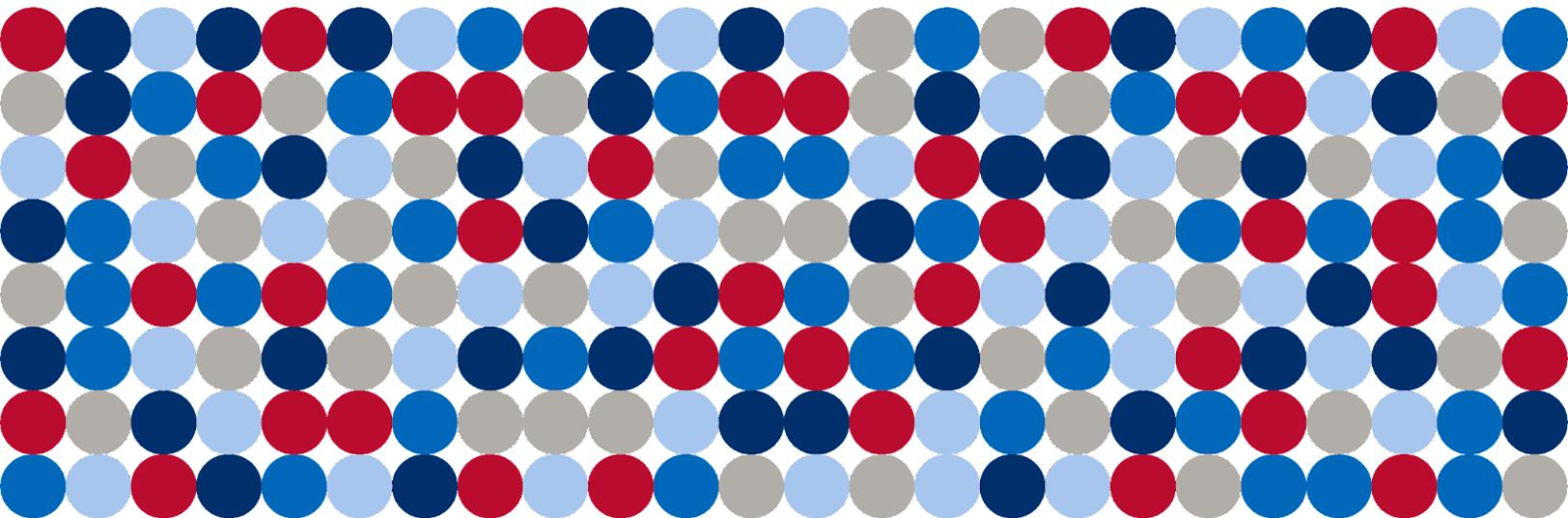




USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Agency Learning Priority: Migration



Rapid Literature Review

In the context of donor-funded programs serving communities where migrants reside, what is the state of evidence on strategies or approaches for engaging directly with migrants and addressing their particular needs (vis-à-vis other community residents)?

November 2023

Produced at the request of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), this rapid literature review is part of a series contributing toward the 2022–2026 Agency Learning Agenda. In response to critical evidence needs, this series seeks to improve awareness and sharing of the latest available evidence linked to the Agency’s highest policy priorities through a review and synthesis of select studies published from 2018–2022.

CONTRACT INFORMATION

The Program Cycle Mechanism is managed by the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning and implemented by Environmental Incentives (Contract No. GS-00F-193DA/7200AA20M00002). The authors’ views do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

PREPARED BY

Claire Price, Environmental Incentives

SUBMITTED BY

Shawn Peabody, Environmental Incentives

SUBMITTED TO

Soniya Mitra, Contracting Officer’s Representative
USAID Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Environmental Incentives, LLC
725 15th Street NW, Floor 10
Washington, D.C. 20005
www.enviroincentives.com

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. INTRODUCTION..... 4
- II. REVIEW METHODOLOGY AND SEARCH TERMS..... 5
- III. MIGRANT NEEDS AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS..... 5
 - Pre-departure: Understanding of the Risks and Realities of the Migration Route..... 6
 - Legal Status in Host or Transit Countries..... 9
 - Understand and Manage Host Country Processes and Culture..... 11
 - Stable and Legal Employment..... 13
 - Finance and Banking..... 14
 - Public Education..... 15
 - Health Care..... 17
 - Emotional and Psychological Support..... 18
 - Money and Resources..... 21
 - Social Acceptance and Integration..... 25
- IV. CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES..... 28

- BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 31

- ANNEX A: STRATEGIES FOR USAID: WORKING WITH MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS ON CLIMATE MIGRATION..... 38
 - Needs and Weaknesses Specific to Climate Migration..... 38
 - Examples of Potential Projects and Partnerships..... 39

ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil society organization
EHI	Essential household items
FDW	Foreign domestic worker
IDP	Internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MDP	Multilateral Development Banks
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
RCT	Randomized control trial
UCT	Unconditional cash transfer
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

I. INTRODUCTION

As of 2020, there were an estimated 281 million international migrants in the world (IOM 2022b). International migration has increased over the past 50 years, with international migrants comprising 3.5 percent of the world's population in 2020, compared to 2.3 percent in 1970. The United States remains by far the top destination for international migrants, followed by Germany, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom. Nearly twenty percent of migrants in 2020 originated in India, Mexico, the Russian Federation, China, and Syria. Most of the peer-reviewed literature found in this search pertained to migration related to relatively older conflicts in Venezuela and Syria. More modern conflicts, such as Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in the fastest outflow of refugees since World War II (UNHCR 2022), and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, have undoubtedly had global impacts on migration. However, they have likely been too recent for studies to surface in this search of 2018–2022 articles.

Across all nations, “climate change is the defining crisis of our time and its impacts are unevenly weighted against the world's most vulnerable people,” said Andrew Harper, Special Advisor to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) on Climate Action (UNHCR 2020). In some cases, migration can be a climate adaptation strategy, in others, it amounts to forced displacement in the face of life-threatening risks. Regardless, those on the move are among the most vulnerable populations—and many migrate to urban and peri-urban areas that are particularly vulnerable to the climate crisis. The World Bank's Groundswell report finds that climate impacts could lead 216 million people across six world regions to move within their countries by 2050. In 2019, weather-related hazards triggered some 24.9 million displacements in 140 countries, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC 2020). Research shows that on the current trajectory, climate-related disasters like storms, droughts, and floods could double the number of people needing humanitarian assistance to over 200 million each year by 2050 (IFRC 2019). Beyond direct impacts from climate change, such as weather disasters, climate change worsens other migration drivers, including food, water, and land crises and conflicts.

A particularly challenging time for migrants, the global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic caused economic pressure, loss of economic opportunities, restrictions on in-person meetings, curfews, expanded police patrols, limited state services, and the risk of infection. Venezuelan migrants in Peru interviewed in 2020 experienced stalled refugee applications, stress and fear from increased patrols, job loss (almost half of Venezuelan migrants lost their jobs during COVID), and lack of health insurance despite state guarantees (88 percent lacked insurance in 2020) (Padrón 2021).

II. REVIEW METHODOLOGY AND SEARCH TERMS

This rapid literature review contributes toward the 2022–2026 Agency Learning Agenda by examining the current evidence and programming around engaging directly with migrants in the communities in which they reside. The scope of this review was decided with the Bureau for Planning, Learning, and Resource Management (formerly the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning) and staff of the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) Regional Bureau, Asia Regional Bureau, and Bureau for Resilience and Food Security. The team identified the research question: “*In the context of donor-funded programs serving communities where migrants reside, what is the state of evidence on strategies or approaches for engaging directly with migrants and addressing their particular needs (vis-à-vis other community residents)?*”

To conduct this review, the authors examined relevant evidence from the past five years (2018–2022) from databases identified by USAID migration experts, including the Migration Data Portal, the Migration Policy Institute, The Asia Foundation, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The authors also searched for relevant resources on USAID’s Evaluation Registry, the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) Development Evidence Portal, JSTOR, and the American Economic Association’s (AEA) registry of randomized controlled trials. This review includes a wide body of evidence, including peer-reviewed literature, institutional reports, expert opinion, and gray literature.

III. MIGRANT NEEDS AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

This section contains the main results of the literature review. Each section header identifies a broad need for migrants, explains the background on migrant needs and barriers, and then identifies solutions from the literature. Broad needs are as follows and are linked for quick navigation:

- [Pre-departure: Understanding of Risks and Realities of the Migration Route](#)
- [Legal Status in Host or Transit Countries](#)
- [Understand and Manage Host Country Processes and Culture](#)
- [Stable and Legal Employment](#)
- [Finance and Banking](#)
- [Public Education](#)
- [Health Care](#)
- [Emotional and Psychological Support](#)
- [Money and Resources](#)
- [Social Acceptance and Integration](#)



Pre-departure: Understanding of the Risks and Realities of the Migration Route

Potential migrants often rely on second- or third-hand advice, and work with untrustworthy middlemen with little incentive to accurately inform them of the risks of their journey, the likelihood of gaining legal

status in their country of destination, and the quality of employment there. Numerous programs seek to inform potential migrants in their countries of origin about the risks and realities of migration and life abroad.

Some research explores potential migrants' knowledge about migration and the conditions of life in destination countries, though knowledge appears to be localized. In one survey of Nigerians in Benin City, a city with high out-migration to Europe, researchers found that potential migrants "may be better informed about destination contexts than information campaigns assume," accurately guessing or even underestimating European lifespan, unemployment benefits, and monthly income (Beber and Scacco 2022). This led the researchers to suggest that "an intervention focused on providing truthful information about economic life in Europe may well lead to an increase in intended or actual migration along the Mediterranean Route." Potential Nigerian migrants were relatively less informed about the realities of the journey: they lacked information about travel logistics, but had an appropriately pessimistic view of potential hardships (slavery, sex abuse, injury, death). Potential migrants were overly optimistic about their likelihood of success: they far overestimated their likelihood of reaching Europe (about 80 percent said it was somewhat or very likely; while the actual figure is unknown, a majority of Nigerian migrants fail to pass beyond Libya), and overestimated their likelihood of being granted asylum if they reached Europe (about 80 percent said it was very or somewhat likely; however, around a quarter of asylum requests were granted to Nigerians in Europe from 2011 to 2017).

Misinformation about the realities of the journey and likelihood of success often originates from smugglers or others who profit from migration. The analysis of survey data in Nigeria by Beber and Scacco (2022) found that: "Traffickers and others with a vested interest in the enormously profitable irregular migration business actively spread misinformation. More generally, information in circulation appears to be biased in favor of relatively rare successful cases, and the reach of those cases is amplified by social media. Furthermore, those who 'make it' in Europe tend to invest in visible ways at home (e.g., in real estate), and interviewees frequently mentioned that they felt pressure from friends and peers to 'give it a try.'"

Even when migrants are appropriately informed of the risks of migration, evidence suggests that structural factors such as living conditions, country of origin, urban or rural location, socio-economic characteristics, and socio-demographic characteristics likely outweigh risk perception (Tjaden 2022; Tjaden and Gninafon 2022). A 2021 systematic review of the literature suggests the importance of structural factors when assessing migration likelihood: "An analysis of the reviewed papers shows that the regional, historical, and political contexts and constellations in which migration-information campaigns are embedded in make a difference in terms of messaging and the perceptions and interpretations thereof" (Pagogna and Sakdapolrak 2021).

Social media is likely a key information tool for both potential migrants and those en route, though misinformation is common. A survey of Syrian refugees granted asylum in the Netherlands showed that they relied on social media to migrate, and prefer information that originates from their social networks and that is based on personal experiences (Dekker et al. 2018). Social media presents an indispensable

source of on-the-ground, real-time information about migration routes and realities, beyond the “official” information available in traditional media or government websites. To validate rumors and information found online, the Syrian asylum migrants used various strategies, including “checking the source of information, validating information with trusted social ties, triangulation of online sources, and comparing information with their own experience.” By consuming and disseminating information about migration routes with peers, migrants may potentially reduce their reliance on smugglers.

Employment agencies and intermediaries are also commonly used, especially in Asia, to match prospective migrants with overseas employers. These agencies vary greatly in the quality of jobs and living conditions they offer, though potential migrants have little ability to parse promises from reality. The poorest quality agencies may misrepresent wages at best, or serve as conduits for human trafficking at worst. Awareness of the risks, signs, and realities of human trafficking is a key need to protect potential migrants. Campaigns to raise awareness of human trafficking have been met with some success, but results are mixed and appear to be short-lived. A randomized controlled trial (RCT) examining human trafficking awareness campaigns in Nepal showed short-lived effects on understanding the signs and types of human trafficking, a sense of urgency around the problem, and willingness to take action against trafficking, but did not show effects on awareness of the prevalence of human trafficking (Archer et al. 2016). Alternatively, an impact evaluation of a counter-trafficking in persons program in Cambodia found that, although the interventions increased the belief that human trafficking was a problem in the country for at-risk persons, it did not affect their willingness to migrate (USAID 2020).

Unfortunately, the literature shows that programs implemented by international organizations and governments to better inform migrants of the realities of the migration journey are often poorly designed. A systematic review by Jasper Tjaden et al. (2018) of such information campaigns found that these programs often fail to clearly state objectives and goals or define their key audience: “A common issue is the lack of a clearly defined campaign objective and/or target group. This hampers any rigorous evaluation of program effects. Whenever an objective is defined, it is most often aimed at ‘awareness-raising’ and ‘knowledge generation.’” These shortcomings further contribute to the general paucity of high-quality evidence of the effectiveness of information programs. The systematic review also found that, while a large majority of programs claim success, they are evaluated poorly, often surveying small samples of respondents at convenience (Tjaden et al. 2018). Over two-thirds of the evaluations studied were rated at the very lowest rank of quality, “indicating low generalizability and low reliability of results.” Information campaigns must understand effective campaign design before investment is made.

Solutions

1. **Carefully design information campaigns with clear objectives and a deep knowledge of the audience and their specific information gaps.** Potential migrants may be better informed than implementers assume. Thoughtfully-designed campaigns with a clear understanding of what they are trying to accomplish and the knowledge and motivations of their target audience will be better positioned to accomplish their goals.



2. Invest in high-quality research on the effectiveness of informational campaigns.

Two systematic reviews of peer-reviewed literature on migration information campaigns found scant high-quality evidence of the effectiveness of informational campaigns (Pagogna and Sakdapolrak 2021; Tjaden et al. 2018). “We find that the uptake in the use of information campaigns has far outpaced any rigorous assessment of the effects that different campaigns may have on their respective target groups” (Tjaden et al. 2018). The reviews call for more and higher-quality research into the effectiveness of informational campaigns to generate causal inference, specifically control-group design, larger sample sizes, and exploring research with “stronger emphasis on the local implementation and outcomes of migration-information campaigns and programs, focusing not only on the variety of actors involved and information disseminated but particularly to examine how migrants navigate this informational landscape and how it affects migration aspirations and practices” (Pagogna and Sakdapolrak 2021).



3. Harness social media to help migrants safely navigate the migration route and reduce their reliance on smugglers.

For migrants en route, their safety may be aided through accessing social media information. In a study of asylum refugees in the Netherlands, respondents “valued social media communication with groups of fellow migrants who traveled a certain route a few days—or even hours—earlier. This helped inform them in detail about the accessibility and safety of various routes, keeping in contact via WhatsApp, Facebook, or Viber” (Dekker et al. 2018).



4. Explore the effectiveness of peer-to-peer messaging, which may have a greater effect on raising awareness of perceived risks than facts alone.

For potential migrants, an RCT of IOM’s “Migrants as Messengers” project in Senegal examined the effect of exposure to a “town hall style” event where attendees watched a short movie about the experiences of migrant returnees who migrated irregularly to Europe, followed by an in-person question and answer session (Tjaden and Dunsch 2021). The researchers found that people who were exposed to the event were significantly more likely to feel well-informed about the risks and opportunities of migration, had higher perceptions of the risk of violence or other negative outcomes, and were significantly less likely to intend to migrate irregularly. However, the study found no effect on factual knowledge of migration: While potential migrants were already fairly well informed about the risks and realities of migration, the town hall event may have changed risk perceptions through an emotional appeal, rather than a simple dissemination of facts. The researchers suggest that “these strong and consistent effects are driven by the nature in which information was provided, namely through peer-to-peer channels that enhance trust and emotional identification.”



Another study examined the effects of a mobile cinema showing “documentary-style testimonies by migrants highlighting risks involved in their own migration journeys” followed by community discussion. The researchers found that the intervention increased participants’ perceptions of risk, reduced their intentions to migrate illegally, increased their perceptions of the costs of migration, and slightly increased their perceptions of economic opportunities at home. These effects remained

for several months after the intervention. “Consistent, statistically significant effects on various migration-relevant outcomes underscore the potential of campaigns to inform the decision-making process of certain groups of potential irregular migrants and, in some cases, potentially reduce harm for those facing perils associated with irregular journeys from West Africa to Europe by land and sea” (Tjaden and Gninafon 2022).

Finally, an RCT of an awareness campaign on safe migration and human trafficking in Indonesia recommended that future informational campaigns use migrant networks to develop messaging strategies and peer discussions, due to their lack of trust in authorities. It also recommended that future campaigns consider partnering with faith-based organizations due to lower levels of trafficking awareness in religious populations (Latonero et al. 2016). Researchers in multiple studies noted the need for more research on the long-term effects of emotional, peer-to-peer appeals and the effects on actual migration (beyond expressed intentions) (Tjaden and Dunsch 2021). It is also important to note that none of these interventions tested the effectiveness of peer-to-peer messaging *compared* to other messaging methods.

- 5. Provide simple, accessible information on labor intermediaries and overseas employment services to improve outcomes and conditions for migrant employees.** An RCT in Indonesia gave quality ratings to recruitment, training, and placement agencies for overseas workers (Bazzi et al. 2021). The results showed that access to quality information on intermediaries was significantly associated with a reduced migration rate (13 percent compared with the control), as women waited for offers from better agencies; then, once accepted, better training (0.17 standard deviations); and better employment and living conditions overseas (0.10 standard deviations). The authors suggest that providing information on agency quality did not reduce migration, but “increased the reservation threshold to migrate, resulting in higher-quality matches.” The experiment reduced the likelihood of migrating with a provider in the bottom third of rankings by 13 percent. An impact evaluation of a USAID program in Cambodia found that connecting at-risk persons with employment agencies and job websites increased participants’ knowledge and use of formal sources of job information, although the population’s limited internet literacy resulted in underutilization of an online platform (USAID 2020).



Legal Status in Host or Transit Countries

A review of the literature reveals that migrants are challenged by a lack of legal pathways, difficulty in navigating migration processes, and documentation requirements. Migrants need pathways to a stable legal residency that will enable them to integrate into host communities, contribute to local economies, access health care and education, and raise their children in a stable environment. Temporary legal status, a reality in many countries, “increases vulnerability, creates recurring bureaucratic requirements for migrants and refugees, and may throw them into irregularity” (MPI 2021b). Furthermore, migrants may not have access to the important records and identification documents needed to apply for residency or access government services.

For those transiting through a country, a lack of coherent regional policies and coordination by host governments means that migrants and government officials struggle to navigate the legal system. The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) notes, for example, that many Latin American countries “offer various exit permits, short-term visas, or travel documents to facilitate their movement northward to the next country. These documents were each created through reactive, uncoordinated national processes, and migrants must be reprocessed in each country” (MPI 2019a). Uneven migration documentation and legal requirements can cause regional imbalances, with potential migrants either taking underground routes to migrate into strict countries or redirecting to less-strict countries, “creating a collective action problem” (MPI 2019a).

Solutions

- 1. Expand current and establish new legal pathways for migrants (such as access to regular immigration status and family reunification visas) and ensure migrants understand their rights.** An analysis of the socioeconomic integration of Venezuelan refugees recommends that countries increase options to access regular immigration status and ensure a pathway to permanence. “By taking steps to increase access to regular status, governments would also effectively be addressing key gaps in access to health care, education, and employment.” Incorporating migrants into the formal job market will reduce the economic burden of migrants to the state by increasing their social contributions (MPI 2021b). Furthermore, in a research report on climate migration, MPI states that bilateral agreements could “introduce initially small flows of voluntary international migration for populations specifically from climate-vulnerable countries through family reunification visas” (MPI 2020b).


- 2. Improve government coordination and electronic, real-time accessibility of migrants’ health history, education, certifications, and legal documents to access services.**¹ In Costa Rica, IOM implemented an initiative “to improve institutional coordination and communication between the [the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and the General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners]. With this purpose, an overarching digitized data system is about to be launched that will facilitate coordination and communication between these bodies by providing electronic access to case information in real-time” (MPI 2021a). In Ecuador, the government has “created [a mobile application] that migrants can upload their documentary information to, which they can then present to potential employers to verify their status” (MPI 2020).


- 3. Facilitate coordinated, standardized regional transit processes and regional cooperation channels that will decrease demand for smugglers or dangerous travel routes.** In regions experiencing high migration and transit, several study authors recommend that host countries increase coordination and streamline their migration policies and paperwork requirements. Especially in Latin America where migrants transit north, both migrants and governments would benefit from a standardized transit process or regional



¹ Subsequent sections of this report describe the importance and potential solutions to documentation around vaccinations, employment, and education.

cooperation channels, reducing government burden and simplifying the process for migrants (MPI 2021a). To alleviate some of the challenges of the currently disjointed system in Latin America, transit countries from Panama to Mexico could create a humanitarian corridor and use a singular migrant registration process followed by a singular transit document authorizing African, Asian, and Caribbean transit migrants to move through each country for a short period of time” (MPI 2021b). Study authors also suggest that international organizations could coordinate transit documentation to assist overwhelmed transit country governments.



Understand and Manage Host Country Processes and Culture

In order to access services, documentation, and legal status, migrants need to effectively navigate government processes and understand how their new host country operates. Migrants also may not understand or be up to date with government laws and requirements and therefore need trustworthy and accessible information. In Thailand, migrant workers often do not speak Thai and need interpreters to navigate the public service system (IOM 2021a). However, there are often not enough translators available, and those that are might be ineffective or lack knowledge of human rights and labor rights protections. Migrants need increased support from host governments, international organizations, and civil society organizations (CSOs) to understand and orient themselves.

Solutions

- 1. Hire migrant liaison personnel within government agencies to help migrants understand government processes and provide translation services where needed.** In Thailand, the Ministry of Public Health “has created a network of migrant liaison officers and migrant health volunteers in areas where there is a high number of migrant workers using health-care services.” These officers and volunteers support Thai public health officials to provide “migrant-friendly health-care services, for example by providing interpretation and translation services, communicating public health messages, and sensitizing migrant worker communities on sanitation and disease prevention” (IOM 2021a). 
- 2. Implement public information campaigns to help migrants better understand their legal rights, immigration processes, and other important issues.** African migrants to South America, who often transit northward to the United States, are seldom informed of their right to seek asylum in transit countries (MPI 2021b). MPI recommends that these countries inform African migrants of their asylum rights. In Costa Rica, a decree on complementary protection for certain refugees went into effect in 2020. Following this, civil society leaders clarified the requirements of the decree with government officials and then spread the word among the immigrant population (MPI 2021a). For migrants seeking to cross Panama’s Darién Gap, “international organizations could create a public awareness campaign in English, French, Haitian Creole (and potentially in other frequently spoken languages and dialects) to assist migrants in understanding the route, the supplies they may need, and the challenges they may confront. Such a campaign could take the form of pamphlets, links to be sent via cell phones, or billboards to draw migrants’ attention in northern Colombia” (MPI 2021b). 




3. **Create and improve migrant orientation programs.** Coordinated, government-sponsored orientation programs for arriving migrants provide examples of organized programming to improve labor pathways, strengthen migrant protection, improve integration, and ensure migrants understand their rights and the processes in their host country (ASEAN 2017). However, this review found no evidence regarding the effectiveness of these programs, and most examples of such programs are in wealthy countries. See Box 1 for examples of orientation programs.

Box 1: Examples of Host Country Orientation Programs

- **In Brunei, the Department of Labor organizes half-day sessions with workplace safety and health orientation programming during industry roadshows.** These programs are tailored to specific industries, and educate migrant workers on the importance of workplace safety and health and the roles and responsibilities of workers and employers to create a safe working environment, and create general awareness of the penalties for non-compliance with laws and safety rules (ASEAN 2017).
- **In Malaysia, the construction industry development board conducts an “induction course” for migrant construction workers** (ASEAN 2017). Conducted by the Construction Industry Development Board, the eight-hour course “introduces the Malaysian laws, the language commonly used in Malaysia (Malay), customs and common practices among the Malaysians, and the new social and working environment.” Following completion, participants are issued a “green card,” which is required to work on a construction site. The Malaysian government more broadly offered induction courses from 2004–2007 before they were discontinued due to political reorganization and increasing costs. Afterward, the Malaysian Construction Industry Development Board chose to independently continue these courses for migrant workers in their industry.
- **Singapore offers government-sponsored programs for foreign workers, employers of foreign workers, and workplace safety courses** (ASEAN 2017). The “Settling-In Program” is a one-day required course for all first-time foreign domestic workers that “includes regulatory information on their rights and responsibilities; adapting to living and working in Singapore, fostering good working relationships in the household, stress management, work safety, and ways to seek help when in need.” The course is conducted in English or the worker’s native language. For employers, a separate “Employers’ Orientation Program” is a mandatory three-hour course that educates potential employers of foreign domestic workers on the roles and responsibilities of employing a foreign worker in Singapore. The course covers: “what it means to be an [foreign domestic worker (FDW)] employer; responsibilities of an FDW employer; providing a safe work environment; and fostering a good and harmonious working relationship with his/her FDW.” Finally, Singapore offers specialized courses in specialized sectors like construction, marine, and metal works.
- **The Philippines Embassy in Singapore offers a mandatory course to help Filipino arrivals adapt to a new work environment and culture** (ASEAN 2017). Subject matter in this course includes “consular services, overseas employment contracts, culture and lifestyle in Singapore, police rules and regulations, and other country-specific do’s and don’ts,” as well as “Singapore-specific migration realities, rights and responsibilities of overseas workers, what to do in case of contract violations, health and safety, financial literacy, Government programs and services such as [the Social Security System] and [the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation], psychosocial counseling, and even legal assistance, if needed.”



Stable and Legal Employment

In a survey of Venezuelan migrants across a selection of LAC countries, an overwhelming majority of migrants cited finding a job and earning an income as their most urgent need (MPI 2020c). Barriers to finding employment include missing or unrecognized credentials (either experience, certifications, or education), employer bias, and ignorance of employment laws. This review found scant high-quality evidence of initiatives to improve migrant employment and banking, though expert opinion is united on the need for improvements.

Finding a job that matches migrants' technical skills is a challenge when migrants do not have validated educational or professional certification credentials. Not only do migrants experience lost wages, but host countries also lose a valuable pool of skilled labor when migrants with higher education and skills do not use their education and training. In Latin America, "migrants are more likely than the native-born to have a professional or technical education, but they face high barriers to getting their educational credentials recognized. As a result, many are unable to secure work that matches their skills" (MPI 2020a). If migrants do have records from their home country, these may not be recognized or need to get apostilled (i.e., notarized by an authority designated by the origin country's government), which may be an expensive, lengthy, or impossible process. Survey evidence confirms this difficulty: "According to a survey conducted by Equilibrium CenDE in October 2020, one in ten Venezuelans in Chile, Colombia, and Peru have gotten their tertiary education degrees validated" (MPI 2021c).

Migrants also face barriers from employers who discriminate against them or are uninformed about the legal rights and requirements for migrants to work. In Uganda, a survey of refugee job seekers and local Ugandan businesses highlighted the barriers that refugees face while finding employment, including bias against refugees and lack of knowledge of the laws allowing refugees to work (Loiacono and Vargas 2019). While a majority of local businesses were in favor of letting refugees work (60 percent), those not in favor cited concern for job competition with nationals (32 percent), migrants already receiving aid from the government (32 percent), and lack of trust (18 percent). Furthermore, migrants may not know about local practices and norms: in Uganda, many employers request a letter of introduction from a local authority as a proxy of trustworthiness, though the study found that only a small percentage of refugees knew to bring such a letter.

For workers who have migrated under an employment visa, employer error or deliberate fraud may mean that migrants miss out on social protection schemes or other government benefits. In Thailand, a high cost to employers to go through formal migration channels is an incentive to use informal channels or illegally pass costs on to employees. Even employers using the proper channels may take advantage of migrant workers, "once the documentation is completed, including the work permit, visa, and [health insurance] card, the employer passes on the recruitment costs to the worker by deducting all or part of it from their salary over time, even though this is illegal" (IOM 2021a). Since most migrant workers have little experience with social protection programs or insurance, they do not expect and are not aware of such benefits or how to navigate the system. According to a diagnostic review by the IOM, "CSOs, especially, expressed concern that neither Thai employers nor migrant workers have sufficient knowledge about the social protection benefits and services available, including the registration process

and the procedures for claiming benefits.” Even when governments respond by creating new education or employment eligibility documentation, employers may be unaware of these credentials or choose to not recognize them.

Solutions

- 1. For existing credentials, improve processing through decentralization and fast-tracking credential recognition.** Providing evidence of higher education or professional certifications may be the difference between a well-paying job and destitution. “Making it easier for immigrants to have foreign-earned credentials recognized by easing documentation requirements and making the process less costly would help address important barriers to employment and higher-paid positions” (MPI 2021c). However, this review did not find evidence regarding the effectiveness of such solutions.



Expert Opinion
- 2. If migrants cannot access their credentials, re-establish missing credentials through short accelerated certification programs in skilled work (MPI 2021c).** Migrants may not be able to access their higher education or certifications from their country of origin for various reasons. For example, Nicaraguan universities and state colleges “have blacklisted students who participated in protests and will not provide academic transcripts or proof of their former students’ titles,” with cases of universities intentionally deleting records (MPI 2021a). Providing accelerated programs to regain certifications may address this problem.



Expert Opinion
- 3. Conduct national awareness campaigns informing employers and migrants about work eligibility requirements.** In Ecuador, the government is undertaking an awareness-raising campaign about the documents that allow migrants to work (MPI 2020a). The *Vivir la Integración* initiative in Costa Rica (a product of UNHCR, the Government of Costa Rica, and labor groups) “entails three main activities: the Livelihood and Economic Inclusion program, activities for promoting employability for refugees (such as entrepreneurial meetings, fairs, and awareness-raising activities for businesses), and the creation of the *Vivir la Integración* seal that provides recognition to entities that maintain standards of inclusion for the population under international protection” (MPI 2021a).



Existing Practice

Finance and Banking

According to the World Bank, almost one-third of adults lacked bank accounts in 2017. Migrants especially have difficulty accessing banking services, either through lack of legal status, lack of creditworthiness, missing documentation, or discrimination. Lack of bank accounts means that migrants may need to hold cash, leaving them vulnerable to robbery or loss. Having a bank account enables safe, effective savings and the ability to access other financial services. According to the World Bank, “Financial access facilitates day-to-day living and helps families and businesses plan for everything from long-term goals to unexpected emergencies. As account holders, people are more likely to use other financial services, such as credit and insurance, to start and expand businesses, invest in education or

health, manage risk, and weather financial shocks, which can improve the overall quality of their lives” (World Bank 2022).

Solutions

- 1. Provide business loans to migrants who may not be eligible for traditional loans.** USAID’s Georgia New Economic Opportunities project sought to improve rural incomes and food security by, among other actions, increasing access to financial services for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable individuals not eligible for commercial loans (USAID 2016). The program provided low- or no-cost loans to invest in project-supported livelihood activities, with the additional goal of helping participants demonstrate “their creditworthiness and thus put themselves in a better position to access commercial credit in the future.” Benefits to this program appear to be on a case-by-case basis, with qualitative and anecdotal evidence that it helped participants access commercial credit, but not quantitative evidence.
- 2. Harness mobile banking to help migrants securely receive, send, and manage money.** An informal study of mobile banking by Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa found anecdotal evidence regarding the usefulness of mobile money (Mavodza 2019). The study found that mobile banking provided migrants with a way to be paid, reduced their need to carry cash, reduced the risk of losing savings while traveling home for holidays, enabled them to send remittances more easily and quickly, and allowed women to manage money without the direct approval of their husbands (however, the researcher noted that women often consulted their husbands on how to use it).



Public Education

Of all forcibly displaced people, 42 percent are children (UNHCR 2022). Parents of migrant children often lack familiarity with their host country’s educational system and may not have proper documentation of their children’s education. Without recognized credentials, enrolling migrant children into school may require placement tests, which may necessitate country-specific knowledge or a new language, or depend on the imperfect judgment of school administrators. In many cases, migrant children may be placed in a lower grade than their academic skills would merit. Higher education students face similar challenges in obtaining recognition for their education records (see previous section). The literature review found some survey and interview evidence around strategies to improve access to education.

Solutions

- 1. Explore alternative methods of grade placement, including creating unique IDs for undocumented children, flexible document requirements for entry, and online education** (MPI 2020a). Latin American governments have instituted these strategies in response to the Venezuelan refugee crisis, and are seeing promising initial results: "In January 2019, a UNHCR survey found that 69 percent of Venezuelan children surveyed

were not attending school; later that year, in its November 2019 survey, 51 percent of those surveyed were out of school."

- 2. Submit sworn declarations in place of identity documents to facilitate children's placement into schools.** In Costa Rica, large-scale Nicaraguan migration led the state to issue educational guidelines in 2018 on placement tests, psychosocial care, and dropout rates for foreign students (MPI 2021a). According to an MPI report on Costa Rican migrant policies, these guidelines allowed refugees, refugee applicants, and migrants to "submit sworn declarations in place of identity documents, should they lack them. Furthermore, it delineates the obligation of educational institutions to promote an intercultural education by fostering knowledge of foreign sociocultural backgrounds and roots." Following the decree, reports of inability to access education were low: "In 2019, out of 259 Nicaraguan applicants for refugee status interviewed, only 11 percent reported difficulties in accessing education."



However, a **negative consequence of allowing flexible grade placement is the ability of school administrators to impart their own biases** when making decisions. "By leaving enrollment decisions to school administrators whose actions may unconsciously be shaped by prevailing biases, this can limit migrant children's access to an appropriate education" (MPI 2021a). The report mentions cases of administrators seeking to hold back Nicaraguan children and migrant parents being asked to provide unnecessary documentation, such as bank documents.

- 3. Create a second school "shift" and offer accelerated programs for migrant children, while ensuring families have the financial resources to send children to school.** In Lebanon, the Lebanese government and partner organizations took more targeted action to improve Syrian refugee children's access to education: "Primary school fees [were] waived; primary school supply [was] expanded by opening an afternoon shift (often referred to as the second shift) in public primary schools dedicated mainly to Syrian children, and an accelerated learning program allowing children who had been out of school for a prolonged period to re-enter school at an age-appropriate grade was... scaled up" (de Hoop 2019). Despite the improvements, enrollment remained low. See the "Money and Resources" section for a study on how unconditional cash transfers in Lebanon increased school enrollment.



- 4. Alternatively, expand school capacity for both migrant and native-born children to improve migrant enrollment and avoid local backlash.** In Peru, the Ministry of Education created the *Lima Aprende* strategy in 2019 to expand public school capacity and increase the enrollment of Venezuelan and Peruvian children. According to a 2021 MPI report, "The decision to target both Peruvian and immigrant children reflects both an acknowledgment of the widespread capacity challenges facing the region's schools and an attempt to avoid a backlash that could result from serving only newcomers when many local children also face enrollment difficulties" (MPI 2021c). The strategy appeared to have positive results and public support, but migrants may still need targeted support: "Some officials have



noted that a more targeted approach to enrolling migrant and refugee children could help overcome issues unique to that population (e.g., lack of knowledge of the country’s education system).”

Health Care

Access to health care systems is specific to each host country, differing in the level of public versus private insurance, what migrants are entitled to, and their documentation requirements. An IOM assessment of migrant experiences across LAC showed large differences in access to care across the region, and most respondents did not have health insurance.

Even when migrants have rights, they may be unaware or unable to navigate complex systems. In Costa Rica, all citizens and regular immigrants have access to their universal health care system. Irregular immigrants and applicants, meanwhile, need insurance to access care, except in the cases of emergency care, prenatal care, and health care for minors. Despite their right to access care in certain circumstances, “research has shown that significant legal, institutional, and practical barriers can prevent migrants from accessing health care, even where they have a right to do so” (MPI 2021a).

Migrants also may have a higher need for health care due to lack of past access or poor quality of life. The IOM assessment showed that “between 5 percent and 15 percent of respondents in Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, and Peru were suffering from chronic health conditions between mid-2018 and mid-2019.” The stressed state of the Venezuelan health care system means that Venezuelan migrants with chronic health conditions may be in especially urgent need of care (MPI 2020c).

Box 2. Evidence Gap: Immunization of Migrant and Refugee Children

An evidence gap analysis of child immunization in low and middle-income countries noted, “There is a notable gap in evidence on interventions to increase vaccination coverage among migrant, refugee, or vaccine-hesitant populations” (Engelbert 2022). The analysis only found one impact evaluation that assessed outreach to migrant populations, and did not find impact evaluations or systematic reviews on vaccinating refugees or migrants.

Solutions

1. **Use telemedicine to increase health access.** In 2021, the IOM worked with Somalian hospitals and clinics to provide telemedicine technology and strengthen providers’ ability to provide remote diagnosis and treatment (IOM 2022a). “Using IOM-donated video cameras, screens, personal computers, and mobile devices such as tablets, through videoconferencing and teleconsultations, doctors located within or outside Somalia’s borders can now support those on the front lines with clinical diagnoses, offering real-time recommendations for patient management.” However, this review did not find evidence regarding the effectiveness of such solutions.



2. **Offer emergency and mobile health clinics and immunization centers in migrant settlement areas to provide care and reduce the burden of seeking care**, saving them from navigating national health systems. In Ethiopia, people displaced by conflict in Tigray have received care at IOM clinics in IDP sites. Health, nutrition, and mental health teams provide “primary care consultations, providing basic sexual and reproductive health services, psychosocial support, screening, and referral management for moderate and severe malnutrition among children, as well as targeted [risk communication and community engagement] activities on COVID-19 prevention” (IOM 2022a). However, this review did not find evidence regarding the effectiveness of such solutions.  Existing Practice

3. **Standardize vaccination records, at least regionally.** Without a recognized international standard, vaccination documentation is a challenge, especially in the COVID and post-COVID era. Standardized vaccination records would both help migrants obtain health care and simplify immigration paperwork. In Latin America, eleven host countries sought to ensure correct vaccination and enable standard recognition across borders by providing Unique Vaccination Cards (MPI 2020a).  Existing Practice

4. **Conduct informational campaigns and disseminate information on migrants’ rights to health care, navigating health systems, and accessing care.** Migrants may lack the knowledge and capacity to effectively access health care in their host country, which likely has a health care system that differs significantly from their country of origin. Informational campaigns run by governments and supported by non-governmental and international organizations may address this gap (MPI 2021a, c).  Expert Opinion

5. **Improve children’s nutrition through schools.** One study examined a pilot program that leveraged schools as an intervention point to improve children’s nutrition (el Harake 2018). In Lebanon, Syrian refugee children who live in informal settlements attend modular schools built to serve those settlements. The study examined a sample of children in fourth through sixth grade who received an intervention consisting of “1) delivering health and nutrition education modules on a bi-weekly basis, and 2) providing children with locally-prepared nutritious snacks.” The study had a relatively high attrition rate (68.6 percent completed post-intervention measures), but the authors found statistically significant effects on dietary knowledge, attitude, and body mass index scores.  Journal Article

Emotional and Psychological Support

Migrants, and refugees especially, have likely been exposed to multiple traumatic events in their lifetimes and live under stressful conditions. In Colombia, over 16 percent of the population has been internally displaced by violence as of 2021. Research by Ana María Ibáñez, Andrés Moya, and others on IDPs in Colombia shows how the trauma experienced by people fleeing violence can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of poverty. Moya (2019) found that “a one standard deviation increase in the number of violent events experienced by the household raises the perceived probability of extreme poverty in the

following year by 54 percent relative to the mean... the results point to the existence of a behavioral poverty trap.” The trauma of exposure to violence was found to distort cognition, increase risk aversion, and increase pessimism about the ability to move out of poverty, increasing vulnerability to poverty through lower productivity, educational attainment, and savings and investment. From these findings, Ibáñez raises the importance of understanding that this link shows “a different mechanism through which forced displacement can contribute to the persistence of chronic poverty” and “the urgency of improving access to mental health services along with standard ‘anti-poverty’ programs” (Ibáñez 2022).

This literature review found three research articles on emotional support programs for children (see Box 3) and one on psychological support for parents, all focused on Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. The search also found some mentions of programs to address mental health among adults but did not find evidence related to those programs’ effectiveness.

Solutions

1. Invest in carefully-monitored emotional and psychological support programs for children from conflict areas, and carefully monitor results and lessons learned.

The reports found in this review note that the evidence around migrant children’s mental health programming is thin: “[T]here is a dearth of high-quality, multi-outcome research evaluating mental health and psychosocial interventions for children and adolescents in conflict settings” (Panter-Brick 2017). Where there is evidence, “prevention programs aimed at strengthening psychosocial wellbeing specifically among refugee and other conflict-affected children have yielded decidedly mixed results.” Within programs that did show positive results, “the quality of the evidence for such effects has been highly variable and effects have often been found only for specific subgroups” (Miller 2020). Poor quality and missing evidence, plus a strong need for such services, point to the need for increased investment in mental health programming for refugee children. This programming should be underpinned by a robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework to gather high-quality evidence on their effectiveness. Examples in Box 3 show the wide differences in results and underscore the need for greater investment and evidence generation in this area.



2. Invest in stress and psychosocial programs for migrant parents to decrease harsh parenting and improve child well-being.

Chronic stress is experienced by many migrant parents, and “the impact of armed conflict and displacement on children’s mental health is strongly mediated by compromised parenting stemming from persistently high caregiver stress” (Miller 2020). A study by Kenneth E. Miller et al. examined a parenting support program for Syrian parents in Lebanon that goes beyond simple knowledge and skills acquisition, to focus on “the deleterious effects of chronic stress on parenting.” War Child Holland’s Caregiver Support Intervention is a nine-session group intervention that “aims to strengthen parenting by lowering stress and improving psychosocial wellbeing among refugee parents, while also increasing knowledge and skill related to positive parenting.” Compared to the control group, the treatment group “showed significantly increased parental warmth and responsiveness, decreased harsh parenting, lowered stress and distress, improved psychosocial wellbeing, and improved stress



management,” and parents reported improved psychosocial wellbeing of their children. The study authors write that this intervention “shows promise as a scalable approach to strengthening parenting in refugee communities.”

- 3. Pilot and monitor mental health programming for adult migrants.** At IOM’s migration response center in Djibouti, “migrants benefit from a variety of recreational activities to help support their mental health and recovery. In addition, women are introduced to traditional basket weaving to equip them with skills for when they return home. In August 2021 alone, 92 recreational activities were organized for the center’s residents. To complement this, 64 migrants had individual discussions with IOM mental health staff and 92 migrants participated in discussion groups, which allowed them to express the difficulties on their journey and any fears about returning home” (IOM 2022a). However, the review found no evidence of the effectiveness of this approach, and programs would benefit from careful monitoring and sharing of results.



Box 3. Examples and Lessons Learned from Psychological Support Programs for Children

- **Remedial programming and social-emotional learning improved educational and behavioral outcomes for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, underscoring the need for increased holistic support for migrant children.** A 2021 study by Carly Tubbs Dolan et al. examined the effects of short-term access to two versions of informal remedial programming infused with social-emotional learning² among Syrian refugee children in Lebanese public schools (Tubbs Dolan 2021). The results from the study’s RCT showed evidence that the programs improved literacy and numeracy; increased children’s view that their school was respectful and inclusive; decreased school-related stress, internalizing symptoms, and stress reactivity; increased behavioral regulation; and decreased hostile attributions and anger dysregulation. The study did not find significant effects on children’s sadness dysregulation, reactive aggression, working memory, or inhibitory control. The results of the study imply that refugee children may benefit from additional support programs in school: “The magnitude of many of these changes was small, and they reinforce the need for additional, effective supports to ensure that children meaningfully achieve holistic learning outcomes. Nonetheless, they also highlight the potential power of access to national education systems for children with unknowable futures.”
- **A different psychosocial intervention for Syrian refugees in Lebanon showed no significant effects but was marked by methodological and measurement issues.** A life skills intervention aimed at fostering resilience, “I-Deal” was a 16-session psychosocial intervention for early adolescent Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Through this intervention, adolescents attended 90-minute participatory group sessions on themes such as identity, relationships, dealing with feelings, and the future with role-playing, drawing, games, and group discussions. A 2020 study of this program compared this treatment to a structured recreational activity group, “a non-thematic, lightly structured, play-based group in which children engaged in a variety of mid to high-energy play activities [which] does not focus on the

² Social-emotional learning programs “generally focus on providing training and ongoing professional development to staff and/or teachers to implement two sets of strategies: (1) integrating classroom climate-targeted SEL practices—such as classroom management and positive pedagogy—into subject-matter instruction in order to establish safe, supportive learning environments; and (2) providing explicit, skill-targeted training to children on how to process, integrate, and appropriately apply specific social and emotional skills in real-world situations.” (52)

Box 3. Examples and Lessons Learned from Psychological Support Programs for Children

development of specific life skills or address key issues facing children” (Miller 2020). The study did not find a significant effect of either the psychosocial group sessions or recreational activity group on adolescent wellbeing, distress, or hope. Beyond the potential ineffectiveness of the programs, the study authors point to methodological and measurement issues, the presence of high existing resiliency among these children, implementation challenges, and ongoing stressors in those communities that could have negated the effects of the program.

- **A stress attunement approach for war-affected youth in Jordan showed promising effects on psychosocial outcomes, health, and potentially social impacts.** The 2017 study by Catherine Panter-Brick et al. examined an 8-week psychosocial support program for war-affected Syrian and Jordanian youth (12–18 years) in Jordan (Panter-Brick 2017). The Advancing Adolescents program created a safe, emotionally supportive space for gender- and age-differentiated groups to participate in structured activities chosen by participants, including fitness activities, arts and crafts, vocational skills, and technical skills. The program followed a profound stress attunement approach, “a community-based, nonclinical program of psychosocial care to meet the psychosocial needs of at-risk children and improve social interactions with participatory approaches.” The analysis found that adolescents with higher trauma exposure benefited most from program participation. Other benefits included positive anecdotal impacts on social networks and trust, perception of safety in their community, and confidence in the future, as well as more friends outside of their community; medium to small effects for all psychosocial outcomes (human insecurity, human distress, and perceived stress); and positive impacts on secondary mental health measures.



Money and Resources

Cash-based assistance is positively reviewed in all the relevant literature covered in this report. Recipients spend given money on essentials such as food, rent, education, and health, with extremely rare reports of misuse. Research also points to other potential positive effects of cash assistance on mental health and stress, a decrease in child labor, and an increase in children’s education. Additionally, modern innovations in methods of distribution and targeting are making implementation simpler, especially with the advent of cell phones. This review found several high-quality articles contributing evidence to the effectiveness of such programs.

However, research on the enduring effects of cash transfer programs suggests that modest monthly transfers (that supplement income) are not enough to pull families out of poverty. Furthermore, consumption levels rapidly return to normal after assistance ends, with households rapidly drawing down and exhausting the money they were able to save while they were receiving assistance (Altindag and O’Connell 2023). For displaced peoples, research suggests that the effect of subsidy and voucher programs may not be strong enough to overcome the loss the displaced persons have experienced, compared to non-displaced people (Phadera 2020).

Other subsidy programs, such as conditional cash transfers, food subsidies, and voucher programs, also show positive results. However, the higher cost of implementing such programs, the restrictions to households (amid very low reports of abuse), and reports of selling vouchers for more immediate needs point to unconditional cash transfers as a win-win for donors and recipients. “Proponents of cash

assistance argue that it is preferred to in-kind assistance due to its efficiency and the financial autonomy it affords affected populations” (Moussa 2021). However, the literature also notes the need to explore potential unexpected incentives caused by cash transfers.

Solutions

- 1. Offer long-term, unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) to vulnerable populations over conditional aid or voucher programs to reduce administration costs.** The literature provides ample evidence of the effectiveness of these programs, and no reports of misuse of UCT funds. Among recipients, children especially appear to benefit from UCT programs, with improved health outcomes, delayed marriage, reduced child labor, and increased schooling. However, the effectiveness of these programs is dependent on the amount and duration of cash received. Some studies of voucher or conditional aid programs concluded that, in retrospect, a UCT program would have been more beneficial to both households and program implementers. A study of Iraq’s universal food subsidy program found that the program was unable to mitigate the effects of economic shock from displacement, and suggested that “given the considerable resources the universal program consumes, it is vital to think of alternative approaches, such as targeted cash transfers, that might be more effective in protection and cost” (Phadera 2020). See Box 2 for more detail on lessons learned from UCTs. 
- 2. Explore potential incentives created by cash transfer programs (both conditional and unconditional).** In a policy paper by Michael Clemens, the author finds evidence that (1) *unconditional* cash transfers caused an increase in *domestic* migration but did not evaluate the impact on international migration, and (2) *conditional* cash transfer programs that require investment in long-term human capital (like education) may increase *international* migration (Clemens 2022). Clemens recommends that to discourage migration from a home country, cash transfers should be conditional on physical presence in the country. The study found “[conditional cash transfers] that contain a strict, targeted, and lengthy condition on presence appear much more likely to reduce the incentive for migration in the short run.” The report also suggests further research into the area, recommending that pilot projects targeting reduced migration should conduct ongoing impact evaluations to determine the effect of cash transfer programs on migrant behavior. Finally, project designers should consider incentives to become eligible for cash transfer programs: one program caused households to change their structure to send children into eligible households. This need not be a negative outcome, however—the study found that the program still benefited the population as a whole (Özler 2021). 
- 3. Consider alternative methods of getting cash to beneficiaries.** In Peru, the IOM provided multiple options for transferring UCT money to Venezuelan refugees, including wires, bank and mobile transfers, and prepaid cards, allowing recipients to choose the best method. Recipients notably reported that, beyond helping with living costs, receiving the transfer had a positive effect on family relationships (IOM 2021b). In an IOM program in Indonesia, a shift to providing transfers primarily via ATM cards required regular engagement and communication with recipients to build trust with recipients, who initially “were afraid of forgetting the PIN number, 

language barriers, and extra charges.” While the shift was reportedly challenging, after several months in the new system, most users felt the card was a benefit that gave them greater freedom, and they felt safe using it.

- 4. Include youth as beneficiaries of programs to develop responsibility and develop productive skills.** In Greece, an IOM program gave a bimonthly “pocket money” allowance for unaccompanied migrant children, with the intention to “contribute to strengthening life skills and developing a sense of responsibility, ownership, and self-reliance, ... [and] money-management skills” (IOM 2021b). No evidence was found on this program's effectiveness, however. An IOM cash-for-work program in Cameroon engaged IDPs in vocational training and construction work; afterward, the program reported that “the rate of youth enrolled in armed groups and community violence decreased and young people were focused on the development of their income generating activities” (IOM 2021b).
- 5. Explore voucher and conditional aid programs if they are necessary for the project, but keep UCT as the first choice for flexibility and ease of administration.** Studies of conditional and subsidy programs, including cash vouchers redeemable for approved items and food subsidies, generally show positive results. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, IDPs received vouchers to use at UNICEF-organized fairs to purchase essential household items (EHIs) (Quattrochi 2020). While it was effective, a study of the program found that households would sell vouchers “to meet more urgent needs, such as food and medicine, both of which were major concerns for respondents.” In this context, providing cash may have saved the program money and the recipients' time. Nonetheless, the program found strong evidence of positive effects of EHIs on adult mental health, smaller effects on resilience and social cohesion, and no significant effect on child health. Importantly, community conflict did not increase and households appeared to share their vouchers and increase their social capital.
- 6. Ensure program benefits are high enough to replace what migrants have lost.** A 2020 study of Iraq's Public Distribution System, a universal food subsidy program, examined the program's effect on displaced households (Phadera 2020). While the study found that program beneficiaries had higher food and non-food expenditures, higher calorie intake, and were less vulnerable to poverty, displaced households were still worse off than non-displaced households. “These results... suggest that forced displacement distresses one's economic condition to such an extent that the food ration program compensates some of the welfare loss and reduces vulnerability, but is unable to reinstate the displaced families to their original level of well-being.” In northeast Nigeria, a Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations program distributed agricultural input kits (either cereal, pulse, or vegetable kits) to vulnerable populations that had access to land for planting and were able to cultivate a plot. A 2018 study of the program found that benefits were highest among internally displaced households (as measured by the Food Consumption Score and the Reduced Coping Strategy Index), but the report notes that “despite these strong [program] returns, the absolute level of food security is still the lowest for the internally displaced and those residing in areas of intense conflict, relative to other sub-groups” (Baliki 2018).





Evaluations
Working
Papers



Journal
Article

Box 4. UCT Program Lessons Learned

Peer-reviewed evidence shows the promising effectiveness of UCT programs on a variety of outcomes, as well as key lessons learned for future programming.

- **UCT programming is beneficial but depends on the duration and amount of cash received.** Two studies on an unconditional cash program for Syrian refugees in Lebanon showed evidence that the program, which provided about \$175 per month, had positive short-term effects on household consumption but differing long-term effects after discontinuation of benefits. A 2021 study by Onur Altındağ and Stephen D. O’Connell showed that the program helped recipients while they received benefits, but the benefits were not sufficient to lift them out of poverty, despite savings and investment behaviors (Altındağ and O’Connell 2023). Recipients were able to increase consumption, improve child welfare, increase food security, and reduce livelihood coping strategies while receiving monthly benefits. The study showed that the “beneficiaries are not myopic: they save and invest in durable goods, children are taken out of work and put into school, and the additional income is not spent on temptation goods.” However, once the program ended, beneficiaries rapidly depleted their savings: within six months, the authors found no difference between beneficiary and non-beneficiary families.
- **Children benefit from UCT programs through improved health, increased schooling, and reduced early marriage.** A second study by Wael Moussa et al. on the same program focused on the impacts of varying durations of cash transfers on children’s well-being by examining data from a programmatic change in eligibility between 2017 and 2018 (Moussa 2021). The study found the cash transfer improved school-age child health outcomes, shifted children toward formal schooling and away from child labor and informal schooling, and reduced the likelihood of early marriages among girls aged 15–19, even after discontinuation of benefits. Young children of recipient families aged 0–5 had a lower likelihood of contracting any illness, and recipient households were also more likely to seek primary care services when required than non-recipients. Although these benefits to young children were not sustainable if families lost benefits after the first cycle, they were sustainable in the long run if they received a second year of benefits.
- **Families receiving cash transfers for children enrolled in school are more likely to spend money on their children and increase school attendance.** A 2019 study by Jacobus de Hoop et al. examined the effects of the “No Lost Generation” program on school attendance (de Hoop 2019). To support the influx of Syrian refugees, the Lebanese government waived primary school fees and added an afternoon shift in schools for Syrian children. However, about half of Syrian children aged 6–14 were out of school. “The [No Lost Generation program] aimed to address these barriers by providing monthly cash transfers for each child enrolled in an afternoon shift at a primary school. The transfers covered roughly the cost of transport to school for children ages 5–9 [\$20 per month] and offset a substantive portion of the income lost if older children (ages 10–14) [\$65 per month] attend school.” The study found a positive impact on afternoon shift children (which targeted Syrian refugees), an increase in household expenditure on children (driven by expenditure on safe transportation, as the afternoon shift is partly at night), and a 20 percent increase in self-reported days attended compared to control groups.
- **Cash transfers need not be conditional on school attendance to increase school attendance and decrease child labor.** The Emergency Social Safety Net in Turkey is one of the world’s largest humanitarian cash transfer programs, supporting 1.7 million international refugees in Turkey as of 2021 (Özler 2021). The Government of Turkey and the European Union partnered to establish the program in 2016 following the rapid rise in refugee populations in the country. A 2022 study by Aysun Hızıroğlu Aygün et al. showed that the program reduced the proportion of refugee children not in school (from 36.2 percent to 13.7 percent) and



Evaluations
Working
Papers



Journal
Article

Box 4. UCT Program Lessons Learned

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decreased child labor (from 14 percent to 1.6 percent) (Hiziroglu Aygun 2022). The study found that the “transfers become a significant part of households’ income, alleviate extreme poverty, and reduce the use of harmful coping strategies.” Furthermore, “beneficiary households become more likely to send children to school because the cash transfer addresses both the opportunity cost and direct cost of schooling—although the former channel is more important.” The effects of the cash transfers on schooling appeared to be stronger for poorer families and for older children (consistent with the opportunity cost of child labor). The paper also contributes evidence to the idea that cash transfers need not be conditional on school attendance: “In this setting, providing cash *alone*, without conditions, generates large, positive impacts on child labor and schooling outcomes.”

- **Unanticipated incentives may result in household restructuring to increase program eligibility.** A 2021 study by Berk Özler et al. found that Turkey’s Emergency Social Safety Net program resulted in a sharp decline in poverty and inequality, a moderate increase in diversity and frequency of food consumption, a decrease in the stock of debt, and a reduced likelihood of returning to their country of origin (Özler 2021). Notably, the study found that populations altered their household structure and living arrangements in response to their eligibility for this program: “The program quickly led to a net movement of children from larger and worse-off ineligible households into smaller and better-off eligible ones, causing a substantial decline in poverty and inequality in the entire applicant population.” The authors hypothesize that this movement was due to “some control households respond[ing] to the revelation of their initial eligibility status by sending children into environments where they will have more access to resources and to school.”



Social Acceptance and Integration

Migrants face significant discrimination, affecting their ability to find a job and housing and feel safe in their host communities. MPI’s report on African migration through the Americas found that “African migrants, those who work with them, and other observers report that these migrants experience immense and persistent discrimination from government officials, ranging from being denied education or health care to being ignored by police when they are victims of crimes, or even being targeted for violence by security officials” (MPI 2021b). Migrant children additionally face discrimination in school. MPI’s report on migration in Costa Rica cited a 2018 report that found that “whereas 9 percent of Costa Rican students reported feeling rejected in the classroom, 57 percent of Nicaraguans reported that feeling” (MPI 2021a).³ In Turkey, the large influx of Syrian refugee children were provided education in state schools, but locals perceived increased peer violence and visible ethnic segregation on school grounds” (Alan 2020).

³ Natalia Campos-Saborío et al., “Psychosocial and Sociocultural Characteristics of Nicaraguan and Costa Rican Students in the Context of Intercultural Education in Costa Rica,” *Intercultural Education* 29, no. 4 (2018).

Solutions

- 1. Create programs that allow migrants to share benefits within their community.** Migrants receiving benefits from the government or other organizations may hurt social cohesion when locals are left out. Sharing benefits with the community, meanwhile, may either ease resentment and help them integrate or, if shared unequally, create more resentment. The 2020 study by Quattrochi et al. of EHI vouchers in the DRC speculated that sharing program benefits with locals helped beneficiaries give back to their host community for the first time: “Sharing may help the displaced integrate themselves into a host community, building social cohesion... Alternatively, if IDPs only share or gift resources to a subset of the community, resentment may be exacerbated, and social cohesion could suffer” (Quattrochi 2020).
- 2. Expand the reach of benefits to all vulnerable members of a community to improve the social cohesion of migrants within their host communities.** The MPI report on Venezuelan migrants in Latin America recommends that governments respond both to migrants’ needs as well as the communities that host them: “In order to avoid a more widespread and engrained sense of xenophobia, proactive measures should aim to improve public services not just for newcomers but for the native-born as well” (MPI 2019a).
- 3. Create programs with status-blind eligibility based on need, rather than refugee or migrant status.** The World Bank’s Refugees and Host Communities Support Project in Niger seeks to improve economic opportunities through agricultural grants and livelihood opportunities and “relies on a spatial targeting strategy that is expressly status-blind (i.e., all people in certain geographies who meet certain criteria are eligible beneficiaries). In such projects, migrants and displaced people may be one potentially vulnerable group (often alongside others such as youth and women), but migration status alone is not enough to qualify somebody to benefit from the project” (MPI 2022). This review found no literature on the effectiveness of this program, however. In Ecuador, a voucher program and nutrition training targeted both refugees and poor locals resulting in improved social cohesion among migrants but had no effect on locals. A 2019 study of the program by Elsa Valli et al. showed significant positive effects on “reported social cohesion of beneficiaries, particularly in the dimensions of agency and confidence in institutions and in the reported attitudes of Colombians towards diversity and social participation” (Valli 2019). The study found no effects for Ecuadorian participants, but also no negative social impacts in the program.
- 4. Use communications campaigns that challenge stereotypes and highlight the positive contributions that migrants can bring to host communities, rather than focusing solely on emotional appeals.** A recent experiment examined the effects of a short reminder (“nudge”) to real estate agents in Ecuador about the extra effort that minority groups must make to achieve the same goals as others, suggesting that “this may be reflected in their behavior as tenants” (Zanoni 2023). The agents then completed a hypothetical rating of rental candidate profiles. The agents receiving the


nudge were more likely to assess Venezuelan candidates highly, and reduced their perceived gap in suitability between comparable Ecuador and Venezuelan rental candidates. Furthermore, an MPI report on climate migration noted that legal migration that addresses labor shortages “may garner more public support than solely humanitarian-focused programs. Public debate over Australia’s climate change responsibilities to the Pacific Islands, while highly fraught, became a way for civil society to publicize the often unrecognized value of Pacific Island seasonal workers in Australia’s agricultural industries” (MPI 2020b). If appropriate for the context, programs could consider using more grassroots media channels, such as community radio, rather than mainstream media, which may carry narratives that are biased toward the elite (Muswede 2015).

5. **Reduce xenophobia from the top by funding anti-discrimination programming.**

Through leading by example, community leaders, political officials, and other influential community members may ease the social integration of migrants. MPI recommends strengthening social cohesion to improve the integration of Venezuelan migrants: “Political leaders and officials must reject xenophobia and lead from the top on supporting and using welcoming and inclusive rhetoric” (MPI 2020b). Furthermore, international organizations could fund antidiscrimination programming. MPI recommends that such programs could be led by groups already doing anti-racism work in-country, such as CSOs, international organizations, universities, or local groups, and be “conducted periodically with the understanding that combating discrimination is an ongoing process” (MPI 2021c). This review found no objective evidence of effective programming in this area, though many sources recommend funding it.



6. **Create programs in schools with high migrant populations that encourage understanding and contact between native and migrant children.** Such programs appear to be effective in reducing social exclusion, increasing inter-ethnic friendships (to a point), and improving migrants’ language ability in the host country language.

“Understanding Each Other,” a full-year educational program implemented in Turkish elementary schools with a high influx of refugees, used perspective-taking to build inter-ethnic cohesion in schools. Part of the school curriculum, the program “[encouraged] students to understand and experience the emotions of the described subject through a variety of reading and visual materials,” including watching similar adverse events happen to different characters, or reading comparable diary entries from refugee and host children. A 2020 study of the program by Sule Alan et al. found evidence that it significantly lowered “high-intensity peer violence and victimization in school grounds;” reduced “social exclusion and ethnic segregation in the classroom,” measured by inter-ethnic friendship ties; enhanced prosocial behavior among treated children, as exhibited by higher trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and altruism toward each other; and significantly improved refugee children’s Turkish language ability (Alan 2020).



7. **Expose children at an early age to different ethnic groups to improve educational results and increase inter-ethnic friendships.** A two-month 2019 summer program in Turkey targeted disadvantaged 5-year-old refugee and native children in order to begin socio-cultural integration, prepare them for the Turkish education



system, and improve refugee children’s Turkish language abilities. A 2021 study by Vincent Boucher et al. evaluated a randomized field experiment in this summer program, where refugee children were randomly assigned to classrooms with different ethnic compositions (Boucher 2021). The study found that Syrian children were less likely to have school absenteeism the following year when exposed to higher groups of Turkish children during the summer program. Increased exposure to Turkish children significantly improved Turkish language skills for Syrian children, and the study found that “improvement in the language skills of Syrian children can offset more than half of the effect that ethnic bias has on friendship formation patterns.” For inter-ethnic friendships, exposure to children of different ethnic groups leads to more interethnic friendships (especially for Turkish children) to a point, but “findings indicate that a large exposure of minority children to native children can backfire by increasing in-group bias on friendship formation.”

Box 5: Key Resource

The IOM developed guidance and a review of lessons learned for “Designing, Facilitating and Evaluating Social Mixing Activities to Strengthen Migrant Integration and Social Cohesion Between Migrants and Local Communities.” This guidance outlines barriers, solutions, core principles, types of activities, target groups, and monitoring and evaluation considerations for social mixing activities (IOM 2021c).

IV. CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

Coordinate across agencies and avoid parallel initiatives. An MPI article on strengthening refugee protection in low- and middle-income countries recommends, rather than allowing each agency (domestic or international) to retain territorial ownership over programs, to “combine existing coordination structures into one central committee that is chaired by the national government, with the most relevant international agency providing support as co-chair” (MPI 2019b). The MPI furthermore recommends that “the international community can play a major role in supporting regional thinking and agreement” around entry requirements, legal status, and data tracking and sharing in the LAC region (MPI 2020a).

Consult and share information with humanitarian agencies during program design and beyond. Humanitarian agencies often have irreplaceable experience and understanding of certain refugee populations, as well as “the capabilities and capacity gaps across governance sectors that affect a country’s ability to provide refugee protection” (MPI 2019b). By consulting with them, USAID can ensure programs are designed with protection needs in mind (MPI 2019b). “Closer coordination between development and humanitarian actors on assessing refugees’ conditions and needs before designing an intervention could lead to better-informed program goals and design, as well as reduce the duplication of efforts.”

Invest in and understand systems. USAID understands the need to utilize a systems approach, as well as target systems for improvement as a strategy. MPI recommends investing in the capacity of systems, including complementary governance structures and service delivery systems, that benefit both refugees and host communities. “Many of the systems and capabilities required to operate an asylum system are those at the heart of development initiatives and investments, such as strengthening education services or enhancing access to the justice system. Development actors can thus be instrumental in guiding investment to priorities and projects that will benefit both refugees and their host communities” (MPI 2019b). Furthermore, programming should take into account capacity gaps in complementary systems.

Generate (political) buy-in and ownership among partners. Commitment from relevant ministries, agencies, and local authorities is critical to effecting change in broader policies and public services that affect refugees, such as employment, housing, and the registration of life events (such as births and marriages). Where development actors have established relationships with specific government departments or agencies, they may be able to bring the right partners to the table and persuade them to give higher priority to refugee-related concerns (MPI 2019b).

Improve data collection, monitoring, and evaluation. Multiple studies cited a dearth of evidence on migrant and refugee programming, and many studies that do exist suffer from high attrition and poor study conditions. More and higher-quality evidence on migrants’ lives and needs is necessary. A better understanding of the impact and lessons learned of various programs will ensure data, evaluations, and lessons learned are widely available.

Local consultation and ownership of efforts. The response to increased migration challenges should “come from local and regional governments and from local NGOs, particularly as the focus turns to long-term integration challenges” (MPI 2020a). Migrant populations especially should provide input to programming that affects the full range of their lives: “Engagement should not only focus on health, shelter, and livelihoods, but also include the often intangible but nevertheless significant cultural, emotional, and political losses associated with potentially leaving one’s homeland. Mobile populations need opportunities to provide input to government and international development policies and projects, not only as households or individuals with economic, health, and social needs but also as collective entities with political and cultural rights” (MPI 2020b). Finally, both host and refugee communities should benefit from programs to reduce divisions (MPI 2019b).

Leverage key entry points for programming. Some of the literature reviewed mentioned places or opportunities to engage migrants. Some of these entry points that are applicable to USAID’s work include:

- I. **Migrant resource centers:** “International organizations and civil society actors can play an important role in providing services to migrants in destination countries. This can take the form of operating migrant resource centers, such as those managed by IOM (as in Sudan) or trade unions (as in Malaysia), and of liaising with origin countries to organize voluntary returns. Migrants from Ghana and Senegal have accessed such services in countries such as Morocco and received basic assistance

(e.g., food, basic health care), counseling about their situation, and for those who opt to return to their origin country, assistance in doing so” (MPI 2021c).

2. **Consulates:** While at times limited in their resources and capacities, origin-country consulates can be a resource for outreach. “For example, Mexico has deployed an extensive consular network in the United States and regularly organizes awareness-raising events to disseminate information about workers’ rights and services available to Mexican nationals and within Latino communities more broadly” (MPI 2021c).
3. **Mobile centers:** In an initiative by the Costa Rican government, *Migramóvil*, “migration officials use buses with traction control to travel to the most far-flung corners of the country to provide information on the requirements involved in regularization schemes to potential beneficiaries. Such efforts have the potential to reduce information gaps and make integration services more accessible to immigrants in rural areas who do not have the means to travel to San José, where most such services are located.” However, programs should use caution when implementing such initiatives: “According to a representative of a [CSO], the government’s *Migramóvil* communication strategy has not built trust among the country’s immigrant population, and there have reportedly been cases in central San José, Cartago, and Los Santos of first the *Migramóvil* visiting, then the migration police” (MPI 2021a).

Understand migrants’ integration into communities. Programming and communications should be adapted based on how integrated migrants are in their host communities, which will change the needs they have. In an interview for MPI’s Costa Rican migration report, a civil society representative “highlighted the need for the government to provide safe spaces in which migrants can access... information in clear, simple, and effective formats” (MPI 2021a). Depending on the migrant community in question, this engagement may be challenging due to language barriers, social isolation, or fear of authority. Other migrants, such as Venezuelan migrants in the LAC region, have been “largely absorbed... into local communities, and they are active participants in local labor markets and public institutions (rather than depending on international aid or lodging in refugee camps)” (MPI 2020a). However, interventions that rely on certain social networks may be less effective for migrant groups that are not integrated into the community. An evaluation of a program to improve immunization rates in India by providing incentives for caregivers, disseminating information through the community social network, and sending targeted reminders noted considerations applicable to migrant communities. The authors noted that “[specific] subgroups may need to be reached through targeted interventions: Incentives may not work for those who... experience geographic or economic or socio-demographic barriers such as migrant workers, daily wagers, and those belonging to certain religious communities” (Banerjee 2020). This study also reached people through phone numbers and noted migrants did not always have phones.

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ANNEX A: STRATEGIES FOR USAID: WORKING WITH MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS ON CLIMATE MIGRATION

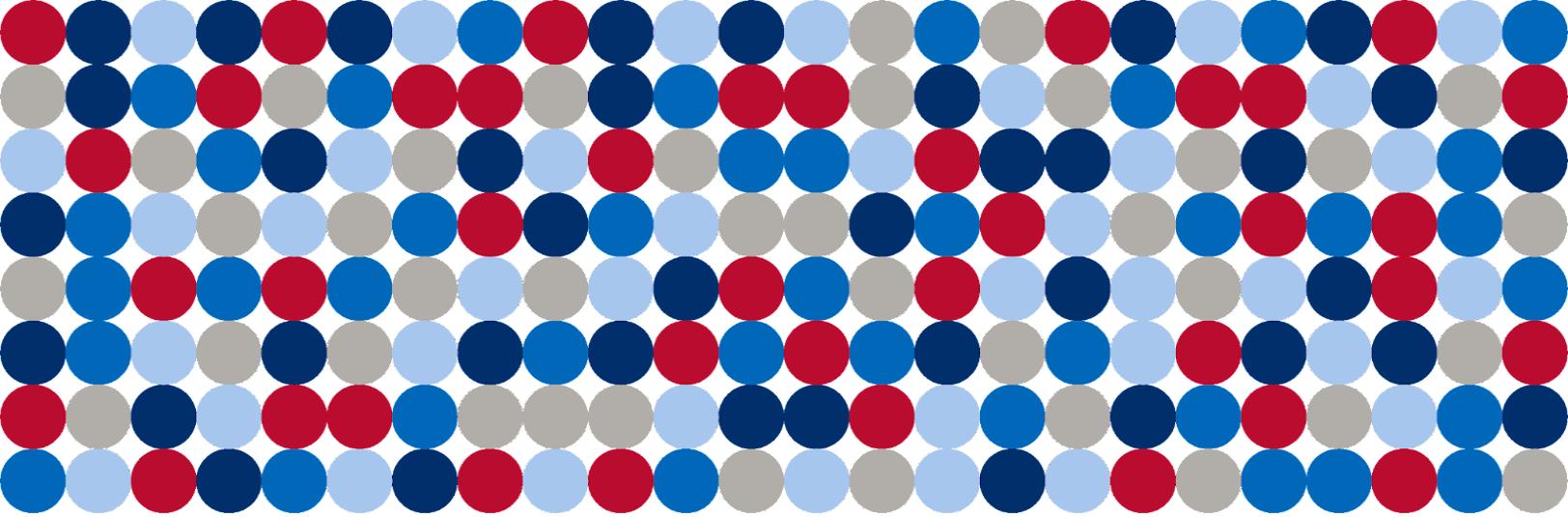
Needs and Weaknesses Specific to Climate Migration

A 2022 MPI report on the role of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) in climate migration responses outlines some key needs and weaknesses for the sector (MPI 2022):

- **More context-specific data and knowledge.** “Projects that link climate adaptation with migration and displacement need to be tailored to locally specific climate and migration conditions. MDBs, however, may not have colleagues based in the countries where they finance projects or may not provide them with the training, capacity, and analytics needed to fully understand local climate and migration dynamics and identify projects that target the nexus between the two. In addition, MDBs usually work with governments and central banks, whereas civil society organizations and local authorities that may better understand the localized links between climate change and migration usually struggle to access MDB financing. These local actors often lack both the credit ratings and the specialized expertise needed to propose bankable projects and take on loans. Their limited capacity to pitch projects also makes it more difficult to convince national governments to finance projects on climate migration.”
- **Limited national policy frameworks and political appetite.** National policies on climate displacement do not explicitly address cross-border migration, likely due to political reluctance to make migration policies. “In turn, this constrains MDB investments because these institutions can only develop projects that align with the development priorities and national policies in each country.” To support policy change, MDBs may use policy-based lending, which relies on blending investment loans with grants, which may not be available. “This approach can also face resistance from client governments unwilling to reform policies, especially on topics as sensitive as migration and displacement, and there is debate over whether MDBs should be leading policy development efforts.”
- **Lack of grant funding and financing.** As mentioned, grants are not always readily available through MDBs. “Grants and concessional loans, which have more generous terms than traditional investment loans, are often needed to encourage governments to implement projects for climate-displaced people, especially if they are foreigners... MDBs have long sought to ‘crowd in’ financing, creating profitable investment opportunities for private-sector investors, for instance by blending private investments with concessional MDB financing to cover risks. But these efforts to mobilize private investment, as well as attempts to engage donors and climate funds such as the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund, have not been effective across MDB activities in general, let alone specifically on climate migration.”
- **Undeveloped internal coordination and capacity within MDBs to work on climate migration.**

Examples of Potential Projects and Partnerships

- **Expand partnerships to increase funding opportunities.** “Partnerships between MDBs, the Green Climate Fund, and other climate financiers and with civil society and UN agencies with different sectoral expertise (including those with stronger humanitarian profiles) could allow MDBs to unlock further financing sources and contribute to systemic change. Some donors, particularly in Europe and North America, are increasingly active in this nexus, and MDBs with experience financing projects on climate migration may be well-positioned to engage these donors.”
- **Build or support access to infrastructure and housing for migrants.**
 - “In 2022, the Asian Development Bank approved a \$41.4 million grant to build water, sanitation, and health-care facilities in a district of Bangladesh that hosts large numbers of displaced persons from Myanmar.”
 - “The Inter-American Development Bank approved a \$11.3 million grant in March 2020 that, along with measures to support host communities, helps some 13,500 migrants in six Colombian cities access secure housing by subsidizing their rental payments for six months.”
- **Increase livelihood opportunities for migrants.** The report notes that such projects are “difficult to implement effectively (and rarely evaluated), so they are not widely replicated and targeted to cities hosting large and increasingly permanent populations of climate migrants. The fact that the implementation and impact of these projects largely depend on policy frameworks makes them reliant on political support and inappropriate for some contexts (e.g., since refugees may not have the right to work or to open bank accounts in receiving countries.” Examples include:
 - “The European Investment Bank’s 50 million euro Economic Resilient Initiative SME Guarantee Facility provides financial incentives for local and central banks in Jordan and Lebanon to offer loans to SMEs that hire migrants, refugees, and other vulnerable populations.”
 - “In Jordan, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has extended loans to microfunds for more than 6,000 refugee women—a particularly vulnerable group that is often excluded from the labor market—to encourage self-reliance and livelihood generation.”
- **Provide technical and financial assistance to develop project proposals.** “Help project staff make a convincing business case to potential clients about addressing climate migration” and increase the chance these projects will be funded.



U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20523
Tel: (202) 712-0000
Fax: (202) 216-3524
www.usaid.gov

