

BLUEPRINT

Reaching Undocumented Migrants

The Reaching Undocumented Migrants project, implemented by ICMPD in collaboration with Fedasil, Mixed Migration Center, and Migration Policy Institute-Europe, addresses the need for effective strategies and tools for outreach and counselling strategies for undocumented migrants.

This Blueprint serves as a practical guide for governmental agencies and civil society organizations to establish coherent, locally adaptable systems for supporting undocumented migrants. It is informed by insights from Belgium, Denmark, and Switzerland, integrating best practices from field visits and peer exchanges.

1. Key challenges in outreach

- **Building trust:** Many migrants distrust authorities, requiring sensitive engagement.
- **Reaching them:** Migrants may avoid institutional contact and frequently relocate.
- **Addressing basic needs:** Essential needs like shelter, food, and medical care must be prioritized before legal or reintegration counselling can be done.
- **Legal barriers:** Navigating legal pathways is complex and varies across different localities.
- **Engaging network:** Many actors work in parallel with limited collaboration, requiring networking and service integration.

2. Principles of Outreach Counselling

2.1 Human-centred approach

- Understand vulnerability; recognise individual experiences.
- Treat undocumented migrants as individuals beyond their administrative status.
- Build relationships based on trust, authenticity, and non-judgment.
- Move at the migrant's pace, using positive moments to advance counselling.
- Integrate into existing support networks.

2.2 Flexibility and adaptability

- For the frontline worker it is a balancing act to meet the person in their experienced life, connect, but control the conversation.
- Adapt strategies to local settings and migrant profiles.
- Balance proactive outreach with allowing migrants to initiate contact.
- Use mobile teams that adjust based on shifting population movements.



- Leverage decentralized support systems mapped as interconnected nodes.
- Intersect at different geographical hubs as well as different phases of migratory life pathways.

2.3 Trust and relationships

- Prioritize informal interactions and personal visibility in the community.
- Recognize that migrants adapt to a shared migratory cultural space, based on experiences in different political settings, where it is generally easier and safer to link to services via personal relationships.
- Accept and support migrants' creative use of existing structures for survival, adapting these structures where necessary.
- Take a patient approach — building trust takes time, and interactions should be organic and rapport-driven.

2.4 Network and multi stakeholder approach

- Strengthen partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, healthcare providers, and legal aid organizations.
- Use both local and international collaboration platforms for service alignment and knowledge exchange.
- Establish referral systems across jurisdictions.

3 Outreach Strategies

3.1 Establishing presence in migrant spaces

- Low key presence.
- Identify key gathering points such as informal settlements, train stations, or community hubs.
 - Build connections by engaging with migrants in everyday settings, such as sharing a coffee and being present in their spaces.
 - *Be part of the space.*
- Avoid paternalistic approaches; instead, integrate into the environment naturally.
- Balance proactive outreach with responses to migrant-initiated contact.

3.2 Mobile teams

- Regular presence is crucial; outreach teams should visit known locations regularly.
- Use cargo bikes or vans as mobile support units.
- Reach out to local NGOs and community leaders as well.

3.3 Trust-building

- Adopt non-threatening attire and body language.
- Use culturally sensitive communication and, where possible, intercultural mediators.
- Listen actively and validate migrants' experiences before offering solutions.



3.4 Providing immediate assistance

- Prioritize urgent needs: food, shelter, medical aid, and safety.
- Establish referral networks for showers, safe spaces, and healthcare.
- Engage in harm reduction strategies for substance use and mental health issues.
- Streamline quick access to therapy while counselling with a focus on decision making.

3.5 Empowering

- Incorporate psychoeducation in counselling.
- Counter misinformation.
- Create opportunities for contributions to society, local projects, etc.
- Educate on informed responses to adversity.
- Share material tools (such as rights cards).
- Promote dignity and mental well-being through harm reduction strategies.
- Carry positive energy while recognising hardship.

3.6 Defining the target group

- Recognize diverse undocumented migrant profiles, including economically active individuals, minors, those experiencing substance use challenges, etc.
 - Tailor support to such locally specific subgroups based on specific vulnerabilities.

4. Collaboration and Coordination

4.1 Multi-stakeholder governance

- Enhance partnerships among key actors.
- Ensure regular case handovers and joint support service planning.
- Encourage local municipalities to develop long-term policy strategies.
- Recognize the unique strengths of each stakeholder and foster complementary collaboration.

4.2 Community-based support networks

- Engage grassroots organizations; optionally diaspora groups and/or faith-based institutions.
- Utilize informal networks to disseminate accurate information and counter misinformation.
- Recognize the *natural* ways migrants connect:
 - Mainly at personal level
 - Usually first diaspora groups, then informal networks of irregularity, then NGOs, and only then official service desks.
 - Facilitate and strengthen these connections to improve accessibility and trust in available services.



4.3 Mental health and substance use

- Create safe, low-arousal spaces for psychological first aid.
- Implement harm reduction strategies.
- Address barriers to accessing mental health services.
- Use continuous counselling to provide structure.

4.4 Migrant protection

- Ensure safe spaces where migrants are not at risk of exposure or flagging.
- Maintain and reinforce agreements with law enforcement to regulate engagement near support facilities.
- Establish easily accessible support locations that are strategically distanced from high-risk areas, such as locations associated with drug activity.

5. Institutional Considerations

5.1 Recognizing migrant contributions

- Acknowledge the economic and social roles undocumented migrants play, particularly in key industries like agriculture and construction.
 - This also includes migrants on the move.
- Consider conditional models that provide limited rights while maintaining migration control.

5.2 Balancing control and tolerance

- Recognize, balance and manage 'grey zones' where state control is limited but engagement remains possible.
 - Adopt policies that ensure these spaces remain structured rather than completely lawless, considering migrant protection.

5.3 Establishing long-term strategies

- Ensure institutional backing for outreach efforts to maintain effectiveness and sustainability.

6. Phases of Outreach Counselling

6.1 Before: Mapping network and information

- Gather accessible information on available services and legal options.
- Map out service providers and establish referral pathways.
- Train outreach teams to ensure culturally sensitive and effective engagement.

6.2 During: Engagement and support



- Establish contact and build trust through non-judgmental engagement.
- Address immediate needs such as shelter, food, and medical assistance.
- Apply Psychological First Aid if needed.
- Stabilize the migrant's situation and assess risks.
- Provide strategic, step-by-step case work counselling, including options for different legal pathways and voluntary return and reintegration.
- Ensure continuity of care through a structured yet flexible approach.

6.3 After: Future orientation perspective

- Support throughout the decision-making for possible future steps.
- Commit to continued interaction in the near future.
- Facilitate access to long-term services and accompaniment.
- Strengthen follow-up mechanisms in the network to ensure sustainable outcomes.
- Promote empowerment through migrant knowledge-sharing and community integration.

7. Knowledge: Empowerment Tool for Undocumented Migrants

Decision-making happens not in a single moment but as a **continuous, circular process** that individuals enter and exit.

During outreach counselling, **information serves as a critical empowerment tool**. Migrants should have access to complete knowledge, even if not for immediate use, as trust in its accuracy and personal relevance takes time to develop.

At **different phases of their migration journey or life in Europe**, individuals may recognize viable options due to the knowledge they previously received. Therefore, **sharing all relevant knowledge consistently**, throughout time, and **across borders and by different actors**, is essential.

8. Tools for Frontline Workers

- Develop multilingual booklets or other accessible formats detailing legal rights, emergency contacts, and available services.
- Consider practical items too such as cargo bikes for mobile outreach.
- Prioritize staff well-being and continuous training.

9. Annexes

- Detailed case study reports from Belgium, Denmark, and Switzerland.

