PEOPLE ON THE MOVE – OXFAM IN COLOMBIA

ACCESS TO SAFER MIGRATION ROUTES AND PROTECTION MECHANISMS FOR MIGRANT WOMEN AND THEIR COMPANIONS

DIF 2019 CHALLENGE
INVITATION

This challenge brief serves as an open invitation for other organisations and institutions to join our development of a tool/ approach for safe and effective two-way communication to support people on the move (e.g. migrants, refugees, internally displaced people), especially women, to enhance their own safety and wellbeing. We invite you to share your knowledge, skills, expertise and (parts of) potential solutions. With your help we will write a project proposal for the DRA call for innovative proposals to increase safety and protection before, during and after humanitarian disasters. This challenge brief forms the basis of a shared innovation project.

CONTACT DETAILS

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

“How can we overcome barriers that exist for specific groups, such as people on the move and walking migrant women, to access services related to their safety and protection?”

CURRENT CHALLENGE

The mass movement of people around the world is arguably the biggest and most polarised issue of our time. According to IOM, approximately 258 million people lived outside their birth country in 2017 and estimates show that by 2050 this number will increase to 405 million. Whether people move as a result of persecution, conflict, climate change or economic inequality, migration can be an important positive coping mechanism to address existential threats. Yet more often than not migrants, especially women, experience deprivation and further violence on the move as they undertake the journey without being sufficiently aware of the risks they may face on the route. Many migrants are not able to identify trustworthy information on risks but also their rights that would enable them to protect themselves. Migrants in Colombia/ Venezuela and Europe are informing each other to some extent, but information is not necessarily accurate and can lead people to take greater risks because it is shared without a full understanding about the consequences in terms of their safety and wellbeing. In addition, the level of access to information (and technology) varies greatly between women and men, youth and the elderly as well as people with disabilities.

The challenge for Oxfam and the humanitarian sector is how to minimize barriers to self-protection strategies for people on the move, how to increase their access to trustworthy information on potential risks, their rights and tools for self-protection at an early stage in their migration cycle, and how to use appropriate technology to expand choices and participation for people on the move in contexts where access to Internet is limited.

Oxfam has experience supporting self-protection strategies of crisis-affected communities in camps and sedentary settings. However, facilitating access to protection for people on the move, especially before people move, has been much more challenging, especially within the confines of a humanitarian system resistant to change. Despite differences in geography and context, Oxfam faces this challenge in both the Venezuela and European migrant crises and will continue to face the challenge of protection for people on the move into the foreseeable future. There is therefore a need for innovative and adaptive migration management and response strategies to support people on the move for which the humanitarian sector is not currently equipped and outstripped in terms of capacity to do so.
**IMPACT GOAL**

We want to combine the traditional humanitarian system’s technical expertise on protection, rights and responsibilities with the adaptive self-protection techniques that migrants are already employing. This will contribute to more progressive, innovative and long-term migration management systems and more resilient migrant and host communities. A focus will be on strengthening protection mechanisms for women on the move and their companions who are the most vulnerable.

Protecting and safeguarding the lives of migrants is the expected impact of this intervention: 12,000 people on the move (mainly women, children, and people with disabilities) will apply self-protection measures to migrate in a safe and dignified way.

More specifically, we aim for an innovative approach or tool that will allow us to achieve the following two outcomes despite limited access to Internet and social media:

1. People on the move can actively design their own protection mechanisms because they have access to trustworthy information on risks and tools: Oxfam and its partners will build on existing spaces, networks and platforms that migrants use to allow people on the move to receive and exchange appropriate tools and information about risks, rights and protection mechanisms from people they trust before and while they migrate. Oxfam will bring its technical skills and tools for self-protection to these spaces. Based on this, people on the move can make an informed decision about migrating and develop self-protection mechanisms by themselves and for themselves.

2. Two-way communication to build a response that is driven by the priorities and experiences of people on the move: People on the move are able to communicate protection and safety needs to us and provide us with suggestions, questions and feedback to allow us to better adapt our response to support their positive coping mechanisms according to the needs of the migrants.

If people on the move cannot access these protection mechanisms, they will be exposed to increased risks of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, labour exploitation and involvement in armed conflict.

Different communities have different coping mechanisms and learning across communities migrating across different parts of the world can contribute to innovation. Learning from this specific innovation will facilitate the paradigm shift that is needed in the humanitarian system to work effectively with mobile populations in a context of protracted conflict and climate change, urbanisation and technological advances. This is why we aim to integrate a strong learning component bringing together the experience in Colombia/Venezuela and Europe.

We specifically look for a partner who can provide or support us in designing a tool/approach to help us establish a two-way communication with people on the move. Any approach, tool or system should consider that on the Venezuela - Colombia route there is no access to free Wi-Fi, very few migrants have cell phones and although they use social networks, during their transit they do not have access to them because they do not have cell phones or Internet.

**ASSUMPTIONS MADE**

We assume that although some migrants want to stay off the grid, they trust the formal humanitarian system and are willing to work with it to gain information about migratory routes and to stay in touch once arrived at their (temporary) destination. We also assume that positive self-protection mechanisms exist within the migrant population that the project can build on. Further, it is believed that migrants want us to support their initiatives which are often the most important and frontline ones.

We believe that it is possible to combine the traditional humanitarian system’s technical expertise on protection, rights and responsibilities with the adaptive self-protection techniques that migrants are already employing.
Oxfam assumes that there are enough common challenges and solutions to people on the move in Europe and Latin America to permit cross-fertilizing ideas and that Oxfam is able to adapt its ways of working to meet the needs of people on the move.

**RISKS IN PURSUING THIS CHALLENGE**

**CONTEXTUAL RISKS**

- Colombian National Government lacks political will to address plight of vulnerable Venezuelans in Colombia.
- Tensions and violence at the border due to delicate political situation in Venezuela and delivery of humanitarian aid from USA.
- Insecurity due to presence of (il)legal armed groups at main routes through which migrant women and their companions pass.
- Continued pushbacks into Turkey by Greek security forces.
- Repurcussions for migrants and/or their family left behind for participating in project and/or speaking out.
- Outbreak of xenophobia in host communities and manipulation of ‘fear of migrants’ by politicians for political gain.
- Politicisation of aid for people on the move by duty bearers and other external actors.

**ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL RISKS**

- Criminalisation by governments/shrinking civil society space for actors seeking to safeguard rights and dignity of migrants.
- Inability to find partners and staff with relevant expertise and connect with non-formal aid providers (diaspora).
- Funding constraints due to sensitivities associated with protection programming.

**INNOVATION RISKS**

- Risk of manipulation of information/ privacy loss associated with ICT (innovations).
- Lack of applicability of learnings from Europe to Latin America.
- Difficulties to conduct MEL due to mobility of concerned population.

**NEXT STEPS**

1. **Finding partners:** We are specifically looking for partners who can provide a tool to help us establish two-way communication with people on the move in a context of low connectivity. We invite interested partners to contact us via email to claudette.van.rijn@oxfamnovib.nl by Friday 10 May 2019 at 12:00 Dutch time.

2. **Horizon scanning:** We will review lessons learned from existing responses and initiatives (e.g. CuéntaNos, SignPost). If you are aware of potential solutions and lessons learned including from outside the formal humanitarian sector, please let us know by email (see contact details above).

3. **Research:** We will also aim to undertake a market assessment of services. This could include possible services and technologies available and risks associated with access as well as the different elements of access (financial, physical, social, cultural, etc.)

4. **Learning:** We want to establish an exchange of experiences and lessons learned between the Europe response and the Colombia-Venezuela response to cross-fertilize innovative ideas.