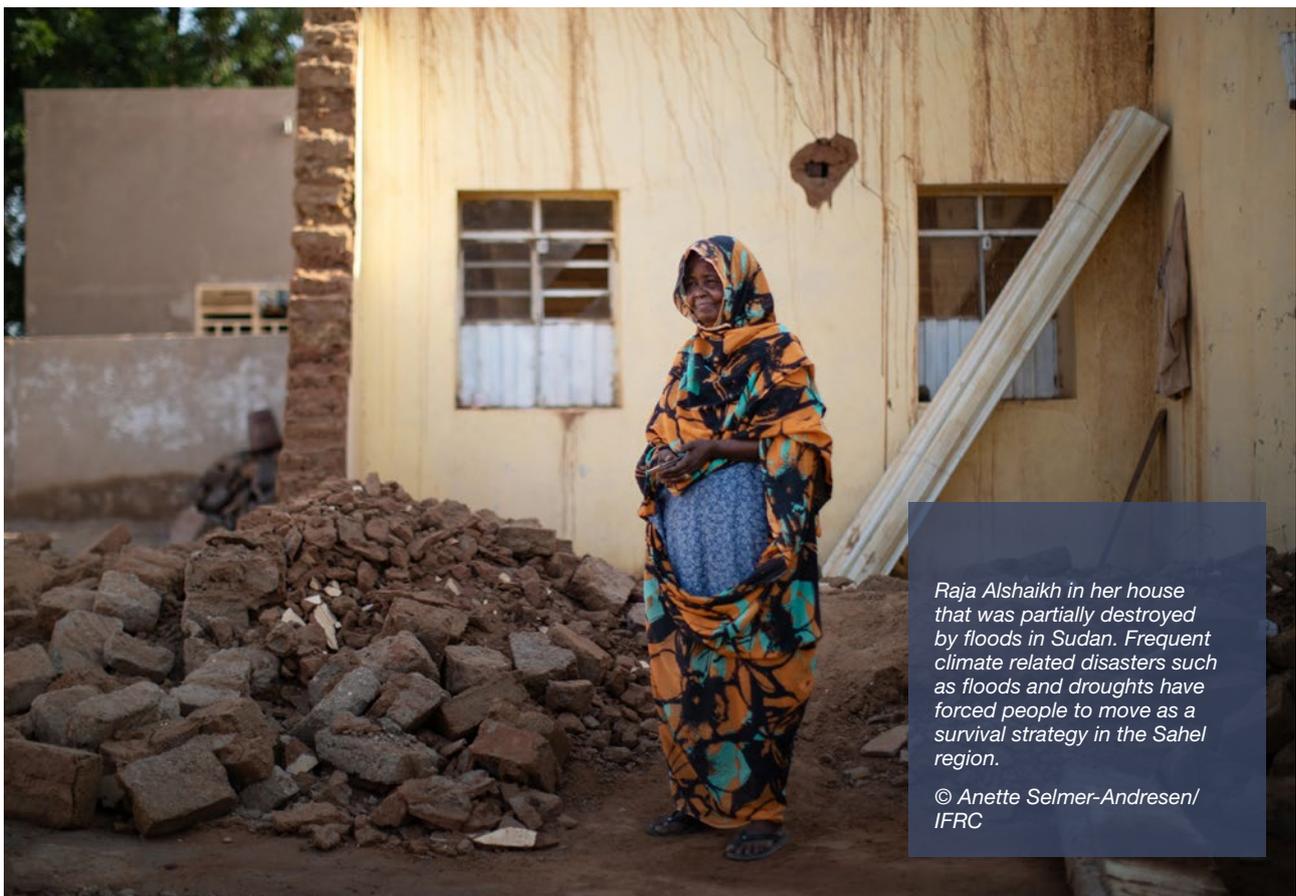
or challenges in urban areas. Individuals relocating from rural parts of sub-Saharan Africa to cities may be impacted by poor urban service delivery, with many cities themselves facing climate risks and other pressures where climate mobility accelerates urban growth.<sup>82</sup>

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**Young people with no [opportunities] prefer to migrate even if they have to die at sea. There is no alternative solution to their problems as long as the problem of money is not addressed. Europeans should understand that no one wants to leave their locality for somewhere else in order to die in the water.**

Focus group discussion, Mali<sup>83</sup>

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*Raja Alshaikh in her house that was partially destroyed by floods in Sudan. Frequent climate related disasters such as floods and droughts have forced people to move as a survival strategy in the Sahel region.*

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IFRC

82 Opitz-Stapleton et al. (2022) Displacement, migration and mobility across the Sudano-Sahel: supporting today, preparing for tomorrow (unpublished ODI briefing for the British Red Cross).

83 Forthcoming ODI and British Red Cross research.

## Box 3: Climate change, gender and mobility

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Gender inequalities are a key sociocultural factor shaping individuals' decisions and ability to move, as well as the vulnerabilities they experience during migration journeys. Forthcoming ODI and British Red Cross research highlights ways in which climate change overlaps with gendered migration patterns in the Sudano-Sahel. Overall, it supports the finding that gender norms around mobility in host societies and countries of origin, including in the context of climate change, are shaped by contextual, sociocultural and economic factors, which vary widely between contexts and communities.<sup>84</sup> For example, in Sudan, the research documented changes in migration patterns resulting from recent environmental changes that contrast with traditional gendered norms and customs around mobility. In particular, young women who had previously predominantly worked as casual wage labourers on local farms, were now considered almost equally as likely as men to move for distant agricultural opportunities. In contrast, while in Mali mobility was also considered a key adaptation strategy, it predominantly remained a male pursuit, with pre-existing gender norms around mobility relatively unchanged.

Although women on the move are not necessarily always more vulnerable than men, many migrant women and girls face a double vulnerability: often being more prone to gender-based violence and exploitation before movement due to gender inequality, with such vulnerabilities increasing while they are on the move.<sup>85</sup> In Sudan, the ODI and British Red Cross research documented a dual burden of work and childcare facing migrant women, many of whom took babies and young children with them, facing harsh conditions in agricultural work that were often unsuitable for children.

Both men and women also face gendered perceptions during and on return from migration journeys. For example, a recent IFRC study in West Africa illustrated how perceptions of migrants are largely tied to gender norms in host societies and countries of origin, that generally place women in the home and depict men as providers.<sup>86</sup> For men, migration was considered more socially acceptable and even in some cases expected, as a way to provide for family members. In contrast, for women migration was often perceived as a transgression of gender norms, with migrant women stereotyped as sex workers or blamed for bringing vice to communities.

84 Opitz-Stapleton et al. (2022) Displacement, migration and mobility across the Sudano-Sahel: supporting today, preparing for tomorrow (unpublished ODI briefing for the British Red Cross).

85 Hargrave and Anderson (2021) AMiRA Programme Migration Rapid Context Analysis (unpublished analysis for British Red Cross).

86 IFRC (2020) Risks and Resilience: Exploring migrants' and host communities' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic in West Africa.

### Insight 3: Some people may choose to move to adapt to climate-related hazards

In recent years there has been an emphasis in political narratives and migration funding on preventing migration, often in terms of movements from the Global South to the North, and towards Europe in particular. However, in the context of climate change, this fails to account for the way in which mobility itself can present a critical adaptation strategy: as a valuable option for impacted communities and a form of resilience in the face of climate-related risks.

For example, migration within the Sahel has long been an important resilience strategy, employed by many communities, especially by pastoralist and agro-pastoralists, for survival and as a way to create new economic opportunities during times of both crisis and stability.<sup>87</sup> For people in the Sahel, migration is increasingly being used as a form of resilience to climate change, drought and desertification. Forthcoming ODI and British Red Cross research in Mali and Sudan found that respondents in both countries identified migration as a common adaptation strategy; in Sudan, this was one of the most prominent strategies identified, likely due to the experience of large-scale flood events that impacted entire areas and rendered them uninhabitable, thus forcing people to move. In Mali, the research suggested that migration was considered a viable adaptation strategy that was largely associated with improved socio-economic outcomes. However, it was also generally considered a last resort, with people preferring to remain in place if possible to do so while maintaining sustainable livelihoods. The vast majority of people who were surveyed in Mali viewed family ties as a major barrier to migration, with many also pointing to a desire to stay in place; echoing

previous research that highlights social losses that may be associated with mobility, even where it presents an otherwise viable adaptation response.

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**If we manage to have a strategy that can help us stay, so much the better. If necessary, if we have the possibility through migration to manage and send [money] to our parents, we'll do that. We have no other strategy but migration.**

Focus group discussion, Mali<sup>88</sup>

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Similarly, Danish Red Cross and Danish Institute for International Studies research in Ethiopia found that, for children and youth facing slow-onset climate change, human mobility may constitute a viable adaptation strategy. It allows them to seek livelihood and other opportunities elsewhere, when climate change impacts their communities of origin. Individuals experiencing barriers to mobility were found to be among the most vulnerable, being left facing climate conditions that threatened their ability to thrive in the future. However, the research also detailed more negative consequences for children and young people forcibly displaced as a result of extreme weather events, including on their ability to establish viable futures.<sup>89</sup> This again highlights the fine balance between opportunities and costs associated with mobility in the context of climate change: on the one hand presenting an important option for adaptation, especially where this is one of a range of viable choices facing individuals; on the other sometimes being associated with significant losses, particularly where people are faced with few options but to leave their homes.

87 Ibid.

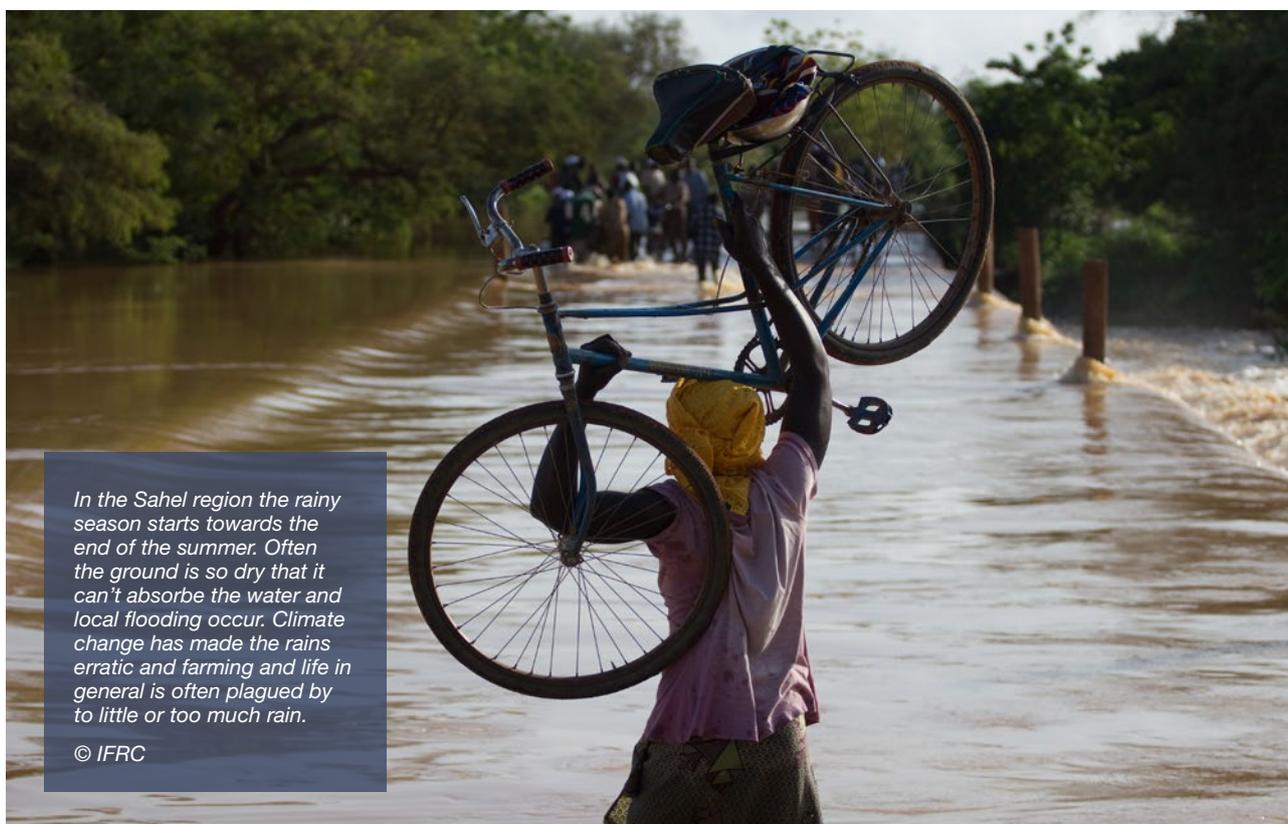
88 Forthcoming ODI and British Red Cross research.

89 Mengiste and Sørensen (2021) [Climate change vulnerability and mobility among children and youth in Ethiopia: current policy dilemmas and recommendations](#). Danish Institute for International Studies.

## Role of the UK Government

In recent years climate change has been high on the agenda of the UK Government. The UK has played an important role in international diplomacy for cooperation on climate change and as a donor to key initiatives. The leadership and international climate diplomacy of the UK continues to be essential in 2022, following on from its Presidency of the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP), and hosting COP26 in Glasgow in 2021. The UK Presidency demonstrated significant global leadership, bringing adaptation up the diplomatic agenda and championing Race to Resilience<sup>90</sup> at the highest level ahead of and during the Glasgow negotiations. This leaves a lasting legacy to be built on for COP27 and beyond, including passing over the COP Presidency to Egypt which is also a GCM 'Champion Country'<sup>91</sup>.

In terms of direct investment in the climate and mobility agenda, the UK has focused on building evidence to better understand the links between climate change and migration, commissioning a rapid evidence assessment of the impacts of climate change on migration patterns.<sup>92</sup> The UK Government's submission to the first GCM regional review also outlines the connection drawn by the UK between drivers of migration and its work on climate change mitigation and adaptation, which was emphasised as the main theme for COP26. The review submission highlighted the UK Government's commitment to double its international climate finance between 2021/22 and 2025/26, with investments aiming to "help developing countries to manage risk; adapt and build resilience to the impacts of climate change; promote low-carbon development; support sustainable management of natural resources; increase access to clean energy; and reduce deforestation".<sup>93</sup>



*In the Sahel region the rainy season starts towards the end of the summer. Often the ground is so dry that it can't absorb the water and local flooding occur. Climate change has made the rains erratic and farming and life in general is often plagued by too little or too much rain.*

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90 UNFCCC (2021) Race to Resilience: Catalysing a step-change in global ambition to build the resilience of 4 billion people by 2030

91 For details of the GCM Champion Countries initiative see: UN Network on Migration. [Global Compact for Migration. Champion Countries Initiative.](#)

92 FCDO (2021) [A rapid evidence assessment on the impacts of climate change on migration patterns](#) (Selby and Daoust).

93 UK Government (2020) [The Global Compact for Migration European Regional Review: Submission by the United Kingdom](#), November 2020.

## Recommendations

Drawing on these insights, as well as recommendations in the UN Secretary-General's report and the GCM, the following recommendations are proposed to the UK Government (and may also be of interest to other governments and donors):<sup>94</sup>

- 1. Anticipate future impacts and support resilience strategies within climate-vulnerable communities – so that mobility remains a choice, but is not the only option.** This should include:
  - investing in building an evidence base aimed at understanding how climate change interacts with existing and future patterns and drivers of mobility in specific contexts
  - provide funding for locally led humanitarian assistance aimed at ensuring that climate-vulnerable communities have access to safe and dignified choices. For example, building on previous UK Government funding and diplomacy, continuing to scale up global anticipatory action, forecast-based financing and resilience building initiatives to minimise and avert loss and damage.
- 2. Address vulnerabilities associated with climate change and mobility.** This should include:
  - promoting the integration of climate-related mobility and disaster displacement into relevant national laws, policies and strategies, including disaster laws, climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and development, as well as broader policies regarding legal status and migration pathways
  - investing in addressing the impacts of climate change on humanitarian needs in the context of migration, including for populations already on the move or displaced. This could be done by mobilising flexible and accessible climate adaptation finance for local organisations to address humanitarian vulnerabilities linked to climate-related mobility, for example. Future UK financial support to the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund could include support for existing and future programmes on climate-related migration
  - addressing wider existing vulnerabilities that may be exacerbated when people are moving in response to climate change impacts. For example, taking actions outlined elsewhere in this report with regards to migrants' humanitarian assistance, protection and access to essential services.
- 3. Build awareness and recognition that mobility can be an important resilience and adaptation strategy.** This should include:
  - building international acknowledgement and consensus that mobility can be an important adaptation strategy to be enabled among a range of choices for people in climate-vulnerable communities.
  - ensuring that where climate-related mobility is included in relevant national laws, policies and strategies, it is framed not solely as a problem or negative consequence of climate change, but also as a viable resilience or adaptation strategy.

94 See for example paragraphs 20–22 and 64 of the UN Secretary-General's report on the GCM and GCM objectives 2 and 5.

## 4. Beyond the International Migration Review Forum: a ‘whole-of-society’ approach to track GCM progress

As United Nations Member States gather in New York for the IMRF, it should be remembered that at the heart of the GCM’s commitments are people’s lives, safety and dignity. First and foremost, the IMRF provides an opportunity to reaffirm continued commitment to its principles. However, the true marker of success for the GCM will be found not just in declarations of continued support but in States’ ability to translate commitments made at the multilateral level into meaningful action in reality.

Looking beyond the IMRF, discussions convened by the British Red Cross in the UK have consistently highlighted the importance of identifying ways to track national-level progress against the GCM’s commitments.<sup>95</sup> The GCM outlines how regular reviews of progress could be achieved as part of formal national implementation plans, providing a mechanism for accountability.<sup>96</sup> To date GCM-specific national implementation plans have been put in place in Kenya and Portugal, while other countries have incorporated the GCM into existing frameworks.<sup>97</sup> However, ongoing assessment of progress and accountability for commitments poses a greater challenge – although not an insurmountable one – in contexts, such as the UK, where such plans have not been formally articulated.

Particularly in such contexts, tracking of progress requires regular and meaningful engagement between government officials, civil society and migrants themselves. In the UK, the British Red Cross has welcomed government officials’ engagement in roundtable discussions convened as part of a British Red Cross–FCDO platform on migration in 2020–2021 and through a recent UK civil society consultation on the GCM. This should be seen as the first step in a longer process that should now focus on developing shared priorities for future action, alongside metrics to support and assess progress in policy and practice.

Ultimately, this should form part of a meaningful ‘whole-of-society approach’ behind implementation of the GCM, at the centre of which should be migrants themselves. It is critical that space is created for migrants’ own voices and experiences to inform the IMRF itself, as well as other global, national and local policy processes; enabling migrants to engage and participate in decision-making; and ensuring laws, policies and programmes are developed with migrants and other affected communities. This is key to ensure that progress against the GCM is measured not just by assessment of government laws and policies on paper, but by how these are experienced in reality by those people who are subject to them.

<sup>95</sup> See for example, British Red Cross (2020) *Policy into practice: Implementing humanitarian priorities in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*; British Red Cross (2020) *Roundtable Summary*. British Red Cross Roundtable. *Turning Policy into Practice: Reviewing the First Two Years of the UK’s Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* (unpublished).

<sup>96</sup> See paragraph 53 of the GCM.

<sup>97</sup> See paragraph 12 of the UN Secretary-General’s report on the GCM.

## Recommendations

Looking to the IMRF and beyond, the following recommendations are proposed to the UK Government (and may also be of interest to other governments and donors):

- 1. Put in place mechanisms and dialogue to track national-level progress against the GCM on an ongoing basis, whether or not supported by formal national implementation plans.** In the UK, this should include identifying specific areas of focus for GCM implementation over the next four years, with metrics developed to measure progress in policy and practice in these areas. This should be part of a process that brings together government officials across departments, civil society and migrants themselves.
- 2. Ensure that migrants' lived experience is central to a whole-of-society approach for the GCM.**<sup>98</sup> For example, by:
  - involving migrants and migrant-led organisations in the IMRF itself and wider GCM processes – including in assessments of national implementation, as members of government delegations to the IMRF and regional reviews, and as technical experts, advisers and key speakers
  - outreach by well-placed civil society, diaspora or migrant-led organisations to disseminate accessible information about the GCM to migrant communities and generate discussion. Migrants should be able to give their perspectives on how the GCM could be a useful tool, opening up opportunities for wider meaningful participation and co-creating solutions for implementation
  - generating opportunities for migrants to lead discussions and influence policy and practice at all levels – including as part of GCM processes and more widely in the UK domestic migration context
  - seeking out recommendations and reflections directly from migrants and local communities, including by partnering with local actors (for example, migrant-led and community stakeholders) on GCM implementation and the design of wider migration policy and programming.

<sup>98</sup> In the context of the UK, more detailed recommendations for developing a 'whole-of-society' and 'whole-of-government' approach to implementing the GCM can be found in: British Red Cross (2020) [Policy into practice: Implementing humanitarian priorities in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).

**For more information**

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