

URGENT ASSISTANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Positive aspects and challenges of the different options for the cash transfer and the delivering of food kits as humanitarian aid provision mechanisms during the outbreak



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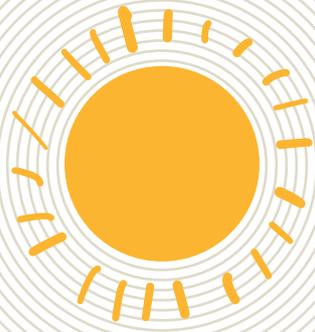
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1. INTRODUCTION

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Save the Children, in partnership with Action Against Hunger, CARE and World Vision, and thanks to the funding of Start Fund, implemented the project “Rapid response to the urgent unmet needs of the migrant and refugee population from Venezuela in the context of Covid-19”, with the purpose of providing a humanitarian response to Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Lima, a highly vulnerable population and one of the most affected by the pandemic, due to unemployment and confinement.

The project benefited 7,955 Venezuelan migrants and refugees who were in a highly vulnerable situation, from which 5,255 were assisted through cash transfers, and 2,700 people, through food kits. Fifty five percent of the population directly benefited by the project were women. Out of the 1,500 families who received the money transfer, 1,248 had women as heads of household. Additionally, by implementing a communications campaign aimed to prevent Covid-19, encouraging positive parenting, the healthy diet of children and pregnant women, and the prevention of gender-based violence, it was possible to reach a total of 33,316 people, making use of social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter.

On the other hand, due to the context in which the project was implemented, as well as the challenges, adaptations and innovations conducted to ensure the achievement of the objectives, the partner institutions made it their goal to systematize the experience and contribute to the strengthening of the action strategies and mechanisms during the delivering of

humanitarian assistance in the scenario of a pandemic and mandatory social lockdown. For this reason, the systematization of the project “Rapid response to the urgent unmet needs of the migrant and refugee population from Venezuela in the context of Covid-19” is defined as a process of critical interpretation of the conducted actions, with the purpose of generating significative knowledge and learning , that contributes to the creation of effective and innovative strategies regarding humanitarian response, related to implementation tools such as: i) the cash transfers; and ii) the delivering of food kits.





2. PURPOSE OF THE SYSTEMATIZATION:

To systematize the positive aspects and the challenges regarding the implementation of the cash transfers and the delivering of food kits, applied as humanitarian aid delivery mechanisms, in the framework of implementation of the project “Rapid response to the urgent unmet needs of the migrant and refugee population from Venezuela within the context of Covid-19”.



3. OBJECTIVE, AXES AND MAIN QUESTIONS:

The systematization objective is the implementation process of the cash transfers and the delivering of food kits, conducted on April 28 and on June 26 of 2020, in Lima, Peru, carried out by Save the Children, Action Against Hunger, CARE and World Vision.



The systematization axes are:



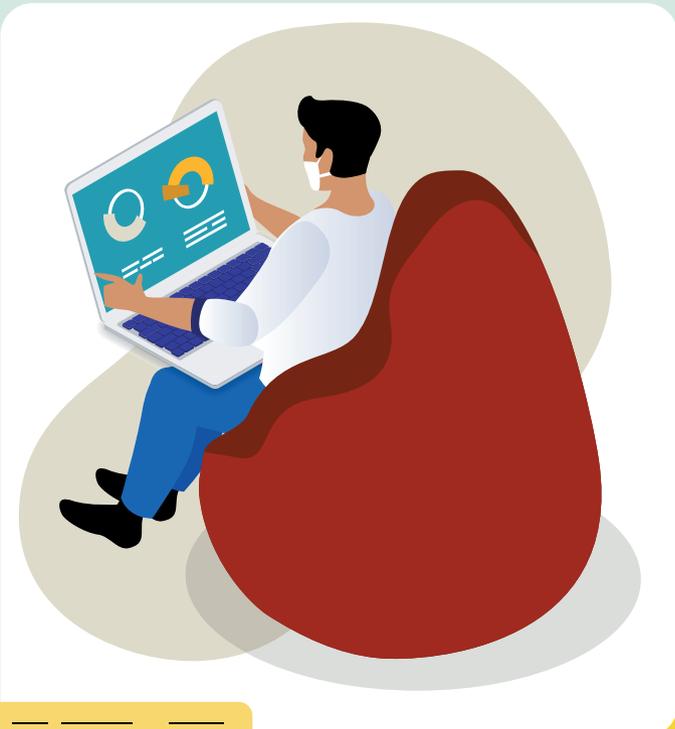
The effective strategies and/or the innovative solutions adapted to the context of Covid-19.



The coordination mechanisms and practices between partners.



The challenges and learned lessons identified throughout the implementation process.



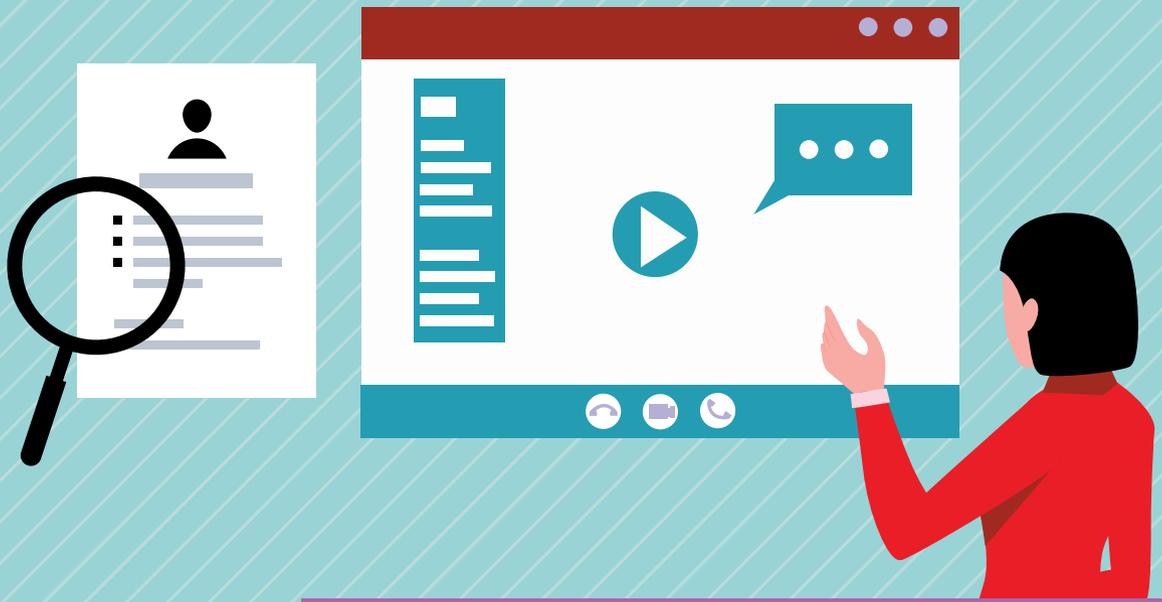
4. METHODOLOGY AND INFORMATION SOURCES:



The systematization methodology contemplated three key steps: (i) mapping of key people related to the implementation process of cash transfer and the delivering of food kits, carried out between April 28 and June 26 of 2020; (ii) reconstruction, regulation, classification and critical interpretation of the experience; and (iii) synthesis, drafting and feedback of the final report.

The main primary sources of information were individual and group interviews to the teams from the partner organizations, financial products providers, support networks, intervention allies and the beneficiaries of the intervention. As secondary sources were institutional project reports, institutional action protocols, the project document, post-distribution evaluation survey, communication products, virtual suggestion and complaint mailboxes, etc.





**5. MAIN
FINDINGS:**



Given the context of the pandemic due to Covid-19, various processes were modified in the presence of a necessity to move from a face-to-face implementation strategy to a virtual and remote process within 45 days , as well as in a national scenery with absolute mobilization restrictions for the partner institutions' personnel, beneficiaries, goods and service suppliers, public and private institutions in general, etc.

Hereunder, the main limitations and/or difficulties faced are described in general terms by various institutions during the implementation process of the project "Rapid response to the urgent unmet needs of the migrant and refugee population from Venezuela in the context of Covid-19". In turn, due to the reflection of experience, the consortium valued the relevance of incorporating these elements into the processes, mechanisms and strategies in emergency preparedness.



¹ It is worth noting that the total that the entire implementation of the project was 60 days, although most organizations were able to achieve the implementation within the planned 45 days.

MAIN LIMITATIONS AND DIFFICULTIES FACED DURING THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT “RAPID RESPONSE TO THE URGENT UNMET NEEDS OF THE MIGRANT AND REFUGEE POPULATION FROM VENEZUELA IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19”

Regarding the context and the institutional arrangements for the implementation of the project

- Adjustments on the organization and management mechanisms that would allow acting in a mandatory social lockdown scenario, based on the virtualization of all the programmatic, administrative, financial, and logistics operations.
- Arrangements on the coordination mechanisms and the institutional and interinstitutional organization that were carried out in parallel to the humanitarian response and the implementation of the Start Fund project.
- Limitations in the availability of some foods highly accepted by the beneficiary population, related to their cultural preferences, as well as the increase in costs from the suppliers.
- Mandatory social lockdown measures decreed by the National Government, that took place consecutively and didn't contemplate the action from the humanitarian aid institutions and its response during the pandemic.
- Limited supply, experience, and responsiveness from the financial sector in an emergency context for the provision of massive/group cash transfer services, aimed at the migrant and refugee population in a vulnerable situation.
- Social mobility restrictions that involved access restriction to the institutional operation centers, as well as restrictions for the allocation and/or distribution of equipment to the required personnel for the fulfillment of their functions related to the humanitarian aid response.
- Reviewing and adaptation of the processes for hiring goods and services suppliers, considering its limitations for the allocation of goods and services due to the effects from the pandemic, the mandatory social lockdown and the stagnation of economic activities in the country.
- Price volatility for the procurement of goods and services, as well as its quality; for example: communication services, purchase of food, procurement of phone chips, hiring of internet services, etc.

<p>Identification, access and communication with the beneficiaries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High mobility and rotation of the phone numbers of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, as well as reduced access to internet and/or mobile phones, due to the lack of economic resources to acquire them. • Lack of a standardized database and updated information of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in a highly vulnerable situation. • The need to go from a face-to-face assessment process and an ID validation to a digitalization and virtualization, guaranteeing the data security of migrants and refugees.
<p>Interinstitutional and institutional coordination mechanisms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties for the setting of institutional synchronic coordination for the rapid decision making and harmonization of the project implementation processes. • Limitations for the operative coordination and exchange of information and/or complementary necessities of the beneficiaries, due to the reduced implementation period of the project and the processes of readjustment and programmatic implementation of the institutions. • Physical adaptation process for remote working, as well as the harmonization of work activities in an emergency context with the care and domestic work at home, by the team members of each institution.



6. LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF THE MONEY TRANSFERS AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE FOOD KITS DURING COVID-19

6.1 Lessons learned regarding agency arrangements to implement Start Fund projects in the contexts of the pandemic and mandatory social lockdown:

Personnel assignment and/or hiring process

The identification of the team of professionals, within the organization's personnel and through the development process of the project, created favorable conditions to carry out the implementation process appropriately. Some key criteria for their preselection and later assignment to the project were their background knowledge and experience in: i) Start Fund projects; ii) cash transfer projects; iii) the operation of implementing agency; iv) assisting migrant and refugee population; v) full-time commitment, particularly for the tasks of project coordination, activation and/or assignment of payment methods, monitoring the payment process to beneficiaries, agency and inter-agency coordination, etc.

In the cases where there were no professionals who could be reassigned within the organization to implement the project, it was important to have an updated roster to hire specialized professionals with background experience in projects of the same kind, ensuring constant support to the management team associated with humanitarian aid, particularly during the start of the project.

Although some of the project teams were part of organizations with experience in remote work, the need arises to consider and/or take specific coordinating measures that provide harmonization of work activities, caregiving responsibilities, domestic work and (direct or indirect) impact on the personnel due to the pandemic. It is also important to assess the conditions of physical adjustment to remote work regarding issues such as Internet access, equipment and material conditions to carry out remote tasks, etc.



Agency coordination



Upon receiving the approval confirmation from Start Fund, it was essential to organize “project startup meetings” that involved different areas related to project activities, with the purpose of designating roles, responsibilities, conditions and strategies to ensure the centralization of project data, as well as a timely response capacity to the requirements for its implementation.



The coordination process with the logistics and communication areas became a key element of the process to ensure coordination and promptness in recruitment and procurement. To that end, it was relevant to review and update the databases and/or framework agreements with providers and/or consultants in order to assess their response capacity in the context of the pandemic and mandatory social lockdown. It was also necessary to establish faster and more simplified purchase and recruitment processes. It was important to coordinate and ensure prompt and simultaneous training for all project teams on the use of the CBI platform and Kobo to record and verify the data of beneficiaries.



6.2 Lessons learned regarding financial products to assist the migrant and refugee population in the contexts of the pandemic and mandatory social lockdown:

- In order to ensure the implementation of the project within the established period of time, it was essential to concentrate the response on the use of some financial products of the agencies under a framework agreement and/or have experience in inter-agency action. In this regard, it was crucial to take into account that: i) the financial product should be accessible, friendly and/or applicable to the migrant and refugee population, regardless of their regular and/or irregular status in the country; ii) a broad network of payment methods should be ensured in the areas where beneficiaries reside; iii) the volume of available cash in the network of payment methods should allow beneficiaries to collect it without having to go back a second time and/or look for another payment center.
- Having structured mechanisms and/or smooth interaction protocols with financial institutions facilitated a quick project implementation in processes such as: i) data verification and limitations in access to the financial system for beneficiaries; ii) payment difficulties at financial institutions; iii) access problems of beneficiaries to payment points; iv) cash availability in payment points, among others. In this regard, a focal point of the financial institution, as well as the implementing organization of the project, facilitated a quick response to centralize communication and solve unexpected situations and/or payment problems.



The processes of recruitment and implementation of financial tools carried out during the project's implementation revealed at least two points of improvement that require strengthening for the implementation of this kind humanitarian aid tools:



Ensure that the financial institution creates or receives friendly and easily accessible information for the personnel regarding the payment process of money transfers, especially about topics of humanitarian aid so as to prevent any kind of discrimination to migrants and refugees, avoid cases of xenophobia and ensure a prompt access for the beneficiaries of the project.



Explore advantages, disadvantages, and viability of different financial products available for money transfers to migrants and refugees in vulnerable situations, which include testing products in “normal” settings, as well as analyzing viable payment methods for people with irregular status and/or without any type of valid documentation in the country.



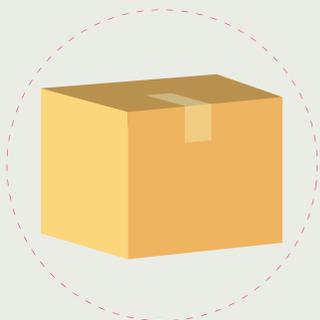
Assess the suitability of the recruitment processes with financial institutions in the context of emergency and with short-term projects such as those from Start Fund, with the goal of establishing contingency mechanisms and/or viable solutions during their implementation.



6.3 Lessons learned regarding the process of identification and communication with migrant and refugee population in the contexts of the pandemic and mandatory social lockdown:



- In order to respond quickly to the project's demands, it was essential to have a database of migrant and refugee populations in vulnerable situations with updated data gathered from previous interventions and/or those in coordination with allies. Where this was not the case, databases of allied organizations were used, in which the data was confirmed to be out-of-date or, in some instances, incomplete, delaying the process of creating a preliminary database of beneficiaries of the project.
- It was very important to develop a communication protocol based on key moments of interaction with beneficiaries, and have clear information on the steps to follow, schedule and means of communication. Additionally, adapting to the schedule availability of beneficiaries was crucial, as well as providing agency information and verification channels that would ensure the possibility to verify the information given via telephone.
- The number of contacts with the beneficiaries of the money transfers varies among institutions; however, four key moments were identified: i) initial contact to provide information about the institution and the project, inclusion criteria and contact details confirmation; ii) submission of survey to update information and the request of sustaining information; iii) the sending of information related to the collection of the cash transfer and communication material related to the collection process (tutorial for the collection at the financial entities, information about the location of the places of payment) and to the protection measures against Covid-19; and iv) the sending of post-distribution virtual evaluation, as well as the information of the media campaign.
- In case of distribution of food kits, each one of the beneficiaries received, a day before the distribution, key information about: i) the protection measures against Covid-19 during the moving and picking up of the food kits; ii) the weight and content characteristics, so that they could ask for someone else's assistance when picking it up; iii) timetables and forecasts



to avoid agglomerations and to guarantee discretion during the pick up. In turn, the beneficiaries were asked to carry backpacks or dark bags to help conceal the food kits they received from view, in order to avoid the agglomeration and demand of low-priority people when distributing the food kits.

- The bidirectional communication with the beneficiary population revealed the need to have complementary communication materials that could respond to their information needs, and/or timely referral to access it, regarding topics that directly affect life sustainability and protection in the contexts of the pandemic. For example, lists of official numbers in case of emergency; access to protection, health and education services for migrants and refugees with regular and/or irregular status; contact and protection centers in cases of violence against women and children; action mechanisms against potential cases of deportation; existing regulations concerning topics of eviction, access or maintenance of basic services; social and emotional support strategies for children and/or families in the context of social lockdown; hygiene and healthy and balanced diet practices for vulnerable people at home; interventions and/or services that could facilitate the recovery of livelihood, access to work, etc.
- For the beneficiaries, it was very important to receive friendly and clear information about how the cash transfer services of financial institutions work, as well as their location and characteristics. In this way, the project provided them with friendly communication material (tutorial for the collection at the financial entities, information about the location of the places of payment), which was socialized with all the beneficiaries. This information was randomly tested to ensure it was understandable.

This experience furthermore revealed the importance of:



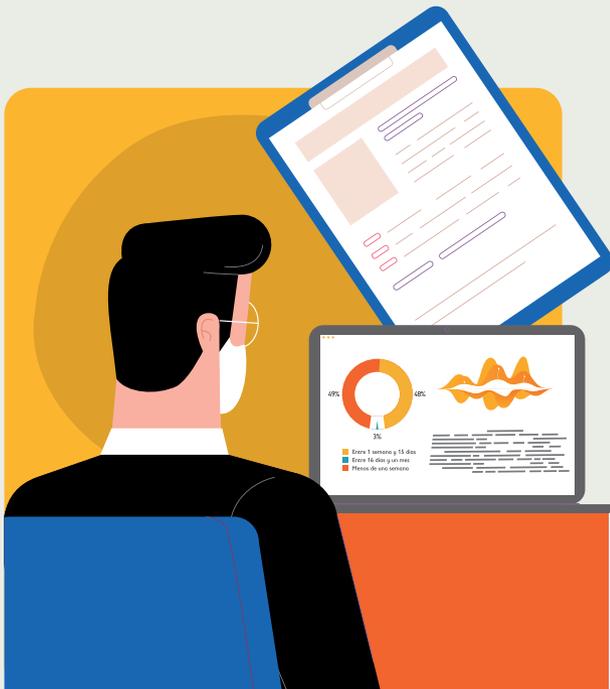
Establishing common criteria for data recording with allied organizations and/or support networks for migrants and refugees in order to have updated databases that also include areas with a higher level of vulnerability, with no access to organizations for migrants and refugees, mobile phones and/or Internet.



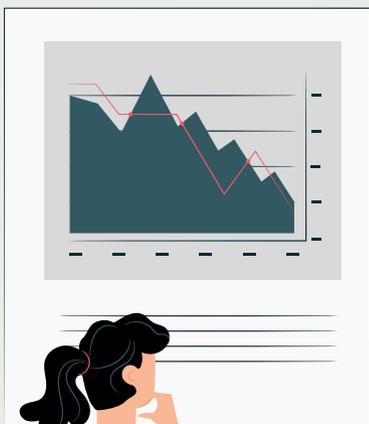
Maintain a smooth communication with the beneficiary population, particularly in the cases where payment difficulties occurred. This smooth communication also ensured a higher participation from the beneficiary population in the post-distribution survey.



To have complementary communication materials that could respond to their information needs, and/or timely referral to access it, regarding topics that directly affect life sustainability and protection in the contexts of the pandemic. For example, lists of official numbers in case of emergency; access to protection, health and education services for migrants and refugees with regular and/or irregular status; contact and protection centers in cases of violence against women and children; action mechanisms against potential cases of deportation; existing regulations concerning topics of eviction, access or maintenance of basic services; social and emotional support strategies for children and/or families in the context of social lockdown; hygiene and healthy and balanced diet practices for vulnerable people at home; interventions and/or services that could facilitate the recovery of livelihood, access to work, etc.



6.4 Lessons learned regarding response and interinstitutional mechanisms in the contexts of the pandemic and social lockdown



- From the beginning of the project, it was important to establish clear interinstitutional coordination mechanisms among project partners; this facilitated the distribution of roles and responsibilities, the identification of complementarity and non-duplicity points, and helped develop strategies for information exchange and/or coordination between specialists regarding key products or processes of the project, as was the case of the communications campaign. In this regard, it is important to ensure that the established agreements with the technical committee and work groups are promptly shared among all personnel in charge of carrying out the project's actions.
- There was a need to create standardized mechanisms and/or criteria for information recording and data protection of the migrant and refugee population, as well as filters, verification and validation mechanisms for inter-agency data. Strengthening non-duplicity verification mechanisms, both for implementing money transfers and distributing food kits, was also a pressing need.

This experience furthermore revealed the importance of:



Creating operational protocols that respond to remote implementation scenarios under mandatory social lockdown restrictions.



Adapting and / or integrating mechanisms of inter-institutional action that include the use of virtual tools (synchronous and asynchronous). It is also necessary to have access and to be able to verify, remotely, the update of the data of the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid projects, in order to guarantee their protection and reduce duplications, under coverages and leaks.



In case of food kits distributions, is necessary to ensure biosafety measures and conditions in order to set up and access distribution points, particularly for food kits, as well as biosafety protocols to promptly distribute equipment and protection materials for the project's personnel, volunteers and/or allies who participated in the response.



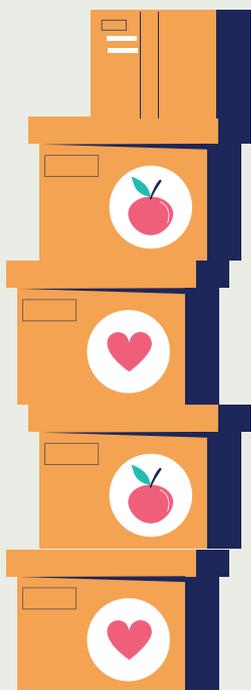


7. MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After gathering the positive aspects, lessons learned, and identifying the challenges faced to implement humanitarian aid tools (such as money transfers and distribution of food kits), the following recommendations are suggested for future interventions, everything available to do in emergency preparedness:



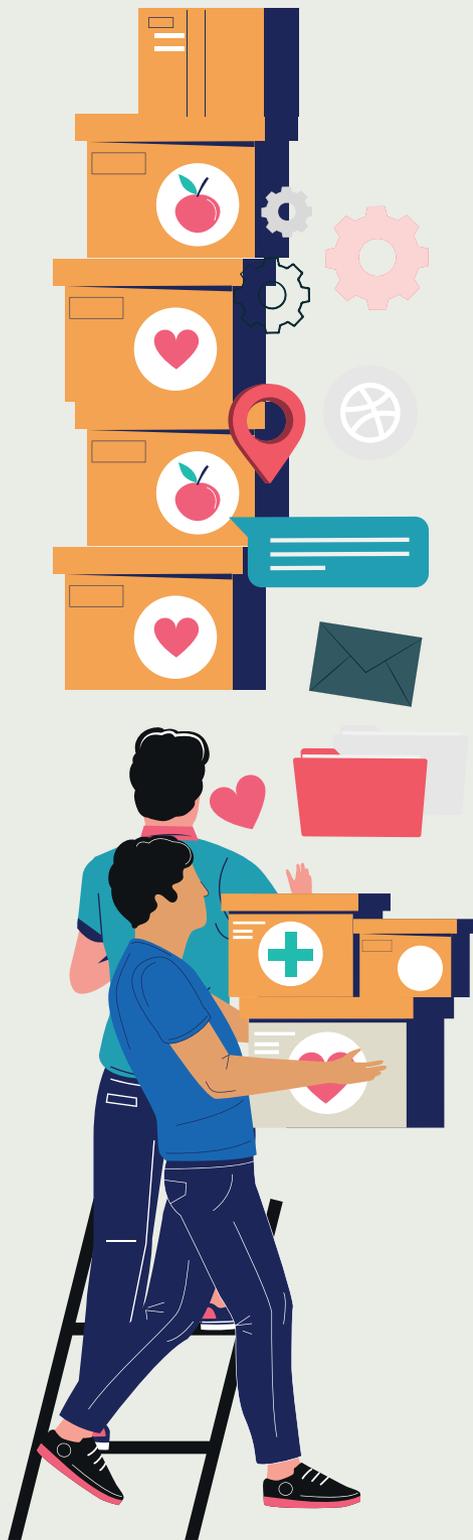
- Establish mechanisms for interinstitutional coordination and political impact on the nation, which would allow international cooperation organizations to respond immediately to emergencies and identify, locate and provide humanitarian aid to Venezuelan migrants and/or refugees in vulnerable situations in Peru.
- Analyze and feedback human resource policies and their adaptation to remote work in order to ensure mechanisms that consider the harmonization of work activities, caregiving responsibilities, domestic work and (direct or indirect) impact on the personnel in the context of the pandemic and mandatory social lockdown, as well as the wellbeing and mental health of teams directly related to assisting and communicating with migrant and refugee population.
- Update improve and/or strengthen inter-agency tools and/or mechanisms that support humanitarian aid actions, such as UNHCR's CBI platform, in order to respond to demands in the contexts of emergency such as those created by the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, create inter-agency platforms that allow remote access to updated information about projects in progress and/or the provision of relevant information or referral for the migrant and refugee population to get assistance and/or access to reliable and verified information.
- Establish standardized mechanisms to record, update, document and validate information of the Venezuelan migrant and refugee population in vulnerable situations, as well as common procedures to validate information that would reduce leaks and under-coverage when implementing humanitarian aid tools, such as money transfers and distribution of food kits.
- Strengthen groups and organizations for migrants and refugees, and provide them with protection conditions that allow them to effectively participate in responding to the emergency and implementing different humanitarian aid mechanisms.



- Ensure that the humanitarian aid tools, such as money transfers and/or food kits, take into account the information need on life sustainability for migrants; whether as part of the project and/or for timely referral on topics such as: access to protection services; health and education for migrants and refugees with regular and/or irregular status in the context of emergency; support channels and care and protection centers in cases of violence against women and children in the context of mandatory social lockdown; action mechanisms against potential cases of deportation in the context of emergency; existing regulations regarding eviction, access or maintenance of basic services; social and emotional support strategies for children and/or families in the context of social lockdown; hygiene and healthy and balanced diet practices for vulnerable people at home; interventions and/or services that may facilitate the recovery of livelihood for migrant and refugee population in vulnerable situations.



- Integrate strategies in work groups to gather evidence, exchange experiences and identify (cost-effective) financial tools that allow massive and prompt assistance to the migrant and refugee population in vulnerable situations. This includes identifying strengths and weaknesses in the finance sector, as well as exploring financial products that respond to vulnerability profiles of the migrant and refugee population in urban settings.
- Ensure mechanisms to collect input from women, teenagers, and girls in this kind of intervention, as well as their interests on how to participate in the implementation process of this kind of humanitarian aid tools. It is also important to ensure the collection of input from women, children, and teenagers in the accountability and assessment processes for the projects, with the purpose of drawing attention to their participation and the impact of these humanitarian aid tools on their lives.



- Given the importance of gender dimensions and involvement of women, teenagers and girls in all actions aimed at ensuring protection to families in the context of the pandemic, it is crucial to take their needs and interests into account when designing this kind of initiatives to establish inclusion criteria for beneficiaries, as well as security and accessibility measures for money transfers and/or distribution of food kits.
- Promote and influence the development of a strategy across sectors and agencies to facilitate dialogue and interaction between several public and private actors, regarding the assistance and procurement of humanitarian aid to Venezuelan migrants and refugees in vulnerable situations due to the effects of the pandemic, prioritizing coordination from the perspective of territory and the participation of key organizations and institutions such as the National Superintendence of Migrations, the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations, the Ministry of Labor, local and regional governments, organizations for migrants and refugees, churches, organizations for international cooperation and humanitarian aid.



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