

Community relations, host fatigue and environmental management

Establishing good community relations with the local population is a key aspect of MRRMs facilities management. Relations between the host community and MRRM beneficiaries are heavily influenced by the specificities of each context (economic, cultural, political, environmental). In some situations, the local community may be itself negatively affected by the context and it may have lower standards of living or access to services than MRRM beneficiaries. In this case, frictions may arise due to competition for services and resources, as well fears related to culture, religion, lifestyle and language.

The needs of the host community shall therefore be taken into account in relation to the infrastructure established and the services provided. Direct contact with the host community shall be established since the early stages of MRRMs set-up. Regular coordination meetings shall be held with the local community, ideally hosted by local authorities. Key concerns of the host communities include the need of information on who are the beneficiaries, on why they are receiving protection and assistance in that given location and for how long, as well as how this will impact the host community's life. It is therefore important for IOM to conduct awareness raising activities to provide a general overview on the targeted beneficiaries, their background and their needs. It is recommended to give specific examples or to facilitate interaction with beneficiaries, as individual stories are more incisive than general descriptions and figures. If possible, the community may be invited to visit the facilities. In coordination with local authorities, IOM shall also address the concerns of the host community and ensure that MRRMs activities will not cause a decrease in services for them.

Whenever possible, integrated mechanisms that include services for the host community are preferable. For example, the provision of medical assistance, information provision, education and other basic services to migrants and local population alike would positively contribute to foster social cohesion and community relations. Other possible ways to build positive relationships with the local community include: organising social events for both beneficiaries and the host population, organising common initiatives to protect the surrounding environment, employing host community members and purchasing from local service providers.

Best practices from the field

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Community engagement is a key component of MRRM programming in Libya, where social cohesion and recreational activities for both migrants and the local population are organised. Though an innovative cash for shelter program, migrants are assisted with temporary shelters by Libyan foster families.

Regardless of their size and scope, the running of MRRM facilities will affect the environment, and certain impacts may also be passed on to the host community. Mainstreaming environmental protection through the establishment of an Environmental Action Plan is therefore an important aspect to monitor the impact of MRRM premises on the environment. When a location is selected for the establishment of the facilities, an environmental assessment shall be carried out, as environmental issues may trigger tensions between the host population and MRRM beneficiaries. Sites shall not be identified near potentially vulnerable ecosystems, and natural resources must be managed effectively and sustainably. Both visible and invisible impacts on the environment shall be addressed, as for instance the overuse of water resources, soil contamination and sanitation management.

The nature and scale of environmental concerns varies greatly according to the location of the facilities and their scope. Water shall be safe for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene. Water sources shall be distanced from latrines, clothes washing and bathing areas and waste disposal sites.

Waste management is a main concern for all MRRM facilities. The disposal of solid waste must be carried out properly, and recycling and separation of types of garbage schemes promoted. Sanitation facilities shall be strengthened if not initially designed to support the number of people utilising them, and latrines cleared regularly by specialised service providers. Whenever possible, the use of environmental-friendly technologies (e.g. solar panels) shall be preferred.

MRRMs' beneficiaries shall play an active role in environmental management, and environmental awareness promoted through clear messages and guidance. Activities involving beneficiaries include organising special occasions related to the environment involving also the local community, promoting the cleaning of the premises and tree-planting activities.

References and Tools

- [IOM, NRC and UNHCR Camp Management Toolkit \(Chapter 6: Environment, p. 84\)](#)
- [East Africa transit centers guidelines: Standard operating procedures, forms, new hotel SOPs \(Community relations, p. 32\)*](#)

Category

Management of migrant centres