CORE | FedEx

Empowering Communities:

Examining CORE's Delivery of
Food Vouchers to Immigrant and
Refugee Households in Brazil

NOVEMBER 2023

Mission Statements

CORE is a global humanitarian response organization that provides life-saving assistance to meet immediate needs and brings long-term recovery solutions to underserved communities. Overall, CORE's mission is to empower communities in and beyond crisis. CORE envisions a more equitable world in which underserved communities are prepared and can respond effectively to crisis from within. CORE delivers Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) to marginalized communities around the world, empowering recipients with timely, effective, and efficient assistance. Providing CVA transfers the decision-making power to crisis-affected communities to make choices about their own immediate needs and priorities. To learn more visit www.COREresponse.org

FedEx Cares is a global community engagement program and one way that FedEx lives out its purpose of connecting people and possibilities. Its "Delivering Good" Pillar lends its global network and unparalleled logistics expertise to organizations with mission-critical needs and helping communities before, during, and after crises. To learn more visit www.fedexcares.com.

Acknowledgments

INTRODUCTION AND OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

UNHCR reports that in 2022, Brazil hosted more than 560,000 refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless individuals and other individuals needing international protection; the majority have come from Venezuela, Haiti, and Cuba. With year-on-year increases over the past few years, this trend is likely to continue. Although the government of Brazil does extend several protections to refugees—including documents, work, and study—the needs significantly outweigh the government's capacity for adequate response. Many refugees, asylees, and stateless persons are unable to access social assistance in a timely manner, or altogether, due to language barriers and/or lack of information and case management support.

To address these needs, CORE utilized internal funding to launch CRAI Rio in early 2023 in partnership with the Special Secretariat for Citizenship (SECID), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). CORE developed CRAI Rio with the intention of running its services, activities, and operations for six months, then transitioning the center over to SECID for long-term management. CORE chose to set up CRAI Rio in the Gamboa neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro because of its central location.

The first facility of its kind in the city, CRAI Rio supports recently arrived immigrants, refugees, and stateless persons with a myriad of services, including temporary shelter for individuals and families, legal assistance, social assistance, psychosocial support, vouchers for food assistance[1], Uber rides[2] to support clients' transportation to reach referred partners, digital inclusion activities[3] and Portuguese language classes.[4] While operating under CORE's management, CRAI Rio served 235 participants in total. Participants were most often referred to CRAI by other organizations or by word-of-mouth from active CRAI clients. The population served included individuals who self-identified as male, female, and transgender. Nations of origin included Venezuela, Angola, Colombia, Congo, Peru, Haiti, Argentina, and Syria.

This learning brief focuses specifically on lessons pertaining to CORE's voucher assistance delivered to migrants who sought services from CRAI Rio. It includes recommendations for scaling cash and/or voucher assistance within a resource hub model, including to enhance complementarity between cash and/or voucher assistance and other types of services referenced above.

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1   Vouchers were funded by the FedEx Foundation
2   Uber rides were funded by the Uber Foundation
3   IOM and USAID donated in-kind materials for a computer room
4   UNHCR donated in-kind Portuguese classroom materials

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This learning brief draws on an external evaluation of the CRAI Rio, encompassing:

» Key Informant Interviews (KII) with CRAI Rio leadership, operational staff, and CORE's HQ Senior Advisor Cash & Markets.

» Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with a convenience sample of program participants (n=24).

» The participant sample included 10 women and 14 men between the ages of 20 and 60 years old, four of whom are living with one or more disabilities.

» Participants fit one of three profiles: 1) Individuals who had stayed in CRAI's shelter for up to three months, 2) Individuals who received voucher assistance but did not stay in the shelter, and 3) Individuals who received social assistance.

» External Evaluator Observations.

» Post-distribution monitoring (PDM) data representing 27 out of 32 total voucher recipient households.

» CRAI Rio Management Instituto CORE Brasil Final Report.

The PDM utilized in this report was administered after the second of three voucher disbursements. Additional PDMs would have supported further insights into client expenditure from a larger data set and recommendations for future use of CVA within a migrant hub program model.

VOUCHER ASSISTANCE: DESIGN AND FINDINGS

Design

To support the most vulnerable CRAI client households with food assistance, CORE piloted a voucher delivery program over a three-month period from May to July 2023. CORE chose "Ticket", a value voucher that can be used at local grocery stores and some restaurants, as the delivery mechanism for this pilot. CORE has previous experience using Ticket to deliver support to flood-affected households in Persepolis and Bahia. A comprehensive intake form administered by the CRAI's team of social workers used weighted scores to select households to receive voucher assistance. The scoring tool looked at aspects of vulnerability and marginalization including income, employment status, displacement status, documentation status, geographic residence, housing status, gender and gender identity, race, (dis)ability, current registration to receive social benefits, and household composition (e.g., separated families). Households that scored 32 points or lower were eligible for the program.

A total of 32 households received voucher assistance. The value of the voucher varied according to the number of dependents living together. The voucher was delivered directly to the head of the household or individual. The base value was R$800 (approximately $161 USD) per household plus R$400 (approximately $81 USD) per dependent. The maximum voucher value was R$2000 (approximately $403 USD) per household per month. This transfer value was decided by the CRAI team referencing the national food basket value. Value vouchers in various denominations were used depending on the household size and appropriate transfer value; households enrolled received R$800, R$1200, R$1600, or R$2000 per month for three months.

Demographics of households receiving vouchers surveyed (n=23) during post distribution monitoring:

» The average age of head of household (n=23) was 40.4 years.

» 78% identified as female (n=18), 4% identified as a trans woman (n=1), and 18% identified as male (n=4)

» Household size ranged from 1 to 7, with an average of 3 people.

» Nationalities of migrants included 35% Angolan (n=8), 17% Venezuelan (n=4), 4% Congolese (n=1), 4% Haitian (n=1), 4% Afghani (n=1), 4% Argentinian (n=1), 4% Ugandan (n=1), 4% Colombian (n=1), 4% Cuban (n=1), 4% Peruvian (n=1), 4% Togolese (n=1), 4% Bolivian (n=1), and 4% Brazilian raised abroad (n=1).

» The most prevalent disabilities included vision (35% with some difficulty; n=8) and ambulatory (30% with some difficulty; n=6) impairments.

» Around 22% of participants resided at the CRAI Rio shelter (n=5).
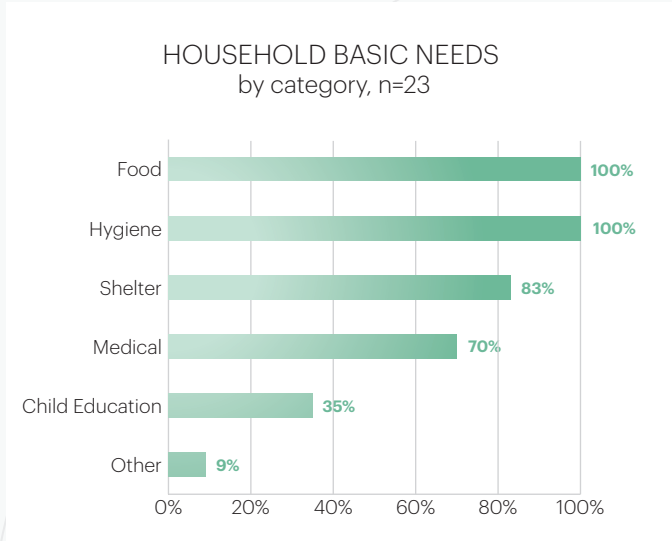
Findings

Findings are gathered from the PDM that was administered after the second of three distributions and external, evaluator-led evaluation at project close. The sample size was 23 participants. These findings revealed more details about how the vouchers were used to meet participants' needs, their ease of use, preferred transfer methods, and how they could be used to further meet unmet needs.

The majority of respondents (77%, n=17) said that they were currently registered to receive benefits from the government's social safety net, Bolsa Família[5]. Of these households, 61% said they were using these benefits alongside CORE's food assistance (n=14), while 39% said they were not using the safety net benefits (n=9). For those who were enrolled in and using Bolsa Família as well as CORE's voucher assistance, the two forms of assistance were reported to be complementary.

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5   Bolsa Família is the Government of Brazil's social welfare program.

HOUSEHOLD NEEDS

Respondents identified the below basic needs for their households. "Other" included water (4%) and internet (4%).

HOUSEHOLD BASIC NEEDS
by category, n=23

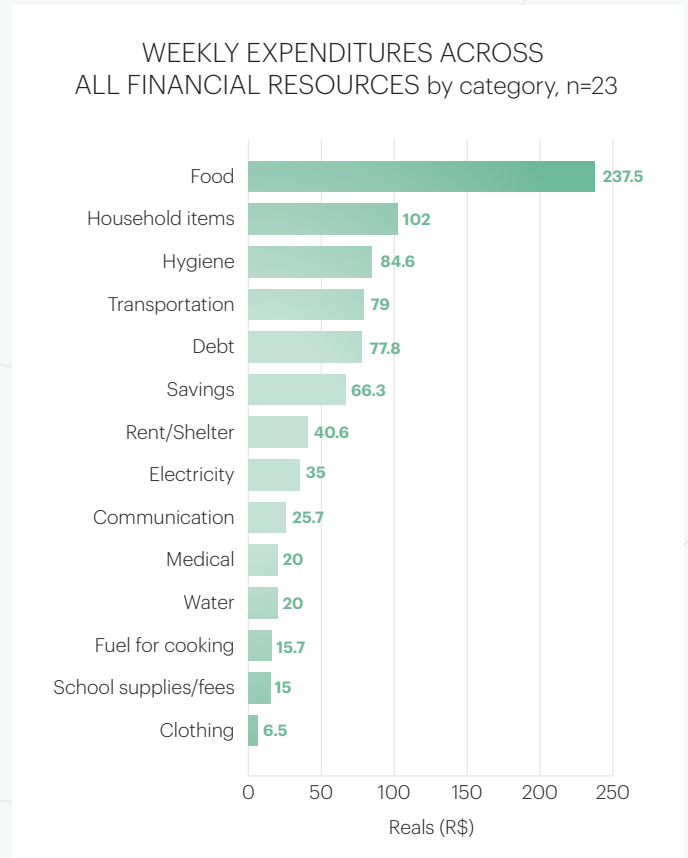| Category	Percentage
Food	100%
Hygiene	100%
Shelter	83%
Medical	70%
Child Education	35%
Other	9%

Respondents were then asked about to what extent the assistance they received met their basic household needs. Out of the 22 respondents, 45% responded they were able to meet all needs (n=10), 14% responded as able to meet most needs (n=3), 23% responded able to meet about half of basic needs (n=5), and 18% responded that they were able to meet some (less than half) of their needs (n=4).

ABILITY TO MEET NEEDS

MOST 14%
SOME (LESS THAN HALF) 18%
ALL 45%
ABOUT HALF 23%
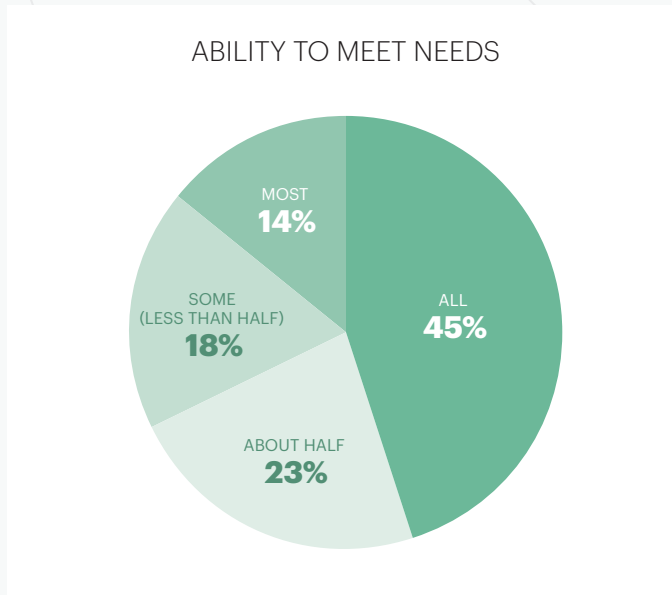
Respondents who indicated the assistance met either "about half" or "some (less than half)" of their basic needs were asked a follow-up question to identify and learn which basic needs remained outstanding priorities. Recipients (n=9) said that they are unable to completely fulfill needs such as food (n=5, 56%), hygiene needs (n=5, 56%), shelter needs (n=3, 33%), medical needs (n=3, 22%) and other (n=5, 56%). The 'other' category included responses addressing communications, rent, furnishings, and non-food items for infants.

Respondents were asked to break down their weekly household expenses by recalling their approximate expenditures per category from the past seven days. This included expenditures purchased using voucher assistance from CORE and other financial resources.

WEEKLY EXPENDITURES ACROSS
ALL FINANCIAL RESOURCES by category, n=23

Category	Reals (R$)
Food	237.5
Household items	102
Hygiene	84.6
Transportation	79
Debt	77.8
Savings	66.3
Rent/Shelter	40.6
Electricity	35
Communication	25.7
Medical	20
Water	20
Fuel for cooking	15.7
School supplies/fees	15
Clothing	6.5

Respondents were then asked what they were able to spend money on with the addition of the voucher to their financial resources. All respondents (n=23) said that they purchased food, which was the largest expenditure category, while 78% also used it for hygiene items (n=18), 70% purchased water (n=16), 30% used it for childcare/protection services (n=7), 9% on gifts or sharing (n=2), and 9% on non-food household items, such as clothing, cookware, furniture, etc. (n=2). Respondents gave importance to the voucher stating that it was beneficial because it was quick and guaranteed access to quality food for a few months, and allowed time to look for work. There were two cases of financial savings found in the closing evaluation: one recipient was able to save for travel and another to save for visa fees. However, most respondents did not report that receiving voucher assistance influenced their migration journey, as most intended to stay in Brazil.

"I received the food card. It was very important, because I live alone and I have two children - 8 and 6 years old - and this card helped me a lot because I could buy good food for the children, vegetables, milk, meat, hygiene products. I receive Bolsa Família, but with the card I was able to save money to pay for Celpe Bras (Certificate of Proficiency in Portuguese Language for Foreigners). (...) My plans are to take the ENEM (National High School Exam), go back to college and find a job. I would love to have a scholarship while I study, because it will make it much easier with the children."
- VOUCHER RECIPIENT

REDUCED COPING STRATEGIES INDEX (RCSI)

20 respondents out of 23 provided complete answers to questions about the five reduced coping strategies (RCSI). RCSI is a proxy indicator of household food insecurity and asks participants how many days in the past week they had to limit meals, choose less preferred foods, limit portion size, borrow food, and/or restrict adult consumption to provide food for children. The RCSI creates a score to understand the quality of food consumption per household. 45% of households were considered to have minimal food insecurity (score < 3, n=9), 30% as stressed (score 4-18, n=6), and 25% as in crisis (score ≥ 19, n=5) as defined by the Food Security Cluster[6] and IPC categories[7].

IPC Phase 1	IPC Phase 2	IPC Phase 3
Minimal	Stressed	Crisis
Score: 0-3	Score: 4-18	Score: 19+
Number of households: 9	Number of households: 6	Number of households: 5

EASE OF USE AND DELIVERY MECHANISM

The majority (n=20) of respondents reported being "very satisfied" with the voucher assistance CORE delivered. 22 respondents shared that the voucher had a positive effect on relationships within their household. Having the resources to meet food needs reduced stress and thus tension among members of the household.

Regarding ease of use, CORE found only 13% of participants had difficulty using the vouchers (n=3), with reasons such as loss of password to access card, expiration dates, or inability to use it at small locations, such as local pharmacies. Ticket had mistakenly sent CORE vouchers that expired before the end of the encashment period which required troubleshooting from CORE. All recipient households received their entitlements, but this resulted in delay for some of the recipients before CORE was able to receive replacement cards from Ticket.

Preferences for type of transfer mechanism varied, with eight participants preferring a bank transfer, nine preferring a cash transfer, and five preferring a digital transfer. The evaluator observed that these preferences were likely so they could deploy funds in an unrestricted manner and have greater choice and range of expenditure.

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6   Food Security Cluster FCS Indicator Handbook https://fscluster.org/handbook/Section_two_rcsi.html
7   Famine Early Warning Systems Network https://fews.net/about/integrated-phase-classification

VOUCHER PROGRAM EFFECTS

When asked who the voucher benefited within the household (n=22), 86% (n=19) said all members in the household equally, while 4.5% (n=1) said female children (under 18), 4.5% (n=1) said children under 18 regardless of gender, and 4.5% (n=1) said other.

VOUCHER BENEFITING HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS
n=22

- All members of the household benefitted pretty much the same
- Female children (under 18)
- Children under 18, regardless of gender
- Other
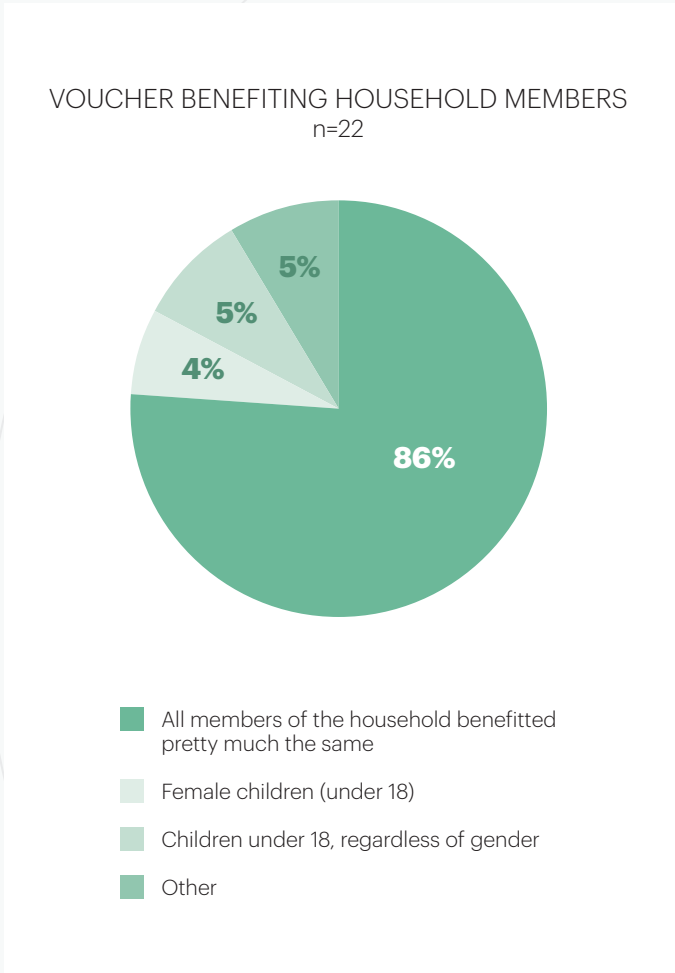
The majority of respondents (22 out of 23) said that the voucher had a positive effect on their household. Comments on the positive effects included:

» "Not worrying about how to have the money to buy diapers and milk for the babies."

» "Keep(ing) your pantry full in a comfortable way."

» "Help with buying food - the basics."

» "Positive, because before there were family conflicts due to lack of financial resources to buy food."

» "The family was experiencing health difficulties, needing to invest money in transport and the card (I.e. voucher) helped… You can go shopping with your children."

When asked if there were any negative effects of the voucher, 22 out of 23 said "No". One participant selected "Prefer not to respond".

Suggestions for improvement of cash programming included:

» "That the card (ie. voucher) would allow the purchase of pharmacy items."

» "Increasing the duration of the program, at least 6 months."

» "Prioritize trans women more."

» "Expansion of the program to include more families."

SAFETY CONCERNS

Safety concerns stemmed primarily around transportation to and from the voucher distribution events. Voucher recipients who were not staying in the shelter reported they appreciated that CRAI staff arranged Uber rides for them to safely come pick up the voucher and return to their residence. All respondents (n=23) reported having a safe place to store their voucher and almost 95% (n=22) said that they had safe access to a market to use their cash voucher.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Programmatic

> "Those who are hungry are in a hurry and I was at that moment unable to eat as I should. So, it was a survival support, really. It was gratifying, being able to go to the market without having to count the money, there is nothing more gratifying." - VOUCHER RECIPIENT

Lessons: Vouchers were effective in supporting households to better meet their basic food assistance needs. For newly arrived immigrants and refugees without a support network the voucher was fundamental. The vouchers were complementary to Bolsa Família assistance for households that were eligible to receive both benefits. Most recipients also received Bolsa Família, the federal government cash transfer program. Two of the 27 PDM respondents signaled that with this support they were able to use the card to purchase food and hygiene items and thus managed to spend their Bolsa Família resources on other fundamental items that they were not otherwise able to afford, such as gas, internet, transportation, and health. To achieve self-reliance, financial assistance beyond food assistance is needed, including targeted livelihoods support.

Recommendations: While the transfer value and frequency were appropriate for most households to cover food expenses, the duration of assistance should be extended to support households over a longer period to cover consumption needs while they work to establish livelihoods. To best meet clients' immediate consumption needs and help them achieve self-reliance, it is key to expand the use of CVA within the program model, including adding a livelihoods Graduation Approach. Within livelihoods programming, CVA can be leveraged to cover professional training to support labor market integration and business grants. Additionally, CVA can cover the costs of childcare to aid job seeking and income generating.

SHELTER

Lessons: The shelter provided emergency housing for a maximum of three months. However, in some cases, this was not enough time for particularly vulnerable clients, including those with mental health challenges, those suffering from addiction, and those who were long-term unemployed. The shelter was successfully inclusive of individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. The shelter was a catalyst in some cases for strengthening the social networks among clients. For example, three clients joined forces and resources to rent a place together to transition out of the shelter.

Program staff and participants reflected that CVA could be used to cover the cost of rent to support clients' transitions out of the shelter.

Recommendations: It would be beneficial to extend the duration of shelter assistance for clients who meet certain circumstances. In addition, providing rental assistance over six to twelve months depending on the case support could support clients' transitions out of the shelter and into longer-term accommodation. Transfer value could also account for the cost of furnishings, linens, utensils, etc. Additionally, to better support clients who struggle with addiction, trauma, and other mental health issues, it would be beneficial to integrate a referral system to or directly provide relevant treatment and/or therapy.

"In the refuge I felt protected. My main problem was time, to get rent and a job." - VOUCHER RECIPIENT

TRANSPORTATION

Lessons: CORE's ability to facilitate Uber rides was generally well received by clients and supported those staying in the shelter to travel to use referral pathways. In addition, the use of Uber to ensure safe transportation for those not staying in the shelter to collect their voucher cards was praised.

Recommendations: Transportation to and from distribution points can help to facilitate access to referral services which may be far from where clients live and, consequently, mitigate risks and barriers associated with transportation. Where arranging transportation directly is not feasible or appropriate, consider including the costs of transportation as a top up to the transfer value.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Lessons: Clients' financial barriers often slowed the procurement of relevant documents from their respective consulates through which they apply for the national social safety net and other services. Providing legal support and assistance was effective in obtaining a variety of legal documents including, but not limited to: documents related to naturalization, asylum, family reunification, visas, labor issues, civil issues, and residency.

Not only was assistance with documentation effective, but it was often a "gateway" to accessing additional services. Legal assistance focal points would refer clients for other services and events both internally and externally, including food vouchers, enrollment in the government's social safety net, and events raising awareness about the rights of and policies affecting immigrants.

Recommendations: CVA can complement and, in some cases, help expedite legal assistance. When the costs of documentation are beyond the means of a client, household CVA can help cover the costs of xeroxing, travel—including long-distance transportation from Rio to São Paolo—and food and accommodation while visiting a consulate. Therefore, CVA can help clients access legal documents more quickly than they may be able to otherwise.

Operational

VALIDITY OF VOUCHERS

Lessons: The vouchers that were ordered and received from the vendor contained expiration dates that affected their use. These had to be cancelled and reordered, which delayed the distribution process.

Recommendations: Coordination with the voucher vendor is important to ensure that vouchers received for disbursement have a validity period that spans the full duration of implementation.

MONITORING SYSTEM

Lessons: There was not a dedicated MEAL staff from the start of the project which delayed the implementation of a MEAL plan.

This had spillovers for the institutional transition of the CRAI, as lessons learned were not fully documented and available for the transfer process.

Recommendations: Ensure a MEAL professional is involved in the set-up of monitoring and evaluation processes from the start of a program.

Ensure a MEAL professional is involved in the set-up of monitoring and evaluation processes from the start of the program. Ensure all programs, including voucher projects, start with a theory of change for accountability and program growth. Develop a sustainability plan to transfer the learnings to the future manager and, if possible, set aside resources to ensure that one or two CORE staff are present in the first months of this transition with the new management.

CASE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Lessons: CRAI had a limited SOP on case management and a case management tracking system which created extra work for CRAI staff. Consequently, this did not enable harmonized tracking of all cases.

Recommendations: Programs like CRAI should have case management software that, at a minimum, fulfills the receiving country's privacy laws and aligns with international best practice. Not only will this allow for smoother tracking of cases, but it can also be utilized to track additional case resources, such as CVA. Having this data in one place will allow for faster data analysis and more rapid learning and adaptation for current and future programs.

TEAM MAKEUP AND SKILLSETS

Lessons: While some of the CRAI staff had previous, informal experience in voucher programming, the staff responsible for day-to-day voucher implementation was inexperienced and lacked knowledge of minimum CVA programming standards. A dedicated and qualified field based CVA focal point for the project had been planned. However, this staffer left CORE and was not replaced, and the rest of the CRAI team worked to fill in. Additionally, the team was often overworked and unable to dedicate time to training in best practice and CVA monitoring.

Recommendations: It will be critical to ensure the program lead has direct experience and/or training in CVA best practice. Additionally, we recommend reviewing and increasing the ratio of staff to program participants, as well as ensuring that staff have access to reflective supervision and ongoing coaching and mentoring.

EXIT STRATEGY

Lessons: Institutional transition was not planned from the beginning of CRAI implementation, which impacted the number of services that were continued.

Recommendations: Develop a sustainability plan to transfer all services before implementation starts. Ensure that one or two CORE staff are present during the first months of this transition with the new management.

REFERRALS

Lessons: Developing the design and standard operating procedures for the voucher component of CRAI's programming with the team of social workers resulted in strong, multi-directional referrals for clients between voucher assistance and social assistance, ultimately increasing the CRAI's reach.

Recommendations: Close collaboration among leads for various services and activities within a migrant hub model allows for complementarity and maximizes reach and impact for clients.

CONCLUSION

While CRAI's CVA programming was intended to meet clients' most immediate short-term needs, establishment and activation of referrals for longer-term support, such as CVA-integrated shelter and livelihoods programming, would have enhanced impact for program participants. Integrating provision of food vouchers into the hub's services was an asset to participants and should be brought to scale in this type of programming. In addition, CVA can be integrated across the hub's services and activities to reduce financial barriers where they exist, so participants can fully benefit from services and referrals. For example, while legal assistance is usually accessible for clients, they often encounter financial barriers that prevent or slow them from accessing requisite documentation. Ensuring appropriate transfer value, duration and frequency of assistance, as well as the availability of multiple delivery mechanisms will facilitate holistic, timely, and safe assistance, as well as longer-term impacts for CVA recipients.