

Key points:

COVERAGE OF MIGRATION BASED ON INTERNATIONAL LAW AND EVIDENCE





ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

This document is a summary and adaptation of the *Journalist Guide to Media Coverage of Migration Based on International Law and Evidence* created by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) country office in Tunisia. The objective is to summarize the key points of the guide so that journalists and media professionals have a source for quick reference on the topics developed in the document.



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SECTION 1.

THE USE OF WORDS



1. MIGRATION CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Responsible media coverage of migration uses the correct concepts. In this section, the most used concepts are selected, but it is recommended to consult the [IOM Glossary on Migration](#).



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO USE THE RIGHT CONCEPTS?

“In the complex reality of contemporary mobility, it can be difficult to neatly separate people into distinct categories as people may simultaneously fit into several categories or change from one category to another in the course of their journey.”

 OHCHR, Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights at International Borders (2019).

MIGRATION

“The movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State.”

International migration is “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence and across an international border to a country of which they are not nationals”.

Internal migration is “the movement of people within a State involving the establishment of a new temporary or permanent residence”.

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

REGULAR MIGRATION

“Migration that occurs in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit and destination.”

A migrant in a regular situation is “A person who moves or has moved across an international border and is authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party.”

 IOM Media Coverage of Migration: Journalists Guide (2019).

IRREGULAR MIGRATION

There is not an official definition for irregular migration. IOM defines it as “**movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements** governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination”.

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

MIGRANT IN A REGULAR SITUATION

A person who moves or has moved across an international border and is authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party.

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

A migrant in an irregular situation may be one or more of the following categories:

- Irregular entry
- Irregular residence
- Irregular employment

FORCED MIGRATION

A migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, **involves force, compulsion, or coercion.**

NOTE

While not an international legal concept, this term has been used to describe the movements of refugees, displaced persons (including those displaced by disasters or development projects), and, in some instances, victims of trafficking. At the international level the use of this term is debated because of the widespread recognition that a continuum of agency exists rather than a voluntary/forced dichotomy and that it might undermine the existing legal international protection regime.

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

MIXED MOVEMENTS (MIXED MIGRATION OR MIXED FLOWS)

A movement in which a number of people are travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have varying needs and profiles and may include asylum seekers, refugees, trafficked persons, unaccompanied/separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation.



 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

REFUGEE (1951 CONVENTION)

A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of:

- Race
- Religion
- Nationality
- Membership of a particular social group
- Political opinion

Is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).



MIGRANT WORKER

A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which **he or she is not a national.**

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRANT

A person or group(s) of persons who, **predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment** that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are forced to leave their places of habitual residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move within or outside their country of origin or habitual residence.

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

SMUGGLING (OF MIGRANTS)

The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the **irregular entry of a person into a State Party** of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, **for the purpose of exploitation**. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

ENVIRONMENTAL/ CLIMATE REFUGEE

Legally speaking, the term “climate refugee” **is inappropriate** because it is not covered by the definition of *refugee* established in the 1951 Refugee Convention.

 IOM Media Coverage of Migration: Journalists Guide (2019).

ILLEGAL MIGRANT/ILLEGAL MIGRATION

There are illegal actions, but there are no illegal people.

The term “illegal migrant” is legally incorrect and has negative connotations that stigmatize a group of people.

Under United Nations general assembly resolution 3449 (9 December 1975), the word “illegal” should not be used.

Instead refer to them as “irregular situation”.

 IOM Media Coverage of Migration: Journalists Guide (2019).

DON'T FREEZE THE VOCABULARY

- Rigorous language is the basis of ethical coverage, and it is important to understand that this implies constant learning and consultation, since the phenomenon is always changing.
- Migration by definition involves movement and leads to movement in different directions over time.

 IOM Media Coverage of Migration: Journalists Guide (2019).

2. WORKING MIGRANTS

In order to provide a more comprehensive view of migration, it is important to work on a coverage that includes the links between migration and development.



DEFINITIONS OF LABOUR MIGRATION

There is no internationally accepted definition of labour migration. However, the IOM uses the following definition:

Movement of persons from one State to another, or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment.

 IOM, Glossary on Migration (2019).

On the other hand, the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines it as:

“... all international migrants who are currently employed or unemployed and seeking employment in their present country of residence.”

 International Labour Organization (2015).

During 2021, there were 281 million migrants in the world, representing 3.6% of the world's population. However, studies show that their contributions to the economy are around 10% of the world's GDP. In 2015, they contributed 6.7 million dollars, while in 2018 their contribution was almost 7 million dollars.

 DESA (2018) and IOM (2022).

The myth that “migrants are expensive” for their host countries is refuted by a number of studies¹. Apart from their undeniable contribution to the local economy, migrants are a source of social and cultural vitality and diversity, innovation and new solutions, and tend to be more resilient in the event of an emergency. In addition, their contribution to the local economy can be seen in their consumption and social security contributions.

SOME RELEVANT INFORMATION ON LABOUR MIGRATION

- There were 169 million migrant workers globally in 2019. This represented 62% of the international migrants in the world².
- Migrants play a considerable part in both strongly growing markets and economic sectors in decline. It is estimated that one-third of Central American migrant workers in the United States work in the service sector³.
- During 2021, growth in remittances was recorded worldwide. In Latin America and the Caribbean, flows increased by 21.7%⁴.
- The feminization of migration in Mesoamerica is a trend that has seen a gradual increase in recent years, both in countries within the region and to extra-regional destinations. In the United States of America, 50% of the Central American migrants are women⁵.
- Qualified migrants contribute to the development of human capital in countries of destination.
- Migrants also contribute to technological progress. For example, migrants have developed applications to support better integration in receiving countries, while maintaining social links and financial support to their families and societies back home⁶.

1. Mecanismos sobre migración laboral en Mesoamérica/ Mechanisms for Labour Migration in the Caribbean / Prácticas de reclutamiento de personas trabajadoras migrantes en Belice, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras y México. IOM, (2021).

2. IOM World Migration Report (2022).

3. See: IOM, Mecanismos de movilidad laboral en Mesoamérica (2021). Available in Spanish only

4. World Bank (2021).

5. See: IOM, Mecanismos de movilidad laboral en Mesoamérica (2021). Available in Spanish only

6. IOM World Migration Report (2022).

3. TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING

Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants are two crimes related to human mobility. It is very important to understand their differences in order to cover the issue properly.



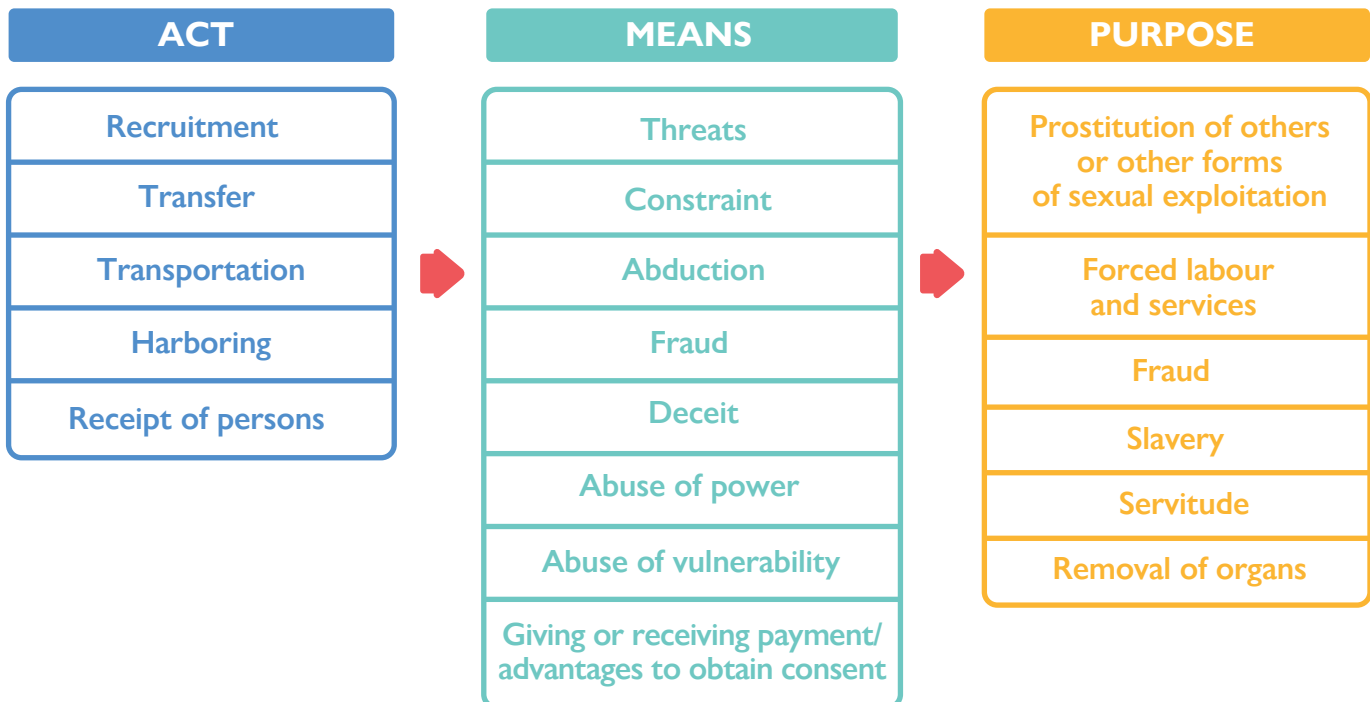
TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Trafficking refers to “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”.

- ▶ Human trafficking can be international or local. **Traffickers work even within the borders of a country.**
- ▶ **Migrants in a regular situation can also be victims of trafficking.** It would be a mistake to think that transnational trafficking involves only irregular migrants.
- ▶ Even if people have been convinced to give their consent, **they are considered victims of trafficking in persons.**

Trafficking is a complex crime simultaneously requiring:

- **AN ACT:** recruitment, transfer, transportation, harboring or receipt of persons.
- **MEANS:** impairs consent.
- **A PURPOSE:** exploitation.



MYTHS ABOUT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS



All traffickers **are men**.

Trafficking in person = **trafficking in women**.

People are only trafficked **for sexual exploitation**

Trafficking in persons **is a purely international problem**.

Trafficking in persons = **Smuggling of migrants***.

*Point five leads us to the distinction between trafficking and smuggling which are often confused.

MIGRANT SMUGGLING

It refers to the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the irregular entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.

Migrant smuggling necessarily implies crossing a border. It also implies:

ACT

Procuring the irregular entry of a person into a different State.

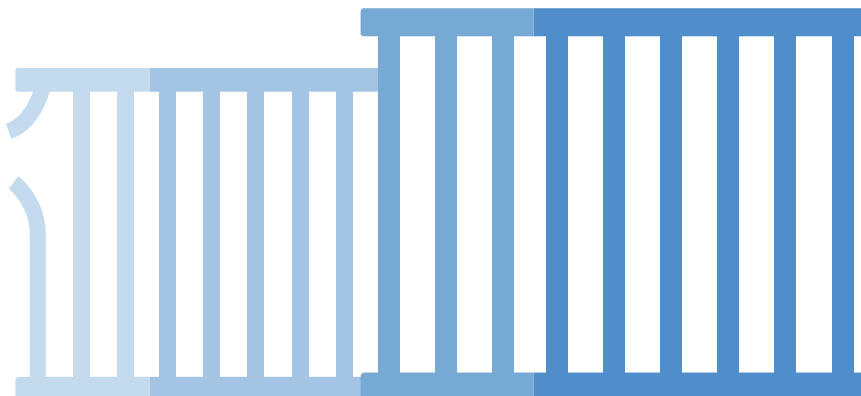
CONSENT

Freely given, irregular crossing of a border, with the help of a smuggler and in exchange for payment.

PURPOSE

For the migrant, to cross an international border irregularly. For the smuggler, to earn money or another material by bringing someone irregularly across the border.

It is important to recognize the difference between the two offenses and understand that in some cases they may be related: smuggling networks may be connected to human trafficking networks.



SECTION 2.

MEDIA COVERAGE



4. HOW TO COVER MIGRATION ON MEDIA? SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JOURNALISTS



Media outlets play a significant role in the framing of policy discourses that affect how people act, what people think, how policymakers prioritize agendas, and how migrants make decisions. Consequently, a key question arises: How should journalists and media professionals approach a complicated and diverse issue such as Migration?

For this purpose, IOM provides a list of recommendations to improve reporting on migrants and migrations from a human rights-based approach:

1. Words matter

Journalists specializing in migration master terminology. They know international law. They know that using the right word is not a purely philosophical or terminological matter, it is also legal. **Word selection can impact on the dignity of migrants and the accuracy of the message.**

2. Respect the dignity of migrants

Migration is first and foremost a human journey, fraught with difficulties most of the time. Avoid the use of dehumanizing language and metaphors that cast migration as form of a natural disaster (often a flood), or migrants as animals, especially insects (“swarms”).

3. Challenge hate speech

Avoid stereotypical, negative expressions referring to the ethnic origin of suspects, for instance, crime reports emphasizing the legal stay status of a person. Journalism Initiative has developed [a helpful tool](#) and reminds journalists that just because someone said something outrageous it doesn't make it newsworthy.

4. Promote evidence-based public discourse

Make use of accurate information and resources, understand that correlation does not mean causation, be transparent and share with the public resources to further explore the topic at hand. Confront, fact-check and analyze statements to hold accountable authorities, educate the public and contribute to a deeper understanding of migration.

5. Connect with migrants

Include a variety of sources, engage with migrants, refugee groups, activists and NGOs that can provide vital information. It is important to include the voice of migrants and reflect the human aspect of Migration, advocate and report on humanitarian crisis and/or violation of human rights at hand, the contrary may reduce migrant's livelihood and dignity to a problem or a number to be debated over in public discourse.

6. Ensure a balanced coverage

Avoid victimization and oversimplification. In most cases, migrants are perceived in extremes, either as a problem or as a victim. Challenge these notions and promote other aspects of migration, for example, cover the stories of successful artists, diasporas, remittances and the contribution of migrants to development in your country. Make appropriate use of images and visual resources. **Journalists should be careful not to reinforce stereotypes, generate revictimization or distort the meaning of an image** with a title, comment or caption.

7. Adopt an international focus

Place the migration story in a global context, local or national interests may predominate at the expense of a wider understanding of the migration and the reasons for it. Framing migration as a conflict between nations may highlight the differences and disparate views of certain individuals or government officials at the expense of migrant's rights, integrity and dignity.



5. COMBATING CLICHES



As members of a society, we are all victims of the stereotypes and representations of migrants naturally present in our minds. Our imagination has fixed the picture of migrants in certain ways and journalists, like anyone, can be misled. However, we have the responsibility to reflect on those structures and help to combat clichés with our work.

IS THIS TRUE OR FALSE?

“The overwhelming majority of migrants are men.”



FALSE: In 2019, women were almost half of all international migrants. The share of migrant women in the total number of international migrants fell from 49.3 percent in 2000 to 47.9 percent in 2019. The share of migrant women was highest in Northern America (51.8 percent) and Europe (51.4 percent), and lowest in sub-Saharan Africa (47.5 percent), and Northern Africa and Western Asia (35.5 percent).

“Migrants have few qualifications and in general no diplomas.”



FALSE: According to the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), 63 percent of migrants arriving in France in 2012 had a bachelor's degree or equivalent diploma.

“Most refugees find asylum in developed countries.”



FALSE: UNHCR statistics show that nine out of ten refugees are taken in by developing countries. People fleeing their countries usually seek asylum in a neighboring country. For example, most Syrians go to Lebanon and Turkey, and most Afghans to Pakistan and Iran.

IS THIS TRUE OR FALSE?

Migrants undermine public health:

- Migrants carry diseases.
- Migrants burden on health systems.



FALSE. In general, migrants do not constitute a burden on the host country's health systems.

Their average age - generally lower than the age of nationals - and the fact that they often have less access to the public health system are some of the factors that explain this phenomenon. In fact, migrants very often:

- Have significantly lower mortality rates, especially with respect to cancer and cardiovascular disease, and a lower child mortality rate.
- Make less use of emergency and specialized health services.
- Are less likely to have diabetes, cardiovascular disease.
- Have a better self-perception of their state of health.

Unfortunately, migrant health tends to deteriorate in the host country over time, notably due to difficulty of accessing health services, the lack of suitable housing and the prevalence of tough working conditions.



6. INTERVIEWING MIGRANTS IN ROUTE:



DOS AND DON'TS

INTERVIEWING MIGRANTS WHILE ON THEIR MIGRATION JOURNEY REQUIRES SPECIFIC PROFESSIONAL SKILLS. NOT ONLY DOES IT INVOLVE SOMEONE IN A SITUATION OF VULNERABILITY, BUT THE SITUATION ALSO MAKES IT HARDER TO CROSS-CHECK WHAT'S BEEN SAID.

DECIDE FOR YOURSELF WHO TO SPEAK TO

Be wary of migrants “pre-selected” by NGOs, associations, the clergy, the local authorities or the migrants themselves. Of course, journalists must at times use intermediaries to reach migrants, but they must take care not to be deliberately directed towards certain mandatory contacts.

Once in the field, journalists must understand the local power structure, how intercommunity relationships are organized – where migrants gather, they are often highly structured.

OBTAIN THE MIGRANT'S “INFORMED CONSENT”

While in route, the migrant is an interlocutor like anyone else. **This is a person who is sometimes in a vulnerable situation** -which is a more important reason to respect their picture rights and their right to protect their personal lives.

What's the best approach? Migrants should be informed from the outset about the conditions in which their words will be used, and where (written press, with or without pictures; television; social networks). **The journalist must clearly identify him/herself and for whom and in what context he or she works.**

This will allow him or her to obtain the migrants' “informed consent”.

Journalists must, whenever possible, create the right interview conditions: choosing a place and a time that ensures that the migrant is not, for example, being watched by someone else.

Hardest of all is no doubt interviewing children. **Journalists must obtain the consent of the children as well as their parents** – if they're present – or of a person in charge of them, a legal guardian. The journalist must take care to blur faces and to use aliases.

NEVER PAY FOR AN INTERVIEW

Journalists should never pay for an interview.

HOW TO CROSS -CHECK THE INFORMATION?

It is no easy task to check the veracity of an account when migrants tell their stories or recount their journeys over several years, and you have no means of cross-checking the information.

How to proceed? **In order to gauge the credibility of an account, it is extremely useful to be very familiar with the typical route the migrants take, the geography and the obstacles they face.** The story must be published in first person and journalists, who can never be sure of what they're told, must keep a certain

distance – “according to so and so” – when revealing these life stories.

Time is another means of counteracting these difficulties. The journalist must take the time to have a long conversation to get a better picture of the migrants' personalities and journeys. When possible, it's good to remember to get the migrants' phone numbers, to be able to contact them again later, and to have them repeat or clarify what they said.

THE FIVE POINT GUIDE FOR MIGRATION REPORTING

The [Ethical Journalism Network](#) has outlined these five key points to consider when covering migration:

1

FACTS NOT BIAS

- Are we accurate and have we been impartial, inclusive and fact-based in our reporting?
- Are we acting independently from narratives that stem from politics and emotion rather than facts?
- Are we fairly and transparently reporting the impact of migration on communities?

2

KNOW THE LAW

Asylum seeker? Refugee?
Victim of trafficking? Migrant worker?
Do we use irregular migrant?
Do we understand and use migrant definitions correctly and do we articulate to our audience the rights migrants are due under international, regional and national law?

3

SHOW HUMANITY

Humanity is the essence of ethical journalism. But we must keep our emotions in check, avoid victimization, oversimplification and the framing of coverage in a narrow humanitarian context that takes no account of the bigger picture.

4

SPEAK FOR ALL

Do we have migrant voices? Are we listening to the communities they are passing through or joining? Question how representative self-appointed community and migrant spokespeople really are.

5

CHALLENGE HATE

Have we avoided extremism? Have we taken the time to judge whether the content about migrants or those who seek to limit migration can lead to hatred? Words like “swarms”, “floods” and “waves” should be treated with caution



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