



**Global
Migration
Lab**

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**Australian
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Migrants' Perspectives: Building Trust in Humanitarian Action





Credit: Louis Witter

French Red Cross operates the 'Mobile support systems for migrants' project in the North of France.



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Cover photo: Honduran Red Cross provides humanitarian assistance - including food, water, information and medical care - to migrants throughout their journeys. Credit: Johannes Chinchilla/IFRC

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Executive summary

Trust is ‘the foundation of humanitarian action’.¹ Trust enables humanitarian organisations² – like the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement)³ – to reach and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. But trust is complex and dynamic. It includes many facets – such as trust by humanitarian organisations that public authorities will respect their humanitarian mandates, and trust by migrants and communities in the quality of services provided by humanitarian organisations. Those dependent on humanitarian organisations to meet their basic needs may not have the luxury of trust; they may simply have to hope an organisation will act in their best interest due to lack of other options. Trust, thus, cannot be assumed, it needs to be built, maintained and evaluated – from the local to the global level.

Background

In the context of migration, trust in humanitarian organisations is critical given the vulnerabilities and risks many migrants face throughout their journeys – including an absence of community support networks, language barriers, irregular status, xenophobia and risks of abuse, violence and violations of their safety and dignity. Trust is also important in the context of the increased securitisation of migration and the conflation of border and migration control policies with humanitarian aid.

Despite growing evidence and concern of a breakdown in trust between migrants and humanitarian organisations,⁴ little is known about who migrants trust when accessing humanitarian assistance and protection, and why, and how trust or distrust impacts migrants’ ability and willingness to seek help at different stages of their journeys.

To gain further insight into migrants’ perspectives of – and trust in – humanitarian organisations, the Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab (‘Global Migration Lab’) together with the Movement, undertook research with migrants in the Americas, Africa, the Asia Pacific and Europe. The rationale for the research is that by listening and responding to the thoughts, fears, doubts, and concerns of migrants about their situations and the humanitarian assistance and protection they receive, humanitarian organisations can better build, maintain – and, where needed, repair – trust.

Methodology and scope

While there is no widely agreed definition of the concept of ‘trust’, it is often described in terms of a positive expectation or belief about the behaviour of another person or institution. Across concepts and measures of trust, common attributes like competence and values are recognised as strong predictors of trust. For this research, migrants’ trust is assessed in relation to indicators of competence, fairness, integrity and inclusion. Migrants were asked about their experiences and perceptions of humanitarian organisations broadly as well as specific questions related to Red Cross and Red Crescent actors.⁵

The research employed a mixed-methods approach including: 225 qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, 2,086 quantitative face-to-face surveys, and 14,532 quantitative online surveys conducted by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) across 15 countries (Argentina, Australia, Finland, France, the Gambia, Honduras, Maldives, Mali, Niger, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Türkiye, and Zambia). The online surveys also reached respondents in a small number of supplementary countries, primarily Syria. As discussed in detail in Section 4 of the report, data collected was not representative and response levels varied significantly from country-to-country, with a large number of online survey responses (over ten thousand) coming from migrants in Türkiye, the world’s largest refugee-hosting country.

While data was collected at the country level, by design data reflects migrants’ experiences and perceptions of humanitarian actors and the assistance and protection sought and received throughout their journeys. It does not necessarily reflect their experiences with, or perceptions of, the National Society or any other humanitarian actor in the country in which the data was gathered.

In line with the Movement’s strictly humanitarian approach to migration that focuses on migrants’ needs and vulnerabilities, irrespective of legal status, type, or category, and reflecting the Movement’s inclusive operational description of migrants, the research was conducted with migrants with regular and irregular status, people seeking asylum and refugees, migrants in transit, migrant workers, migrants on temporary visas or residency permits, returning migrants, and deportees, among

1 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, “[Summary Report from Commission III: Trust in Humanitarian Action](#),” 2019.

2 Agencies that provide support and assistance to migrants in need in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. There are a great many differences between various agencies working from the local to global level. Based on the research questions for this project it was necessary to use a general term to facilitate data collection in different countries and contexts.

3 The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is made up of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the National Societies, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

4 Independent Monitoring, Research and Evidence Facility (IMREF), “[Exploring Migrants’ Trust in Humanitarian Organisations](#),” 2021.; Ida Vammen et al., “[Does Information Save Migrants’ Lives? Knowledge and Needs of West African Migrants En Route to Europe](#),” 2021.

5 This refers to any combination of the components of the Movement. This term is used to increase the accessibility of this report to readers unfamiliar with the structure of the Movement. Research participants were not asked to specify which component of the Movement they received support from or interacted with throughout their journeys.

others – all of whom, at various stages of their journeys, had accessed or needed different forms of humanitarian assistance and protection.

This report focuses on key highlights from the data set collected. Further reports containing detailed analysis and comparison of sub-sets of the data disaggregated by demographic indicators will be released in future. This report should be read with the understanding that data collection was based on convenience sampling of migrants identified based on their perceived need for humanitarian assistance and protection in accordance with national contexts and programming priorities of participating National Societies. Country reports, including cross-tabulations by demographic indicators, have been provided to each participating National Society enabling context specific analysis.

Key Findings

Migrants' perceptions of, and experiences with, Red Cross and Red Crescent actors

The findings reveal Red Cross and Red Crescent actors are, generally, trusted by migrants, but that trust is not universal and work to build and maintain trust must continue.

Findings show Red Cross and Red Crescent actors are widely recognised, but vaguely understood in terms of the support provided to migrants. While most migrants involved in this research associated the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems with safety and hope (73%), they also expressed confusion about the work Red Cross and Red Crescent actors do with and for migrants, highlighting the need for strategies to better communicate services of Red Cross and Red Crescent actors in providing humanitarian assistance and protection to migrants in vulnerable situations, irrespective of legal status.

The findings also underscore the importance of principled humanitarian action and the need for greater awareness of the independence of Red Cross and Red Crescent actors by migrants. Only approximately 21% of all migrants recognised Red Cross and Red Crescent actors as independent to public authorities in their countries of birth and 26% in their current countries. The majority of migrants surveyed were unsure of the level of independence of Red Cross and Red Crescent actors from public authorities or the relationship that exists between these organisations and public authorities. This has the potential to impact trust – particularly in the context of the securitisation of migration.

The research confirmed Red Cross and Red Crescent actors' staff and volunteers are a key pillar to build and maintain trust by migrants. The direct interactions between migrants and staff and volunteers along routes can positively influence migrants' willingness to seek and access humanitarian assistance and protection. Eighty-five percent (85%) of all migrants noted Red Cross and Red Crescent actors treated them with dignity and respect, while 72% considered Red Cross and Red Crescent actors to be competent in addressing migrants' needs. However, there were some instances where migrants noted they would not seek assistance and protection in the future because of prior negative interactions, underscoring the importance of competence and integrity in building and maintaining trust and the interconnectedness of the work of organisations across borders.

Access to humanitarian assistance and protection: opportunities and barriers

The data provides important insights into migrants' perspectives and experiences of broader humanitarian action. Findings indicate that independence is an important pre-condition for migrants to trust humanitarian organisations and to seek humanitarian assistance and protection. Migrants in particularly vulnerable situations will not seek help if they believe that doing so might place them at risk of detention or deportation. One quarter of all migrants (25%) expressed fear that accessing humanitarian assistance and protection from humanitarian organisations may increase risks of detention or deportation. This fear was more prominent among migrants who self-identified as deportees (48%), those whose asylum applications had been refused (40%), and those with an irregular status (37%).

The findings also suggest a need for further responsiveness by humanitarian organisations to local contexts, as well for increased collaboration at the local level to build trust and reach a wider range of migrants in vulnerable situations. Overall, Red Cross and Red Crescent actors were identified by migrants as a key provider of humanitarian assistance and protection throughout their journeys. More than a quarter (28%) of all migrants had received humanitarian assistance and protection from Red Cross and Red Crescent actors amongst other providers, while 46% would recommend Red Cross and Red Crescent actors to other migrants in need. Findings also point to the important work of other local and international actors, with migrants noting assistance and protection was received from United Nations actors, community groups and governments, thus highlighting the need for coordination and cooperation.

While migrants expressed gratitude and appreciation for the humanitarian assistance and protection received from humanitarian organisations, many were clear about the limitations of such support, particularly in terms of quantity and reach. Despite humanitarian organisations' best efforts, migrants identified a trail of unmet needs, noting that assistance and protection was unavailable at various stages of their journeys (79%) and/or that the support provided fell short of meeting their most immediate needs (51%). This not only emphasises the importance of an integrated approach that addresses humanitarian needs along the entire migratory route, but also the importance of rethinking the type and level of humanitarian assistance and protection available to migrants. The research indicates that the needs of migrants vary greatly depending on their situations, their journeys, the countries where they reside and the local context, and reveals that migrants in some locations are interested in joining humanitarian organisations as staff and volunteers.

To respond to these varied needs, experiences and perspectives and to reach the most vulnerable and ensure assistance and protection is inclusive, humanitarian organisations must ensure the participation of migrants in the design and evaluation of humanitarian interventions and in relevant decision-making processes. This will build trust and increase the potential reach, quality, and impact of humanitarian assistance and protection available to migrants.

Findings also indicate a clear gap in migrants' awareness of where or how to access humanitarian assistance and protection services (40% reported not knowing where to get services), underscoring the need for outreach initiatives related to existing services and activities. Other key reasons cited by migrants for not accessing humanitarian assistance and protection were limited availability (37%) and restrictions on eligibility (21%). Many migrants expressed frustration and/or disappointment with humanitarian organisations for a perceived inability to provide assistance and protection, which has implications for building and maintaining trust related to competence and fairness.

The level of unmet need reported by migrants confirms that humanitarian organisations are faced with a reality of increasing humanitarian need among migrants across the world. While almost half (44%) of migrants surveyed reported having received some form of assistance and protection at one or more stages of their journey, more than three quarters (79%) reported needing assistance and protection at another stage but not receiving it. This points to the importance of further engagement in advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy to ensure that States enable a principled humanitarian approach, strengthen efforts

to prevent and alleviate human suffering, and address the assistance and protection needs of all migrants, irrespective of legal status.

Recommendations

The findings presented in this report can be used to inform approaches to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions, build migrants' trust and contribute to discussions about the importance of a principled humanitarian approach to migration. In particular, this report recommends that humanitarian organisations, including the Movement, urgently identify concrete actions to implement the following recommendations:

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- 1 Uphold the principle of independence and take action to communicate when, where and in what context humanitarian organisations are cooperating with public authorities.**

 - 2 Improve migrants' effective access to understandable, relevant and reliable information on services, protection, assistance, and support available along their journeys.**

 - 3 Ensure humanitarian action is inclusive, responsive to local contexts and enables the participation of migrants in decision-making processes.**

 - 4 Invest in staff and volunteer diversity – engaging people with a lived experience of migration – as well as in training to ensure competence and integrity.**

 - 5 Invest and engage in evidence-based humanitarian diplomacy on migrants' needs and vulnerabilities and a principled approach to humanitarian action.**

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

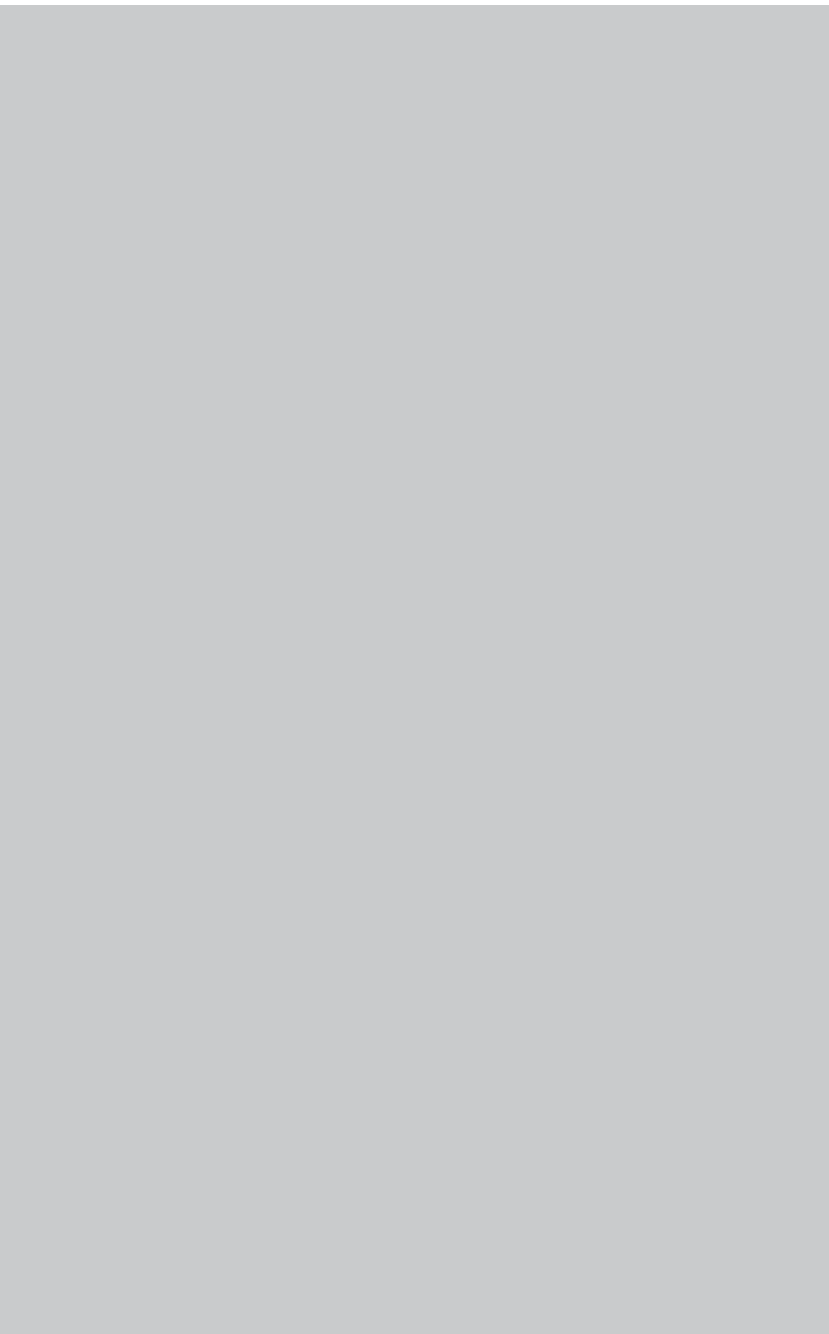
It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



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