

Summary of the intervention of Eleonora Servino from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) - Project Coordinator for the Family Assistance Programme (FAP)

Thanks to the Council of Europe and the Special representative for inviting me today to present the Family Assistance Programme that is implemented by the International Organization for Migration and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, and I am glad this project was included as one of the best practices identified in this field.

- Our main goal is to facilitate the family reunification of vulnerable migrants who are compelled to leave their country, with a person with protection status in Germany.
- The programme started in 2016 with the opening of five centres in Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq, where Syrian and Iraqi nationals could apply for family reunification visas mainly to join a refugee.
- The project began after the large number of migrants that arrived in Europe in 2015 mainly originated by the Syrian crisis and expansion of ISIS in MENA. With so many asylum seekers obtaining protection in Europe at the same time, suddenly a large number of family members would qualify for Family Reunification. This resulted in long waiting time that applicants were not using to prepare their documents because of lack of information and misunderstanding of the procedures
- GFFO partnered with IOM to tackle this issue, as IOM could provide robust outreach, spoke the same language of the beneficiaries, therefore could facilitate communication, misspel rumors and prevent irregular migration
- IOM is mainly tasked with informing applicants about the FR procedures and the docs required, we as well process the visa applications on behalf of visa section by preparing the file, collecting biometric and visa fees and transferring them once completed
- After successfully enhancing and managing this regular migration pathway to Germany for the first two years, the programme was expanded to support beneficiaries from various nationalities through a network of centres across ten countries, namely Germany, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and Afghanistan. The focus has expanded also to assist those with subsidiary protection.
- We assisted almost 400,000 beneficiaries, they are vulnerable migrants, most of them are still living in their Country of Origin, such as Syria, Somalia and Afghanistan, and if in third countries they are often living irregularly there.
- We liaise with local authorities, NGOs and UNHCR to ensure proper registration while they wait for the FR procedures, we support as well with other services with cases particularly vulnerable.
- One of best practice within project implementation has been the facilitation of e-visa for KRI for Syrian applicants through IOM
- Because of large numbers, we customized different IOM technical solution that would ensure a proper case management and protection of data
- Case management approach has been very helpful while dealing with separated children, as they have specific needs, we were addressing by mapping assistance services also beyond IOM support, fast-tracking the cases whenever possible
- It is challenging to adapt standard FR for migrants to persons who are compelled to leave their country, FAP is a positive example because it made the processing more efficient for Germany but provided also a tailored service to a particularly vulnerable group

- Now with COVID most of our work has shifted on remote, but we have ensured follow up in close coordination with visa sections for urgent cases, we have maintained call centre and email services in key languages across the lockdown periods and we hope to resume soon ops.