



## **Migration and communication – AVSI’s key points**

### **AVSI’s operational approach to migration, in the framework of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees**

#### **1 The person and his / her dignity**

“Undocumented,” “illegal alien”, “irregular” “returning or economic migrant”, “displaced person”, “refugee”: when using definitions and labels to describe the phenomenon, we risk boxing people in with a label that can last a life time.

While aware that migration is a historical phenomenon that needs to be understood and governed, AVSI works tirelessly to remind us all that what is at stake is not the given label or numbers of people involved, but the individual person whose dignity is irreducible.

#### **2 The person and the community**

To focus specifically on the person means to care for each individual in his/her entirety including relationships with the community: family of origin, community that receives him/her along the way, both in the countries of transit and at the final destination.

This care for the person requires that we also consider the role that families and communities play and the influences on the person’s decision to leave. This includes employment opportunities at home, the decision to return home after the migration experience, how well a person and his/her family fits into the new community, and the relationships made along the way. All of these aspects are important to promote a full-blown encounter and authentic integration. Any hostile reaction to those who have “just-arrived” and any expression of fear in the host community needs to be considered. The needs for safety and security of the migrants and the host community must also be taken seriously.

#### **3 Paths that cross time and space**

Migration flows that we are seeing today and in recent decades need to be considered for their duration (more often impacting at least two generations of people) as well as their geographical span, crossing borders. The short-term, immediate humanitarian responses are an essential but incomplete part of the response.

AVSI's experience shows that long-term programmes that are structured to address key issues along a migration pathway is the only approach that can bear fruit: in those countries of origin with potential migrants, in places of transition where they stop before heading to further destinations, host communities where they arrive after complex moves, and finally back to the countries or communities of origin when they decide to return.

For these reasons, long-term and cross-border monitored actions need to be envisaged.



AVSI supports people at various stages along this pathway. First, in communities of origin where people are “at risk” of migrating due to poverty, insecurity or limited opportunities and support. Before they come to the final decision to migrate, AVSI works to create alternatives by addressing the root causes of vulnerability.

Second, during their travelling and upon arrival in host communities, AVSI works to reduce the risk of abuse and violence and promote integration into new contexts..

Finally, along the path of return to home and reintegration into countries of origin following voluntary repatriation, AVSI works with communities to ensure the process of re-starting.

The presence of AVSI offices in many countries along the migratory routes themselves is a fundamental asset to be able to operate while following the beneficiaries in their travelling and via integrated interventions.

#### **4 Culture and communication**

If the person is the central focus of any activity or project, this means that all his/her set of relationships and cultural heritage as well as traditions and/or religious affiliation are integral parts to be taken into account. For those who have left their homeland and are on the move, that heritage constitutes a point of reference upon which they base their choices even within new contexts and situations. The cultural heritage of the host community needs to be protected in the same way.

Cultural differences act as bridges, not as objections to a true encounter.

In the framework of this long process, communication plays a decisive role, both in the countries of origin as well as the in the host countries. It is important to spread correct information on migration routes, laws, rights and risks for all involved. It is also imperative that we create a realistic migration narrative in order to close the gap between the perceptions of the issue and people involved (for example the risk of violence due to migrant invasion just to mention one issue) and the objective reality.

AVSI has found that authentic communication based on actual testimonies, with real facts and figures can help us to understand this phenomenon in its depth and complexity. Such an approach provides opportunities for collaboration between members of complex societies, avoiding ideological drifts (let’s welcome them all vs. reject them all), and preventing dangerous forms of migration due to misinformation.

#### **5 Desire and alternatives**

The person who leaves home is motivated by the desire to be safe and secure, or to improve his/her life and the prospects for his/her family. This desire is intrinsic to human nature, and as such it is hugely valuable since it generates dynamism and energizes us to change and embrace challenges in pursuit of something more. This feature of our human experience cannot be forgotten.



Furthermore, this innate desire reminds us to pay close attention to the need of creating alternatives to migration, in other words protecting the right to remain at home with conditions that allow people to live with dignity.

## **6 Supporting actions on the ground**

AVSI implements a range of programs that address the issue of migration at various points along the pathway described above and which are concrete expressions of its vision and mission:

- Education: understood in all its forms, for children, young people, and adults, and within contexts of emergencies, war, and poverty.
- Protection: prevention of any form of abuse, violence and exploitation, through activities such as psycho-social support, tracing, and family reunification.
- Distance support with the aim of constantly accompanying the child and his/her family over the long term, also in case they decide to move elsewhere.
- Empowerment and professional training of young people and adults to enable them to make the step into the world of work, essential for independence and as a means of improving one's own economic situation, integrating into new contexts or reintegrating at home. Training and employment also deter violent radicalisation.
- Work is an essential tool to ensure economic independence and dignity of a person and family in all settings. Further, work is also an instrument of social cohesion since the workplace becomes a space for mutual knowledge, where migrant and host can meet and be linked in a common endeavour, in this way benefiting society at large. AVSI facilitates job creation both through encouraging personal initiative and the creation of new businesses (entrepreneurship), as well as collaboration with the private sector to encourage integration of vulnerable persons into the workplace.
- Encounters between communities: any initiative to support refugees and migrants should also include involvement of and support for the host community with the purpose of fostering positive and enriching encounters for all involved.
- Partnership: the migration phenomenon is so complex that networks need to be built between international and local NGOs, civil society organizations, local and national institutions and governments, the private sector, educational agencies, among others. In doing so, an effort should be made to enhance the specific contribution of each actor and to build innovative responses that improve the existing system and network of services together and for the common good.
- Capacity building: technical assistance to local institutions to support better coordination of the response to the phenomena of migration in specific contexts.