

## **Call to Action for Philanthropy to Address Urgent Regional Humanitarian Needs for Asylum Seekers**

### **Updated Recommendations February 18, 2021**

The administration [announced](#) that it will begin processing an estimated 300 asylum seekers per day who have pending cases in the MPP (Remain in Mexico) program beginning on Friday, February 19, 2021. Initially, the processing will take place through Tijuana and San Diego, Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, and Matamoros and the Rio Grande Valley. This is one of many potential policy shifts that advocates are pushing for, including the [rescission of a Title 42](#) order that is the basis for the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers, and has particularly harsh impacts on Black asylum seekers.

Philanthropy is in a position to advance critical support to community-based organizations in the border region, cover travel expenses to cities around the country, provide access to legal services, and grow the use of community-based case management programs in cities around the country. Philanthropy can also support messaging and communications strategies that shift public perceptions about asylum and drive welcoming narratives.

The recommendations highlighted below reflect core values of dignity, justice and belonging, as well as ongoing conversations with a broad range of community-based organizations in Mexico and the U.S, nationally and locally. There is a deep sense of **urgency** in the NGO community to be prepared.

We want to ensure to the greatest extent possible that our recommendations do not recommend grantmaking where there are **either** existing federal government resources **or** organizations have told us that they are advocating at the state, city or county levels for resources that should be made available at that level (unless emergency situations emerge where the public sector is unable to respond). These recommendations reflect an immediate timeline for the next several months. We also have concept notes and budgets within each of the recommendations.

**Addressing regional humanitarian protection in northern Mexico is a critical strategic opportunity for the philanthropic community.** A Funders Workgroup on Asylum and the Border has been meeting and connecting with Mexican civil society leaders to better understand the emerging humanitarian, advocacy, and communications needs in the community. As a result of this engagement, a set of recommendations focused on organizations with specific needs has been developed. Please reach out to us if you are interested in grantmaking in Mexico.

**Addressing urgent humanitarian needs along the U.S. border for asylum seekers.** The following are urgent needs and we have been tracking information from trusted organizations seeking support.

- **Border reception.** Regional task forces are working across the U.S. border region to provide cohesive emergency humanitarian shelter and stabilization services to asylum seekers, beginning with those in MPP. Such services help ensure that migrants are not trapped in CBP custody for long periods of time or placed in ICE detention. The situation on the border is fluid and the task forces will continue to map gaps and adjust their service delivery as the MPP population is admitted and other policies shift. This funding should be flexible and open so that shelters can respond to immediate needs on the ground, whether it is for quarantine, COVID-testing, food, clothing, hotel rooms, transportation, or personal protective equipment. The following task forces are seeking support to assist MPP asylum seekers through the initial 3 corridors identified by the administration:
  - Rio Grande Valley Regional Welcome Task Force: Global Response Management, Team Brownsville, Angry Tias and Abuelas, Catholic Charities, ProBAR, and many others.

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- California Welcoming Task Force: Jewish Family Services, on behalf of San Diego Rapid Response Network, including Immigrant Defenders, Innovation Law Lab, UCSD Health, and the ACLU.
- Frontera Welcome Coalition: Hope Border Institute, Las Americas, DMRS, Annunciation House, and many others.
- **Support for particularly vulnerable communities.** Across the region and in the U.S., Black, indigenous, and LGBT+ individuals seeking protection face racism, discrimination, violence, trafficking, and a complete lack of language access and cultural competency in systems. It is critical to fund organizations that are led by directly impacted community members and to build up the existing infrastructure of networks that have developed to protect these most vulnerable populations. In addition, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) are particularly vulnerable as they flee situations of persecution in the region, while also facing pervasive violence along the migration route and abuse in CBP and ICE detention. Organizations that focus on supporting survivors of SGBV lack sufficient resources. Finally, unaccompanied children continue to be a highly vulnerable population facing heightened levels of violence and exploitation, and are in need of critical procedural and protection mechanisms that differ from those provided to adults. Organizations along the migration route and in the U.S. have developed specialized expertise to help unaccompanied children in accessing these protection mechanisms, and are also in need of philanthropic support.
- **Regional medical and pediatric support.** Medical services are necessary to ensure families understand and can access any COVID-related resources, as well as family and pediatric care.
  - Global Response Management (GRM) is also playing a critical emergency operations role for asylum seekers in the Rio Grande Valley and provides emergency and trauma-informed medical support.
  - Specialty Care Access Network and Babies at our Borders have an infrastructure in place to activate pediatricians and family doctors for families seeking asylum both along the border and in destination communities to address a broad range of medical needs.
- **Legal services along the continuum.** Access to lawyers will be a lynchpin in ensuring that the policy shift towards the restoration of asylum is successful. Legal information and access to attorneys is critical in helping asylum seekers navigate complex cases and increases the likelihood they will show up for immigration court hearings. Robust representation diminishes the need for detention, surveillance (e.g., ankle or wrist bracelets) and other forms of custody. Lawyers can ensure oversight and accountability around surveillance practices that can be dehumanizing and traumatizing to asylum seekers. . In addition, there will need to be funding to support systems of coordination to find and train lawyers to represent asylum seekers in under-resourced regions, as well as support for legal services providers in more established destination communities, such as Houston and Los Angeles. National legal services organizations are now collaborating to develop plans for coordination and local legal services providers are also preparing for a potential increase in asylum seekers, both at the border and in destination communities.

**Catalyzing a protection-centered vision for welcoming case management models to support asylum seekers.** For over a decade, community-based organizations have developed humane models to welcome asylum seekers and help them navigate their new communities in the U.S. These approaches use a holistic

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trauma-informed approach to providing legal, housing, and stabilization services for asylum seekers. Such approaches are similar to models for refugees. It is important to note that “case management” has sometimes been used to describe programs that use surveillance technology, such as the placing of ankle or bracelet monitors on asylum seekers and other similar tactics. These programs do not reflect community-based organizations’ views on welcoming humane case management models. Resources for community-based case management are needed in both the short and longer terms:

- Short term: organizations that serve refugees and other newcomers have the skill set and partnerships in place to provide case management services to asylum seekers if properly resourced to operate such programs, and are in need of resources urgently to scale up in response to MPP and subsequent arrivals.
- Mid to long-term: organizations have been working to institutionalize a protection-centered case management model for over a decade. They are in need of resources to support a convening and advocacy process to replace enforcement-centric responses like detention, ankle monitoring, or other surveillance devices with community-based case management and other critical support services.

**Messaging and communications to drive change:** Securing changes in the treatment of asylum seekers will require pushing back on narratives that call for limiting access to asylum, and reframing conversations away from enforcement and towards the idea of welcome. The Women’s Refugee Commission, Families Belong Together, Fwd.US, Human Rights First, Center for Gender and Refugee Studies, America’s Voice, and Latin America Working Group have launched the #WelcomeWithDignity campaign. The campaign, which is seeking \$5.5 million, is broken into multiple pillars:

- Values-based communications and messaging strategies that drive the mainstream media conversation around asylum, shift public opinion in favor of welcoming asylum seekers, and create space for legal and policy change.
- Direct advocacy with the Biden administration to press for reforms including swift processing of asylum seekers, protection-centered and community-based case management, and adequate legal representation.
- Collaborations with regional partners to grow civil society organizations’ ability to work with and inform asylum seekers in transit, advocate for pathways to protection in the region, and highlight the root causes driving forced migration.

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