

Concept Note for Advocacy

Route-Based Programming in Response to Reverse Flows in Latin America and the Caribbean

A route in itself.



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**NOR
CAP**

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Their collective commitment reinforces our belief that interagency cooperation is essential to advancing more coordinated, effective, and dignified responses for people on the move.

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Summary

The increase in reverse flows in Latin America and the Caribbean calls for a rethinking of humanitarian assistance beyond national borders. Route-Based Programming (RBP), which focuses on people's actual journeys rather than borders, emerges as a strategic response to voluntary or forced returns characterized by high exposure to risks, service fragmentation, and declining funding. By aligning humanitarian intervention with key segments and Points of Interest (Pols), RBP offers flexibility, continuity, and interagency coordination, ensuring timely, tailored, and dignity-centered responses.

To fully leverage this potential, the advocacy agenda is structured around five key pillars:

1. **Highlight return as a regional phenomenon:** Ensure donors and coordination mechanisms allocate specific resources to reverse flow routes.
2. **Strengthen cross-border protection:** Implement systematic risk monitoring at high-transit Pols.
3. **Maximize efficiency through RBP:** By concentrating resources and coordination at priority Pols, unnecessary transfers and duplicated interventions are eliminated, significantly reducing logistical costs.
4. **Ensure shared state responsibility:** Promote coordination and cooperation among states to guarantee that return processes comply with human rights standards, are implemented only when necessary, ensure due process, uphold the principle of non-refoulement, and prevent chain deportations.
5. **Drive innovation with traceability:** Fund digital cash transfers and tracking systems that enhance autonomy, reduce operational costs, and improve accountability

The added value of RBP lies in transforming operational challenges into strategic opportunities: it prioritizes Pols with the greatest needs, integrates rights-based multisectoral responses, and generates traceable evidence to support stronger advocacy. In an environment of limited resources and growing risks, especially for women, children, and LGBTIQ+ individuals. RBP redefines the “where,” “how,” and “with whom” we work to ensure protection, efficiency, and dignity throughout the routes of reverse flows.

Call to Action: Scaling Up Route-Based Programming

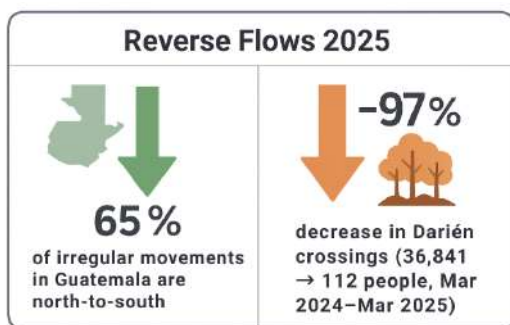
These advocacy notes provide a general framework to:

- Describe the current context (2025)
- Avoid the invisibilization of new transit flows
- Position RBP as a mechanism that ensures protection, efficiency, and dignity in contexts of return and reverse flows.

Target audiences include donors, states, interagency coordination mechanisms, UN agencies, and the private sector.

Advocacy Pillars:

1. **Recognize return as a structural phenomenon:** Return is not marginal, it already accounts for two-thirds of movements in certain corridors.



Proposed Indicator:

Donors and coordination bodies acknowledge reverse flows and allocate budget for return routes

2. **Protect people in reverse flows:** Risks along these routes are equivalent to or greater than those of the outbound journey and require cross-border safeguard.

Risks and Health 2024–2025



Proposed Indicator:

Risk monitoring is conducted at major transit Pols.

3. **Maximize efficiency:** Concentrating resources and coordination at priority Pols eliminates unnecessary transfers and duplicated interventions, drastically cutting logistical costs.

RBP Approach – Operational Efficiency

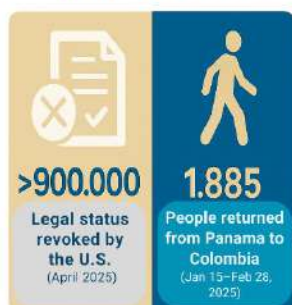


Proposed Indicator:

A dedicated RBP fund is capitalized

4. **Shared responsibility in returns and deportations:** States must ensure that all return procedures are voluntary whenever possible, and always safe, dignified, and compliant with international human rights law, thus avoiding chain deportations.

Migration and Returns 2025



Proposed Indicator:

States uphold the principle of non-refoulement through¹:

- Adoption of aligned regulatory frameworks
- Independent monitoring
- Prevention of chain deportations
- Sustainable reintegration plans

5. **Innovation with traceability (CVA + digital systems):** Cash and Voucher assistance combined with traceability systems ensures dignity and autonomy for people, enhances efficiency, reduces operational costs, and strengthens transparency, accountability, and protection.

¹ The principle of non-refoulement finds its direct legal basis in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Geneva Convention) and, by extension, in its 1967 Protocol, which extended this obligation to all refugees regardless of the date or region of their displacement. Source: https://www.acnur.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Convencion_1951.pdf

**Cash-Based Assistance
and Traceability Systems**



Dignity and
autonomy of
individuals



Efficiency
and reduced
operational
costs



Transparency,
accountability,
and protection
through
traceability

Proposed Indicator:

Donors and the private sector fund traceable digital cash transfer initiatives along reverse flow routes.

Background on RBP

In 2023, the conceptual and operational framework of RBP was developed based on consultations with key stakeholders, field assessments, and identification of needs, institutional capacities, protection risks, and political realities influencing human mobility in the region.

By 2024, the following milestones were achieved:

1. **Feasibility** assessments conducted along critical routes in Northern Central America and Southern Mexico, allowing the characterization of Points of Interest (Polis) and testing of a specific route analysis tool ([link](#))
2. **Technical discussions** among evaluation teams, refining the operational definition of RBP and validating common methodologies.
3. **A regional workshop held in Panama (December 2024)**, with **participation from 17 organizations** in the sectors of protection, CVA, health, and coordination. The event facilitated the sharing of lessons learned and the definition of next steps ([link](#)).

One key action identified by stakeholders was to promote political advocacy, programmatic innovation, and systematic documentation of impacts to ensure more adapted, flexible, and coordinated assistance, centered on dignity and protection for people on the move.



"Programming with a Route Perspective" Workshop, December 10–11, 2024, Panama.

In the region, initiatives such as the **"Routes of Hope"** pilot by World Vision and CALP have demonstrated that Route-Based Programming (RBP) enhances the relevance and continuity of assistance across multiple countries. Through digital cash transfers linked to a WhatsApp chatbot and a prepaid card operable in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, the project supported 80 families (292 individuals) highly exposed to protection risks, reduced homelessness by over 60%, and promoted autonomy in the flexible use of funds. Cross-border coordination, case management from origin to destination, and information traceability validated RBP as a key tool to identify early risks, prevent re-victimization, and maintain a secure and timely data flow that strengthens accountability.

For its part, ZOA implemented the RBP approach in Colombia using multisectoral electronic vouchers distributed along 2,600 km of migration routes through 14 service points and a network of over 80 partner merchants. Between 2022 and 2025, the program assisted 50,196 people in transit, with an identification-to-delivery process of less than one hour and biometric controls that enhanced security and minimized fraud. Beneficiaries allocated 57% of the vouchers to transportation, the most significant factor in risk reduction, and reported satisfaction levels above 95%. These experiences, complemented by UNICEF's service packages, Save the Children's educational route, and Médecins du Monde's health response, underscore the added value of RBP in integrating actors, harmonizing quality standards, ensuring traceability, and proving that well-designed cash transfers do not incentivize migration but instead protect and uphold the dignity of people on the move.

Context²

Panama has officially declared the operational "closure" of the Darién Gap after a dramatic decrease in northbound crossings, from 36,841 individuals in March 2024 to just 112 in March 2025 (a 97–98% decrease). As a result, the country shut down its main humanitarian reception centers. In February 2025, only 408 people were recorded heading north via this route, the lowest number since 2020. Concurrently, IOM reported that 65% of individuals tracked in Guatemalan routes were now traveling southbound, heading to Colombia, Venezuela, or seeking asylum within the region. Colombia confirmed the arrival of 1,885 migrants (84 daily) from Panama between January 15 and February 28, 2025. A study by the Mixed Migration Centre and ProLAC found that two-thirds (67%) of respondents were returning due to the perception that northward migration was no longer viable, while one-third (34%) cited fear of deportation upon completing their journey.

The region is thus experiencing a sustained increase in return flows, both voluntary and forced (deportations).

Main cause:

- Changes in U.S. immigration policy under Donald Trump's second term, including mass deportations, termination of protection programs like TPS³ and DACA⁴, Changes in U.S. immigration policy under Donald Trump's second term, including mass deportations, termination of protection programs like TPS and DACA, shutdown of CBP One, and increased border militarization.
- Insecurity, violence, and discrimination in transit countries such as Mexico and Central America, prompting many refugees and migrants to abandon northward journeys.
- Panama's phased closure of migration centers like Bajo Chiquito and Canaan Membrillo, after nearly a decade of collaboration with international organizations.
- Ongoing humanitarian crises in countries of origin, leading to increasingly dangerous and complex displacement patterns.
- Failed integration or fatigue in host countries, triggering secondary migration flows from South American host nations⁵.

² The main reverse flow routes are described in detail in the chapter Reverse Flow.

³ Created in 1990, TPS (Temporary Protected Status) is a temporary immigration status granted to eligible nationals of designated countries. The program aims to protect individuals from deportation and allow them to live and work legally in the United States while their countries of origin recover from crises.

Source: HIAS.

⁴ DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, introduced in 2012 by the Obama administration, temporarily protects undocumented individuals brought to the United States as children from deportation and grants them work authorization based on specific criteria, such as continuous residence in the U.S. and no felony convictions. Source: Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition.

⁵ Haitian migration from the Southern Cone is explained, among other reasons, by lack of employment, insecurity, political crisis, and racism. Uribe Salas, F. J., Núñez Medina, G., & Parra Ávila, J. (2024). La migración haitiana desde Sudamérica hacia Estados Unidos. El caso de ciudad Acuña-Del Rio en la frontera Coahuila-Texas. *Ciencia Y Sociedad*, 49(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.22206/ciso.2024.v49i1.2990>.

In April 2025, the Trump administration revoked legal status for over 900,000 migrants who entered the U.S. via CBP One, including the cancellation of TPS for hundreds of thousands from Venezuela, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Cuba, pushing many into high-risk return routes.

Reverse flows present high humanitarian risks, particularly along maritime stretches, jungles, and areas with armed groups. These dangers persist despite the decline in northbound flows. In 2024, at least 174 people died crossing the Darién, and 522 perished in route to the northern Mexican border. In Mexico City, Médicos Sin Fronteras reported a 36% increase in mental health consultations in early 2025, linked to trauma, anxiety, and depression from transit and containment.

Vulnerable profiles are on the rise: women, children, LGBTIQ+ individuals, persons with disabilities, and those lacking resources.

Reverse Flows⁶:



Reverse flows are North–South human mobility movements that reuse established transit corridors. These flows are triggered by changes in migration management policies and protection failures at both destination and transit points. They differ from classic “return” movements as they occur while in transit, often under irregular conditions, and present risks equal to or greater than those of the original journey.

Some of the main routes include:

- **From Mexico to Central and South America**
 - México → Guatemala → Honduras / El Salvador / Nicaragua / Costa Rica → Panamá → Colombia → Venezuela
 - Includes deportations or spontaneous returns from Mexican migration stations.
 - Used by refugees and migrants expelled from the U.S. or choosing to return due to insecurity or lack of opportunities in transit.
- **From Costa Rica to Panama and Colombia**
 - Costa Rica → Paso Canoas → Darién (Panamá) → Colombia (Urabá)
 - Route used by people deported from the U.S. or Mexico and released in Costa Rica without clear options.
 - Includes refugees and migrants seeking to return to South America or attempt alternate routes.

⁶ Routes identified in situation reports and various press articles published between January and March 2025.

- From Panama to Colombia via the Caribbean
 - Panamá (Miramar, Guna Yala) → Puerto Obaldía → Capurganá / Acandí (Colombia) → Necoclí → Urabá → Venezuela / Ecuador / Perú
 - A maritime route is increasingly used for return, despite being extremely dangerous (shipwrecks, trafficking, scams).
 - Favored by those lacking funds or documentation to return through formal channels⁷.



Source: Situation Alert February 2025. Protection Monitoring: Return Movements in Urabá, Colombia. NRC.

Points of Interest (Pols) are strategic locations along migration routes where people on the move face significant risks, critical humanitarian needs, or key moments in their journey—such as route changes, waiting periods, border crossings, or decision-making points. These sites are selected based on their humanitarian relevance, operational feasibility, and/or institutional acceptance, and serve as essential nodes for the coordinated delivery of humanitarian assistance, protection, and other multisectoral interventions.

In the context of **reverse or return flows**, these points may include transit stations, maritime embarkation/disembarkation sites, border areas, community shelters, or informal locations with high concentrations of returning individuals.

⁷ Press release on maritime crossing. <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/cruzaaron-el-darien-para-llegar-a-eeuu-pero-ahora-regresan-en-barco-a-sus-paises/7988853.html>

- **From Colombia to Venezuela or other Southern countries⁸**
 - **Colombia (Necoclí, Medellín, Bogotá) → Cúcuta → Venezuela**
 - Assisted or spontaneous returns to Venezuela.
 - **Colombia → Ecuador / Perú / Bolivia**
 - Southward reorientation after failed attempts to head north, often in search of family networks or new opportunities.

These routes reuse existing corridors and are characterized by high levels of humanitarian risk, especially in maritime segments, jungles, and areas controlled by armed groups.

Challenges in Humanitarian Response

The current context in Latin America and the Caribbean is marked by a rapid increase in reverse flows, significant cuts in humanitarian funding, and the expansion of anti-migration policies that are forcing the closure of key projects. This combination exacerbates existing structural challenges in the region's humanitarian sector, limiting response capacity, disrupting continuity of care, and leaving people in reverse flows or returning highly exposed to risks equal to or greater than those faced during their original journey.

In this scenario, humanitarian advocacy is more necessary than ever. It is crucial to make reverse flows visible as a structural reality, to defend resources and protection guarantees, and to coordinate actions along North–South migration corridors.

The main challenges requiring urgent attention include:

- **Funding cuts** and the urgent need for prioritization and efficiency.
- **Fragmented responses**, with no continuity of care along the return journey.
- **Lack of visibility of return** as a regional structural phenomenon.
- Weak coordination among actors at Points of Interest (Polis).
- Lack of reliable, up-to-date information and specific protection mechanisms.

The implementation of “chain deportations” through non-transparent bilateral agreements between the U.S. and countries in the region—such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama—has increased the number of people being deported without adequate protection guarantees. These practices generate disorderly reverse migration flows, marked by high risks and lack of access to basic rights during return journeys.

⁸ According to recent data from Migración Colombia, between January and February 2025, migration flows of Venezuelan nationals returning from Mexico, Panama, and the United States increased by more than 60% compared to the same period in 2024. Two main modalities have been identified: entry through airports and irregular maritime returns to Capurganá, Chocó. This new dynamic poses significant challenges to migration control systems and humanitarian assistance efforts.

Observatorio de Migraciones, Migrants and Human Mobility. Monitoring of Migration Dynamics. Report on Reverse Migration Flows. <https://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/publicaciones-migracion-colombia/informe-sobre-flujos-inversos-de-migrantes-venezolanas-170740>

The Importance of Route-Based Programming in the Context of Reverse Flow.

Route-Based Programming (RBP) responds to non-linear, cross-border dynamics. By following people's actual trajectories, RBP helps avoid gaps or duplications in assistance, improves continuity in protection, and reduces operational costs by focusing on high-impact Points of Interest (Pols). This makes it the most suitable approach for addressing current reverse flows, which are characterized by rapid returns, ad hoc routes, and increasing restrictions at both destination and transit points.

What Does Route-Based Programming (RBP) Offer?

An approach that transforms constraints into operational and strategic opportunities.

Operational Relevance:

- **Aligns assistance** with actual, including emerging, routes.
- Improves continuity of care, avoiding service gaps or duplications.

Adaptability and Efficiency:

- Enables **flexible and mobile** interventions adapted to changing contexts and political constraints.
- **Maximizes resource** use by focusing on high-impact Pols.

Protection and Rights:

- Makes differentiated needs visible and addresses them, especially for vulnerable individuals.
- Integrates referral systems and data protection mechanisms.

Advocacy and Sustainability:

- Generates clear evidence on needs and solutions.
- Strengthens the regional humanitarian narrative in the face of restrictive or limiting discourses that hinder humanitarian action.

Opportunities and Priority Actions

Opportunities	Priority Action
Mapping and validation of reverse flows	Develop a georeferenced and consensus-based map of Pols across three key corridors (Central America, Costa Rica–Colombia, Andean region).
Multisectoral RBP pilot projects	Promote pilot projects at prioritized Pols; each will assess cost per beneficiary versus traditional (static) programs.
Donor and state mobilization	Promote a common agenda based on routes, with criteria focused on impact, efficiency, and protection.
Strengthening local capacities	Train local actors (civil society organizations, municipalities, private sector) in RBP tools.

These actions align with the Route-Based Programming work plan for the 2025–2026 period, developed under the deployment of the Route Advisor. The full work plan can be reviewed at the following [link](#).

Successful Experiences in the Region

Various initiatives in Latin America have integrated the Route-Based Programming (RBP) approach, demonstrating its value from the identification of needs to the implementation of coordinated responses. The following experiences, developed in Colombia and Ecuador, show how this approach can enhance the relevance, efficiency, impact, coordination, and continuity of humanitarian assistance along migration routes.

Dignified Mobility, Secure Stabilization: Analytical Study of the "Routes of Hope" Project

World Vision Pilot Project

Migration patterns in the Americas have shifted, showing increasingly diverse flows and heightened vulnerabilities, accompanied by a diminished capacity for mobility. People on the move face numerous protection risks, and cash transfers have become a key strategy to support mobile populations and promote dignified stabilization.

The "Routes of Hope" project is a pilot initiative jointly developed by World Vision and the CALP Network, designed with a route-based and person-centered approach. Its objective

was to “Provide route-based assistance to migrant populations in transit, ensuring their protection and access to basic needs across Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.” In total, the project supported 80 families comprising 292 individuals in transit between Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, with some heading toward Venezuela. A total of USD 33,693 was distributed.

All selected families faced protection risks or had been victims of related incidents. Of these, 89% migrated for socioeconomic integration, 7% for voluntary repatriation, and 2% for family reunification. No assistance was provided to families traveling toward North America. It is worth noting that 82% of the households had children under five years old.

Assistance was provided through a prepaid card issued by AAvance, a financial service provider offering solutions for individuals lacking proper documentation.

The project used a WhatsApp chatbot as a communication channel to share large-scale information, prevent loss of contact during transit, provide personalized guidance on card usage, and facilitate referrals to other services. Partnerships were established to refer participants to services such as health care, education, and protection mechanisms in both transit and destination countries.

Main Results

For participating families:

1. **Flexibility and contextual adaptation:** The project demonstrated a high level of adaptability, responding effectively to changing environments and addressing identified risks in a timely manner. Cross-border legal coordination was key to ensuring continued support across countries.
2. **Autonomy and decision-making:** The project promoted participant autonomy, allowing them to prioritize their own needs through flexible use of the funds.
3. **Impact on living conditions:** A significant reduction of over 60% in homelessness was achieved among beneficiary families.
4. **Diverse and strategic use of funds:** 97% of the funds were used for food, 27% for shelter, among other categories, reflecting a response tailored to actual needs.
5. **Route-based approach:** The project successfully implemented a route-based model instead of limiting assistance to specific countries, enabling fair and timely support across all contexts.
6. **Early identification of protection risks:** Case management as a central tool facilitated the identification of protection risks from the beginning of the assistance process.
7. **Protection and prevention measures:** Revictimization risks were minimized, such as repeated procedures and exposure to exploitation upon arrival in new destinations. The prepaid card, which allowed purchases or cash withdrawals at any time, was key to ensuring safety and autonomy in high-vulnerability contexts.
8. **Child protection and informed decision-making:** The information provided through the project influenced families’ mobility decisions, helping them avoid routes or processes that could jeopardize children’s well-being.

For Coordination Efforts:

1. **Transnational approach and interagency coordination:** A transnational working model was adopted, which facilitated communication among teams in the three countries and coordination with other key actors.
2. **Commitment and leadership:** Leadership teams in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru demonstrated a high level of commitment, tackling the unique challenges of a project of this nature.
3. **Effective internal communication:** Internal communication channels were effective, enabling flexible coordination and timely responses to changing contexts.
4. **Workload management:** One of the main challenges was the heavy workload faced by some staff members, who had to manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously.
5. **Attention to special cases:** Successful coordination was achieved in providing additional support to cases requiring specific assistance, ensuring tailored responses.
6. **Digital tools for data management:** A digitized eligibility tool was implemented through KoboToolbox, allowing for secure and efficient participant data management.
7. **Technological innovation for protection:** The use of a WhatsApp chatbot as a channel for communication, guidance, and referrals was a key innovation in the project's protection strategy.

For the Financial Service Provider:

1. Participant autonomy and control
2. Financial inclusion for vulnerable populations
3. Responsiveness and innovation
4. Incident management
5. Product alignment with project approach
6. Monitoring and traceability
7. Support tools for financial inclusion.

Recommendations

For route-based assistance programs:

1. **Flexibility is key:** Assistance to people in transit must be adaptable. Project designs should balance the legal frameworks of different countries with participants' needs.
2. **Collaborate with others:** Cash transfers should be paired with access to complementary services such as health care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and housing to ensure holistic stabilization.
3. **Select appropriate financial service providers:** Provider selection is crucial to project success. Providers should offer service points along the route and reliable support to enhance participant experience.
4. **Promote social integration:** Combat discrimination and xenophobia by fostering inclusive and respectful service provision experiences for mobile populations.

5. **Provide psychosocial support:** Ongoing guidance during transit is vital to reduce stress and insecurity. This support strengthens informed and safe decision-making, especially in high-risk contexts.
6. **Scale up the transnational model:** Expand this successful approach to other human mobility contexts in Latin America, adapting it to local realities and promoting regional coordination to maximize impact.
7. **Address data management risks:** Protect the personal data of mobile populations by ensuring compliance with legal frameworks in all countries.

For World Vision teams:

1. **Clarify selection criteria and use of funds:** Provide families with clear guidance on selection criteria and card use in case of loss or theft to improve understanding and access to assistance.
2. **Mitigate internal delays:** Coordinate internally to prevent delays in fund access for participants under stress. Delays in card activation and withdrawals caused frustration among some participants and affected the overall perception of the project.
3. **Strengthen financial literacy training:** Improve participants' familiarity with digital and financial tools through accessible educational resources.
4. **Optimize chatbot support:** Maintain and enhance chatbot functionalities by incorporating detailed responses and flexible solutions for issues such as phone loss or theft.
5. **Conduct impact evaluations:** Assess the medium- and long-term impact of the pilot project to better understand its outcomes and scaling potential.
6. **Include protection protocols for critical incidents:** Establish clear action paths in case a participant reports violence, trafficking, family separation, or any other risk situation during transit.
7. **Continuously monitor protection risks:** Integrate feedback mechanisms to identify whether participants face new risks along the route.
8. **Review the SOP developed for the pilot and integrate a referral protocol:** Ensure that referral protocols are embedded at all project touchpoints, including the chatbot and registration process, to guarantee rapid and safe responses to risk situations.

To explore the methodology, indicators, results, and lessons learned from the "Routes of Hope" pilot in greater depth, please refer to the full report at the following [link](#). The document demonstrates how assistance and regional coordination models can be advanced to effectively support mobile population.

The Use of Multisectoral E-Vouchers to Reduce Protection Risks for People in Transit in Colombia.

Needs vary greatly among people on the move, making them almost unique to everyone. Migrants and refugees are difficult to locate and assist at a fixed point due to their high mobility, they move in different directions, use various routes, and change plans quickly. In response, since 2022, ZOA has implemented an innovative humanitarian assistance model

in Colombia for migrants in transit, based on multisectoral electronic vouchers (e-vouchers). These are delivered quickly and securely through a digital system that allows beneficiaries to meet priority needs such as transportation, food, hygiene, and shelter. The strategy operates along more than 2,600 km of migration routes through 14 service points and a network of over 80 local commercial partners. The main goal is to reduce protection risks during migration, respect the mobility rhythms of people on foot, and promote their dignity.

This is ***an innovative, flexible, and adaptive model, combined with a user-friendly and rapid assistance mechanism that also strengthens the local economy.*** The multisectoral e-vouchers provided along the routes offer access to emergency support through an integrated response that aims to protect migrants and refugees in transit through Colombia. It is a safe, dignified, and comprehensive solution across the 2,600 km of migration routes in the country, allowing people to prioritize their own needs.

The project targets refugees and migrants in transit through Colombia, especially Venezuelans traveling on foot due to lack of resources. It includes pregnant women, people with disabilities, unaccompanied children, older adults, and single men—all facing high protection risks. Unaccompanied minors and individuals whose declared destination is the Darién Gap are excluded due to the high risks associated with that route. Beneficiaries must present some form of identification (original or copy) and undergo verification of their support network at their intended destination.

Between September 2022 and February 2025, **the program benefited 50,196 people**, including more than 6,000 pregnant or breastfeeding women and individuals with disabilities. **Over USD 2.9 million in e-vouchers were distributed**, with the majority spent on transportation (57%), followed by clothing (15%), food (16%), medicine (5%), and baby items (4%). A total of 98% of beneficiaries used part of their voucher for transportation. Satisfaction levels were very high: 67% reported being “very satisfied” and 33% “satisfied.”

Key Lessons Learned:

- **Speed is essential:** Migrants and refugees prefer to continue their journey rather than wait for assistance. Therefore, the process from identification to voucher delivery is limited to 45–60 minutes.
- **Safe and flexible modality:** E-vouchers provide autonomy and dignity without the risks associated with cash. The use of biometric verification enhances participant security and helps mitigate risks such as fraud and human trafficking. The ability to define voucher amounts and select among various merchants based on priority needs—drawing on all collected data—ensures modality acceptability and flexibility in assistance.
- **Access to transportation and shelter is fundamental:** Transportation reduces more risks than any other type of assistance. Including free lodging as part of the voucher increased its use.
- **Reduction of xenophobia and support for host communities and transit areas:** By generating income for local businesses, the perception of migration improves, dignifying the profile of these individuals. Partner merchants take ownership of their role in humanitarian response.

- Coordination with other actors: The referral system and partnerships with organizations strengthen an integrated response and a “safe arrival” approach, while easing pressure on host communities.
- Digitalization as an advantage: It allows real-time monitoring, immediate identification of fraud or misuse of the project, enhances transparency, and facilitates evidence-based decision-making.

For more programmatic details, please refer to **the ZOA Good Practices Report: The Use of Multisectoral E-Vouchers to Reduce Protection Risks for People in Transit in Colombia** ([here](#)). or general project data for 2023–2024, please consult the [Dashboard](#).

Experiences Shared at the “Programming with a Route Perspective” Workshop

During the workshop held in Panama City in December 2024, four organizations shared their experiences working with people on the move using a route-based approach⁹.

1. They presented four key dilemmas to foster joint solutions:
2. Seeking complementarity among actors
3. Ensuring traceability of assisted individuals
4. Demonstrating that cash transfers do not lead to increased migration
5. Standardizing the quality of assistance

The experiences shared were:

- UNICEF’s minimum humanitarian service package for children on the move
- Save the Children’s educational route
- Médecins du Monde’s health services tailored to the needs of populations in mixed migration flows
- World Vision’s Routes of Hope.

A visual summary of the four experiences is presented below:

⁹ The presentations of the four experiences shared during the Panama Workshop can be found at the following [link](#)



Conclusion

Route-Based Programming (RBP) demonstrates that it is possible to ensure protection, efficiency, and dignity in reverse flows when assistance is anchored in the actual segments and points of mobility, not in borders. The evidence presented through successful experiences, from a more than 60% reduction in homelessness in the “Routes of Hope” pilot to the coverage of over 50,000 people with e-vouchers in Colombia, confirms that transnational approaches, cash assistance, and coordination at Points of Interest (Pols) produce tangible and measurable results.

Therefore, RBP represents a strategic opportunity to redefine how, where, and with whom we work to protect lives on the move amid current conditions and uncertain future scenarios.

Call to Action

- **Recognize return as a structural phenomenon:** We call on donors and coordination mechanisms to allocate specific budgets for reverse flows.
- **Strengthen cross-border protection:** There is an urgent need to implement risk monitoring at high-transit Pols and to establish regional safeguards that prevent chain deportations and uphold the principle of non-refoulement.
- **Maximize operational efficiency:** Concentrating resources and coordination at priority Pols eliminates duplication, reduces logistical costs, and optimizes the impact of every dollar invested.
- **Ensure shared state responsibility:** Promote coordination and cooperation among states to ensure that return procedures adhere to human rights standards, are implemented only when necessary, guarantee due process, respect the principle of non-refoulement, and prevent chain deportations.
- **Promote innovation with traceability:** Funding digital cash transfers and robust tracking systems strengthens people’s autonomy, increases transparency, and facilitates accountability.

By adopting this advocacy agenda, a complex humanitarian challenge can be transformed into an opportunity for systemic change: to protect lives in motion throughout the entire journey, to optimize resources amid shrinking funding, and to reinforce a model that is scalable across other routes in the region.

Glossary of Key Terms

Deportation

The act by which, under a deportation, expulsion, or return order, a state forces a foreign national to leave its territory and sends them back to their country of origin or a third country after entry is denied or legal stay expires.

Reverse Flow

The voluntary or forced return movement of migrants to their countries of origin or to third countries, often via non-linear routes and with risks comparable to or greater than those faced during the original journey.

Point of Interest (PoI)

Strategic locations along migration routes where people on the move face significant risks, critical humanitarian needs, or key moments in their journeys such as route changes, waiting periods, border crossings, or key decision points. These sites are selected based on their humanitarian relevance, operational feasibility, and/or institutional acceptance, and serve as essential nodes for delivering coordinated humanitarian, protection, and multisectoral interventions.

Principle of Non-Refoulement

A norm of international law that prohibits returning or expelling a person to a country where their life or freedom would be threatened. This is established in Article 33 of the 1951 Refugee Convention and other human rights treaties.

Route-Based Programming (RBP)

A humanitarian approach that aligns assistance with actual migration routes, rather than limiting it to national borders. This model shifts away from country-centered responses to address the dynamic and evolving needs of migrants throughout their transnational journeys.

Cross-Border Protection

A set of coordinated measures among states and humanitarian actors that ensures access to asylum procedures, basic services, and risk monitoring throughout the migration route, beyond a single jurisdiction.

Return¹⁰

The act or process of going back or being sent back to the starting point of a migration journey. In the current context of mixed migration in the Americas, “return” refers to the movement of refugees and migrants who, having migrated or been in transit toward the United States, are returning or have returned in the opposite direction (north–south) to countries in Latin America, either their country of nationality or a third country.

¹⁰ The terminology defined by MMC and ProLAC (2025) in Migration Dynamics and Protection Risks in North–South Return Movements in the Americas. Impacts of Changes in U.S. Migration Policy has been used. Available at: www.mixedmigration.org and prolac.live

Traceability (in CVA)

The ability to record, track, and reconcile every movement of funds and data end-to-end—from donor allocation through the financial service provider to the moment the participant spends or withdraws the money—using auditable electronic or physical records. Traceability helps ensure resources reach intended recipients, and strengthens transparency, accountability, and risk management (fraud, duplication, diversion).

Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)

Refers to all programs where cash or vouchers for goods or services are directly provided to participants. In the humanitarian context, participants may be individuals, households, or communities, never governments or state actors. This excludes remittances and microfinance in humanitarian interventions.

Electronic Transfer

The digital transfer of money or e-vouchers from an implementing organization to a recipient. Electronic transfers enable access to cash, goods, or services via mobile devices, e-vouchers, or cards (e.g., smart cards, prepaid, ATM, credit, or debit cards). Also referred to as digital payment; both terms refer generally to electronic money and voucher.

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