

GLOBAL WEBINAR

Meaningful Participation of Migrants and Displaced People

10 July 2024

A. Overview

This report provides insights from the first global webinar on meaningful participation of migrants and displaced people held twice on 10 July 2024 from 10:00-11:00 CET and 17:00-18:00 CET. Over 250 staff and volunteers of National Societies, IFRC, ICRC, and the Global Migration Lab attended from all regions. This report may be of interest to webinar participants and other staff, volunteers and management, including people with lived experience, expertise and interest in the topic.

B. Objective and Agenda

With growing attention on strengthening the meaningful participation of migrants and displaced people—both within and outside the Movement—the webinar aimed to:

1. Prompt reflection on how meaningful participation is addressed in our work.
2. Generate ideas on how to strengthen action according to local and specific contexts.

The webinar explored:

- How meaningful participation is conceived in strategic documents.
- How meaningful participation is implemented in practice and barriers and challenges encountered.
- Ideas and support needed to strengthen investment in people with lived experience and expertise and embed a meaningful participation approach.

The agenda covered:

- Conceptions of meaningful participation.
- Insights from a discussion paper developed by the Global Migration Lab.
- National Society examples and lessons learned.

C. Framing, Insights and Discussion Paper

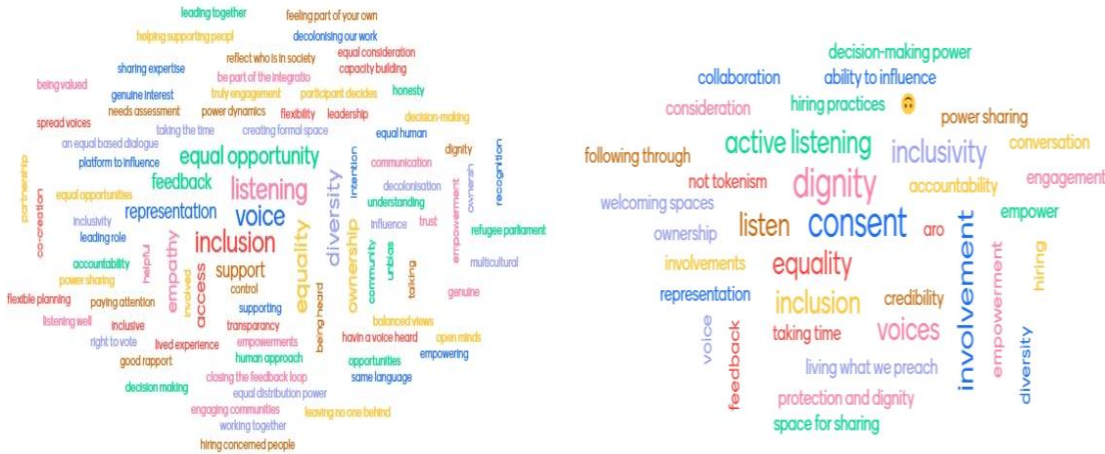
IFRC highlighted how the topic is gaining traction in the Movement and the need to consider how to strengthen meaningful participation in: (1) programmes and responses; (2) humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy; and (3) institutional structures such as hiring, while acknowledging that the themes have long been reflected in strategic documents and work of different Movement components.

- The first of five enablers in the Draft [Movement Migration Strategy](#) (page 8) is on meaningful participation. It sets out minimum expectations and commitments and highlights that meaningful

participation is essential for achieving impactful, positive, and long-term outcomes. It highlights the importances of investing in a meaningful participation approach in a sustainable way.

- One of four pledges made by the IFRC at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2023 focused on strengthening meaningful participation. IFRC committed to strengthen meaningful participation of refugees and displaced people in planning, co-designing and decision-making in both programmes and policy processes through the [GCR Multistakeholder Pledge on Refugee Participation](#).

Introductory remarks by Davina Gomes (Refugee Support Service Manager at the British Red Cross with lived experience of migration) emphasized the importance of the “power of choice” in self-identification and access to services for migrants and displaced people. The remarks prompted participants to consider the “ingredients” of meaningful participation in their local context, understand what it is not— not without choice; not tokenism; not exploitative, not without psychological support, not without safe spaces—and to reflect on iterative steps to act along a co-production ladder.



The Global Migration Lab shared insights from a discussion paper entitled *Meaningful Participation of Migrants: From Words to Actions*. The paper presents reflections from interviews with 13 National Societies and focus group discussions with IFRC and ICRC staff. The paper contains three sections: (1) *What is meaningful participation and why is it important?* (2) *How does the Movement apply meaningful participation in practice and what are some of the challenges?* (3) *How can the Movement improve the meaningful participation of migrants?* The paper is available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

D. National Society Examples, Lessons and Recommendations

Examples and lessons from National Societies on strengthening meaningful participation

National Societies shared examples and lessons from their work in strengthening a meaningful participation approach. Examples highlighted during the discussion included the following:

The **Colombian Red Cross** uses suggestion boxes, focus group discussions and other feedback mechanisms at humanitarian service points to give migrants in transit

The **Gambia Red Cross Society** has invested in building partnerships with migrant associations, recruiting and engaging migrants into the National Society and

the opportunity to highlight needs, ask questions and flag problems. At integration centers, several kinds of activities, including creating space for artistic collaboration, have enabled host communities and migrants to co-create needs-based responses. Migrant feedback prompted the CRC to establish “humanitarian stores” along migration routes where migrants can select the goods they need, rather than receiving pre-determined kits. This shift has reduced costs and waste, and helped move from a model of involving, informing, and consulting migrants to empowering and collaborating with migrants in the design of programs.

*The **Danish Red Cross** Asylum Department Strategy engages asylum seekers as a resource to inform and shape the running and daily life at asylum centres. The Danish Red Cross established an Advisory Board to the head of the Danish Red Cross Asylum Department and engaged asylum seekers as experts to influence and qualify the decisions of management: in a concrete example of this dialogue, asylum seekers helped identify and design recreational activities in their centre by bringing up a gap in options to the head of the Danish Red Cross Asylum Department. The Danish Red Cross emphasized the importance of direct communication and dialogue, without which there is limited scope to identify and put into practice the needs of migrants.*

undertaking assessments and collecting feedback from migrants in transit to develop an understanding of their experience. Meaningful participation has nurtured ownership, improved access to migrants, improved dignified service delivery, and helped to manage expectations and build trust.

*At the **New Zealand Red Cross** 30 percent of managers and 50 percent of staff in the migration programme have lived experience. This shift occurred following an analysis of the programme, establishment of leadership and advisor roles to analyze meaningful participation, and development of a strategic goal to increase the number of people with lived experience in the programme. The increased number of lived experience staff has led to higher quality community engagement, reduced distance between staff and communities, and higher visibility of the programme.*

*The **Turkish Red Crescent Society** established Advisory Boards composed of representatives from migrant and local communities. The boards are involved in decision-making processes of programme implementation, with avenues for providing feedback to better adjust programmes to local contexts. The TRCS has long had these boards in place, and in situations of heightened needs—such as the earthquake—the boards and committees who were working in the field could conduct immediate needs assessments and ensure the needs of migrants, local communities, and other groups were considered.*

Examples highlighted during the chat included the following:

- A participant noted the [Voices Network](#), a collective of refugees and people seeking asylum who speak about issues that affect them, established with support of the **British Red Cross**.
- A participants noted that the **Red Cross of Chad** has a wealth of experience to share in the field of migration, particularly with Humanitarian Service Points.
- A participant noted that the **Hungarian Red Cross** considers the opinions of migrants while developing programs and services to better meet their needs and migrants can join and be involved as a volunteer. The National Society has seen that involving refugees in its work brings benefits, such as newly arriving refugees developing trust in the National Society and its staff and volunteers, which helps build a more trustful community and a more welcoming host community.

- A participant highlighted **New Zealand Red Cross** meaningful participation practices relating to [employment and labour market integration programmes](#) for displaced persons.
- A participant noted that the **Red Cross Society of Niger** did not receive a lot of feedback through suggestion boxes and therefore the National Society set up an anonymous telephone line. The National Society has also carried out a mapping to collect information on problems reported during social cohesion activities which has made it possible to develop an action plan accounting for the concerns of internally displaced persons and migrants.
- A participant shared a **Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan** [practice](#) submitted to GRF.

Recommendations from National Societies on strengthening meaningful participation

National Societies shared recommendations on strengthening a meaningful participation approach. Examples highlighted during the discussion included the following:

- Engage migrants and displaced people in decision-making and delegate responsibly.
- Ensure diversity in boards and decision-making bodies (and among staff and volunteers) so their composition is not homogenous and reflects diverse perspectives and experiences.
- Acknowledge and treat migrants and displaced people as equals in strengthening action on meaningful participation, ensuring practices do not perpetuate or maintain vulnerability.
- Embed a meaningful participation approach in policies and metrics of the National Society to ensure that people with lived experience are leading, designing, and coordinating programmes.
- Recognize it takes time for staff to develop skills and fulfill leadership positions and plan accordingly, including by consulting and establishing a lived expertise staff development plan.
- Understand that there will be ongoing tensions between tokenism and meaningful participation and that it takes time to learn these lessons.
- Dedicate a specific budget line for meaningful participation.
- Support the establishment or strengthening of migrant associations, recognizing legal and structural barriers may limit, at least initially, the scope of engagement with such organizations.
- Develop procedures and processes to identify representative migrant and community leaders and facilitate their meaningful engagement.
- Strengthen feedback mechanisms at humanitarian service points and more generally in programmes and operations.

The Global Migration Lab's discussion paper also contains a series of recommendations, reinforcing and echoing many of the points raised by National Societies during the webinar.

E. Looking forward

With their responses to questions posed through a menti-meter, National Society and other participants expressed how they intend to strengthen action on meaningful participation in their context. The following inputs are organized based on the number of responses received.

- Organizing national conversations (and regional discussions with support from IFRC)
- Gathering, analyzing, and acting on migrant perspectives and feedback

- Increasing engagement of migrant representatives in action
- Establishing communities of practice or working groups at national level (and regional level with support from IFRC)
- Reviewing internal policies

Participants also identified the types of support that would be most valuable from IFRC or peers:

- Training and workshops
- Peer-to-peer exchange
- Tools on the enabler in the Movement Migration Strategy

Annex: Questions raised during the chat

- Will a strength-based approach or a thriving approach instead of a trauma-informed approach change the way we understand meaningful participation as professionals? And the way people with expert lived knowledge understand and reflect on it?
- What are the common barriers encountered when trying to engage migrants in meaningful participation and how have challenges been addressed?
- How has community engagement and accountability helped with the implementation of migration programmes?
- How do you protect people with lived experience who work with you, as it can be quite tough to be working in an environment that has a close connection to experienced traumas?
- How can we ensure effective and meaningful participation of migrants in the designing and planning of operations aiming to support them? Knowing that there are limited or no funds to carry out surveys, tight deadlines to submit proposals and at times there are language barriers?