

Start Fund Project Recommendations for Central American Displacement and Migration Projects

The current decade has seen more people than ever, from dozens of nations, making the journey through Central America towards the USA. Driven by endemic poverty, security issues and climate change world over, many of these individuals and families embark on this journey to seek a new life in one of the richest countries in the world. The route often involves crossing numerous borders where laws, health challenges and limited resources can halt the caravan, leaving host countries with the responsibility of providing shelter, food and water, and WASH facilities to thousands of migrants.

Synthesised from a review of nine alerts and their subsequent awarded projects, the following recommendations reflect the learnings and advice of CADENA, World Vision and Oxfam in relation to crises of migration and displacement in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama. It is intended to act as a guidance document for organisations facing these kinds of crises, through the provision of simplified recommendations founded on evidence and learning.

1. Cooperation and Collaboration are Key.

The findings from all nine alerts stressed the importance of cooperation in the pre-project, delivery, and post-project stages. The following groups were highlighted as particularly important to engage with:

- **Migrants** need to be at the heart of project design and implementation. If possible, this should begin whilst groups are still in transit, with needs assessments being conducted prior to their arrival at border regions to allow for the tailoring of preparatory actions. This also triages issues, meaning emergencies can be dealt with quickly and effectively. Inclusive and accessible feedback and communication mechanisms should also be established both in transit and in camp settings to ensure that migrants are kept informed and have avenues through which their voices can be heard.
- **National and local authorities** need to be included in project design and delivery to ensure that activities align with both the law and community objectives. This helps projects to have greater longevity and support beyond the immediate crisis. Moreover, encouragement of collaboration between these actors is essential, with a lack of coordination being identified as one of the most damaging factors in relation to the migration crisis in Central America; resulting in, “a kaleidoscope of national measures with different effects on the local, national, and regional levels.” (Faret, Téllez, Rodríguez-Tapia, 2021 p.64)
- **Local organisations**, including religious, civil, and social groups, often already have activities and a network in place which can be adapted and utilised to make responses quicker and more culturally appropriate. They often also already have trusted suppliers and contacts who can be used to speed up response times.
- **Host populations** need to be engaged with and given a platform through which their voices can be heard. In this process, interactions between local people and migrants should be encouraged in order to reduce instances of xenophobia.

*“By the support of community leads, community-based and faith-based organizations, it is possible to reduce risks associated with xenophobia”
(CADENA, Panama, 2023)*

2. Anticipate!

With migrant caravans often transiting through numerous countries on their way to the USA, your organisations should have time to prepare for their arrival, using previous experiences and coordination with other agencies to inform your actions. It is recommended that reliable communication avenues are established both nationally and internationally so that organisations are able to inform each other of the specific needs of the oncoming caravans. This supports aid being tailored and effective whilst also giving organisations time for resourcing and stockpiling. Through these anticipatory and preparatory actions, you will have more time to prepare local communities and organisations for the oncoming caravan, allowing for local organisations, suppliers and contractors to be utilised, providing benefit to local people which can help to reduce tensions.

3. Adopt a Human-Centred Approach.

Agencies highlighted the importance of balancing life-saving activities with ones that prioritise dignity and psychological support. Examples of this included:

- **Involving migrants in project activities** builds agency and redistributes power. Through having control and responsibility within projects, displaced individuals are able to regain some of the confidence and self-worth that is often lost during traumatic journeys.
- **Signage and communication need to be visual and inclusive** to account for illiteracy and language-diversity amongst migrant populations.
- **Internet access is an essential service** for migrants to ensure they can communicate with family members following dangerous journeys whilst also allowing them to independently access information.
- **Familiar and culturally appropriate food** helps migrants to feel comfortable and safe despite often being in an unfamiliar environment. The International Organization for Migration have created [a toolkit for providing appropriate and nutritious food items](#).

4. Prioritise Vulnerable Individuals.

Migrant populations are often extremely vulnerable, being at high risk of exploitation, violence and environmental hazards. Within the wider group there are subsections who are more at risk such as children, disabled individuals, women, older people and LGBTQI+ individuals. These groups need to be identified and provided with specific services that help to ensure their dignity and privacy whilst keeping them safe.

Examples of this include LGBTQI+ specific WASH facilities and psychosocial support sessions for children aimed at reducing instances of PTSD. The evidence suggests that this is best done with the assistance of a designated safeguarding officer who can act as a point of referral and support for these groups.

The need for security also extends to staff and volunteers who also need to feel safe to carry out their roles effectively. This is particularly important as border-regions are often some of the most unstable and dangerous locations within countries.

“Ensure that the benefited population are located in safe areas for your on-site staff and always have a protection and security specialist because the intervention areas are dangerous due to the presence of drug cartels.” (CADENA, Mexico, 2022)

5. Disseminate Accurate and Accessible Information.

Information needs to be available to migrants in formats that are inclusive and reliable, utilising verbal and visual formats. As identified by agencies acting in Central America, the kinds of information that should be shared include:

- **Legal information pertaining to both host and destination countries** is essential for ensuring that migrants are prepared and aware of their human rights. Dissemination of literature and the running of information sessions are some ways this information can be shared.
- **Simple public health messaging can have a huge impact** on the spread of communicable diseases and physical wellbeing. Accompanied by the distribution of hygiene kits and WASH facilities, these measures can help to avoid potential outbreaks. [A comprehensive guide on delivering effective WASH](#) has been created by the UNHCR.
- **Environmental messaging remains important** for encouraging behaviours that do not consciously contribute to the already disproportionate environmental degradation in the region. Actions that can be encouraged include sourcing resources locally, setting up recycling points, supporting re-use campaigns, and ensuring that items being handed out are not duplicating what has already been distributed at earlier shelters or camps. [USAID have highlighted](#) three priority areas to focus on.