



Solidarity networks that overcome social distances

The response of migrant
associations to the
COVID-19 crisis

Ignacio Ellacuría Social Foundation

Arrupe Etxea - Aita Lojendio Kalea, 2
48008 Bilbao, Bizkaia
+34 944 465 992

info@fundacionellacuria.org
www.fundacionellacuria.org

Title

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Authors

Nedra Ben Salem
Noelia Larrauri Sánchez
Marie-Lucie Monsheneke
Bernat Oró Capellades
Letiția Vișan

Collaborators

Dayanna Fernanda Cardona Rodríguez
Cristina Gil García

Design and layout

Tintácora. Creative study

Publication date

june 2023

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This research received funding from the call "Knowledge management for social intervention (2021)" of the Department of Equality, Justice, and Social Policies of the Basque Government.

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Foreword

Gorka Urrutia Asua

Director of the Pedro Arrupe Institute of Human Rights, University of Deusto

The motto of the Ignacio Ellacuría Social Foundation is “To accompany, serve and defend migrants and their organizations.” Some of its lines of action focus on associative accompaniment, research and public advocacy, and hospitality. Those who have been part of the Foundation, both currently and in the past, have initiated numerous efforts aimed at addressing the challenges encountered while working towards the goal of accompanying, serving, and defending migrants in our society.

One of the big challenges they faced during 2020 was the pandemic caused by COVID-19. In reality, it was a challenge faced by all people. However, the migrant population was in a situation of particular vulnerability. In this context, and within the framework of the work that the Ellacuría Foundation has been carrying out in the accompaniment and strengthening of migrant associations, as can be seen in this work, the response given by these organizations was noteworthy for its solidarity and care, leaving aside their other actions. Indeed, the majority of the projects that migrant associations had planned for 2020 and 2021 were either cancelled, postponed, or adjusted due to the pandemic. Their efforts had to be redirected towards more pressing matters, resulting in a shift away from their previous activities. Nonetheless, these organizations showcased their creativity and organizational capabilities by developing many new solidarity initiatives to address the crisis.

It is within this framework that the idea of carrying out the study whose main results are presented in these pages arose. The main purpose of this work has been to document and analyze, based on empirical evidence, the deployment of solidarity actions carried out by migrant associations in the context of the pandemic. With this work, the various initiatives developed in that period of time are compiled, bringing them to light and increasing their visibility. Furthermore, this work also extracts valuable insights and best practices from the analysis, emphasizing the value of these actions and offering elements for learning. The findings, well-presented, featuring a rigorous research design and a range of illustrative examples that highlight the solidarity initiatives undertaken, can be found within the pages of this study.

This publication is aligned with one of the core objectives of the Ellacuría Foundation, which is to disseminate good practices of coexistence, citizenship, and diversity through awareness-raising, research, and advocacy. Works such as this one undoubtedly make a valuable contribution towards achieving this goal, serving as a testimony to the ongoing efforts towards promoting a culture of human rights in the context of migration, diversity, and solidarity.



Summary

The COVID-19 crisis brought about a rapid mobilization of civil society to provide social support in the face of inequalities and social distancing, creating new patterns of mutual assistance.

When solidarity actions involve beneficiaries in decision-making and their own activism through dialogic processes, they have the potential to create social impact and contribute to the construction of more inclusive societies.

This research aims to fill a gap in the scientific literature pertaining to the social responses to the pandemic, highlighting the active role of migrant organizations. Through a qualitative study, we analyze how the organization of solidarity actions by these groups responds to the shortcomings of institutionalized emergency planning, involves people in extreme need in the organization of solidarity actions, and contributes to transforming the model of social intervention and public management.

01.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a high impact on migrants.¹ Among the main reasons for this, the following stand out: increased exposure to jobs generally less stable, less senior, less protected, and to occupations classified as essential services;² or an increased likelihood of having more precarious housing conditions or less possibility of maintaining social distance.³

In addition, confinement periods, with many closures of public amenities, posed an extra challenge due to the inability to renew visas and permits (such as work and residence permits) and to cover their essential needs. Along with that, labor precariousness and loss of income due to unemployment (including loss of housing in the case of live-in domestic workers)⁴ aggravated the social situation of many people. Even many policy responses, although theoretically inclusive and flexible, were often structurally inequitable for migrants.⁵

These factors have not gone unnoticed within the associations of migrants, and despite the fact that many of their members have directly suffered these consequences, they have tried to overcome them and make a great effort to fulfill a fundamental social role.

1. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2020). *What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children?*. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=137_137245-8saheqv0k3&title=What-is-the-impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children%3F

2. Fasani, F. & Mazza, J. (2020). *Immigrant Key Workers: Their Contribution to Europe's COVID-19 Response*. IZA Policy Papers 155, Institute of Labor Economics (IZA). <https://www.iza.org/publications/pp/155/immigrant-key-workers-their-contribution-to-europes-covid-19-response>

3. Ralli, M., Cedola, C., Urbano, S., Morrone, A. & Ercoli, L. (2020). Homeless persons and migrants in precarious housing conditions and COVID-19 pandemic: peculiarities and prevention strategies. *European Review for Medical and Pharmacological Sciences*, 18, 9765-9767.

4. International Labour Organization [ILO] (2020). *Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on loss of jobs and hours among domestic workers*. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/domestic-workers/publications/factsheets/WCMS_747961/lang-en/index.htm

5. Miller, R., Arita, K., Igarashi, N. H., Fujii, D., Yumino, A., & Jimba, M. (2022). Social support as a bridge: A rapid realist review of migrant inclusion in the Japanese response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of migration and health*, 6, 100135.



Many of these organizations have fragile organizational structures, with little funding, media presence or visibility. Nevertheless, they have done a vast amount of work to “leave no one behind,”⁶ contributing to equality, social cohesion, and more inclusive citizenship. Each one, starting from their own reality, has helped their community intensely and in solidarity,⁷ and very often also to other neighbors in vulnerable situations.

This research aims to explore in depth the capacity of migrant organizations to develop specific and direct ways of solidarity among equals, building effective support and assistance networks and reaching out to people at risk of social exclusion; including collaborating with the public administration and initiating new, more egalitarian and less bureaucratic forms of collaboration between sectors.

This study is especially relevant and pertinent given the current situation where racist discourses have an impact on citizens and their attitudes towards immigration, fostering prejudice, discrimination, less solidarity, and unfavorable opinions about their rights and access to public services.⁸ Furthermore, the pandemic has led to a global scenario of increasing bans on mobility and an exceptional migratory regime,⁹ as well as xenophobic attitudes and responses towards cultural minorities, which have led to increased discrimination and greater psychological distancing between groups. Stigmatization and inequalities pose challenges to solidarity and especially to solidarity between communities.¹⁰

6. United Nations - CEB (2017): *Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development. A Shared United Nations System Framework for Action*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1628748?ln=es>

7. Harresiak Apurtuz (2022). *Impacto del COVID-19 en mujeres migradas: experiencias de resistencia frente a desigualdades estructurales*. <https://www.harresiakapurtuz.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/LIBRO-HARRESIAK.pdf>

8. De Botton, L., Ramos, R., Soler-Gallart, M. & Suriñach, J. (2021). Scientifically Informed Solidarity: Changing Anti-Immigrant Prejudice about Universal Access to Health. *Sustainability*, 13(8), 4174.

9. Giliberti, L., & Queirolo Palmas, L. (2021). The hole, the corridor and the landings: reframing Lampedusa through the COVID-19 emergency. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1–22.

10. Stok, F. M., Bal, M., Yerkes, M. A., & de Wit, J. B. F. (2021). Social Inequality and Solidarity in Times of COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(12), 6339.

1.1. Solidarity in times of COVID-19

Highlighting disparities instead of acknowledging commonalities with others hinders prospects for solidarity by implying that others are at fault for one's own problems.¹¹ The COVID-19 crisis has brought to the table the necessity of collaborating instead of acting independently, of recognizing the rights of all human beings by promoting their welfare, of helping each other and sharing a common purpose.¹² In fact, when social bonding and a sense of common destiny are established, people are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors (i.e., those through which people benefit others,¹³ e.g., helping, cooperating, comforting, sharing, etc.), understanding that one's well-being depends on the well-being of others. Grass-roots movements can create solidarity as a reaction to crises (and indeed is a prerequisite for overcoming them),¹⁴ provide emancipatory bases for establishing full relevance in a community and thus enable political and interpersonal solidarity.¹⁵

The confinements and social distancing interrupted social interaction and citizen mobilization attempted to recover the interdependencies that had existed up to that time in order to correct the inequalities caused by this suspension.¹⁶ Solidarity was a global phenomenon. Thus, during the hardest moments of the pandemic, civil society mobilized quickly to provide support for new needs that the confinements made emerge (shopping support, home education support, etc.) and to fill the gap left by the reduction or suspension of social and health services by certain institutions and social organizations.

11. Prainsack, B. (2020). Solidarity in Times of Pandemics. *Democratic Theory*, 7(2), 124–133.

12. Balingue, A. C. (2021). Countering social stigma and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic through solidarity. *Journal of Public Health*, 43(2), e399–e400.

13. Yue, Z., & Yang, J.Z. (2021). Compassionate goals, prosocial emotions, and prosocial behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 32(3), 476–489.

14. The Lancet. (2021). COVID-19 in Africa: a lesson in solidarity. *The Lancet*, 398(10296), 185.

15. Gómez Garrido, M., Carbonero Gamundi, M. A., & Viladrich, A. (2019). The role of grassroots food banks in building political solidarity with vulnerable people. *European Societies*, 21(5), 753–773.

16. Basaure, M., Joignant, A., & Mascareño, A. (2021). Between Distancing and Interdependence: The Conflict of Solidarities in the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Sociological Perspectives*, 64(5), 706–725.

In this respect, the use of digital tools played a fundamental role in the organizational success of the successive confinements and the ability to mobilize on the basis of non-hierarchical relationships and an attitude of reciprocity.¹⁷ The adaptation of pre-existing solidarity and the participants' prior experience in other crises also facilitated early action.¹⁸ However, research also demonstrates that the majority of unofficially organized assistance was dispersed through already-existing social networks. For this reason, the crisis aggravated the position of people with shaky ties to their communities.^{19, 20}

The mobilization of resources and the management of hospitality by the community can create new patterns of peer-to-peer solidarity.^{21, 22} It has been demonstrated that diverse and inclusive groups and organizations—where every member is assured of being heard, appreciated, and allowed to make substantial contributions—are more effective, creative, and productive overall.²³

Thus, in order for citizen-led initiatives to generate social change, the research indicates that the following aspects are necessary:

17. Chwat, O. (2021). Social Solidarity during the Pandemic: The “Visible Hand” and Networked Social Movements. *Kultura i Społeczność*, 65(1), 87-104.

18. Travlou, P. (2021). Kropotkin-19: A Mutual Aid Response to COVID-19 in Athens. *Design and Culture*, 13(1), 65–78.

19. Carlsen, H. B., Toubøl, J., & Brincker, B. (2021). On solidarity and volunteering during the COVID-19 crisis in Denmark: the impact of social networks and social media groups on the distribution of support. *European Societies*, 23(sup1), S122-S140

20. Grasso, M., Klicperová-Baker, M., Koos, S., Kosyakova, Y., Petrillo, A., & Vlase, I. (2021). The impact of the coronavirus crisis on European societies. What have we learnt and where do we go from here? – Introduction to the COVID volume. *European Societies*, 23(sup1), S2–S32.

21. Moralli M., & Allegrini G. (2020): Crises redefined: towards new spaces for social innovation in inner areas?. *European Societies*, 23(Sup. 1), 5831–5843.

22. Giliberti, L., & Filippi, D. (2021). Making Ethnography of Migrations in Pandemic Times. Research notes from the French-Italian border during the first lockdown. *REMHU Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana* 29(61), 67–82.

23. Warrior, L., Kim, C. Y., Burdick, D. J., Ackerman, D. J., Bartolini, L., Cagniard, K. R., Dangayach, N. S., Dawson, E. T., Orjuela, K. D., Gordon Perue, G. L., Cutsforth-Gregory, J. K., Bahouth, M. N., McClean, J. C., 2nd, & DeLuca, G. C. (2020). Leading with inclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Neurology*, 95(12), 537–542.



Ensure diversity and plurality of voices in participation;²⁴



That this participation takes place in contexts based on an egalitarian dialogue, i.e. where all people have the same opportunity to speak, to be heard, and where decisions are not made on the basis of power relations; and



Promote dialogic leadership,²⁵ being the process in which the leadership practices of all the members of a group or community are created, developed, and consolidated, based on the premise that any person can promote this type of leadership, contributing their experience to strengthen the voices and dialogue among all its members.²⁶

The people and grassroots organizations that have mobilized during the pandemic share the conviction that there is a need for mutual, spontaneous, generalized assistance, that is independent of government actions, either because they are considered insufficient or to generate more agile solutions.²⁷ The COVID-19 crisis highlights the need to strengthen community and solidarity not only to ensure that no one is left without assistance, but also to make the response more effective,²⁸ which is key to improving people's health and lives.

24. Blokland, T., Hentschel, C., Holm, A., Lebuhn, H., & Margalit, T. (2015). Urban Citizenship and Right to the City: The Fragmentation of Claims. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 39(4), 655–665.

25. Redondo-Sama, G. (2016). Leadership and community participation: a literature review. *International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1), 71–92.

26. Padrós, M., & Flecha, R. (2014). Towards a Conceptualization of Dialogic Leadership. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, Vol. 2(2), 207–226.

27. Córdoba, D., Peredo, A. M., & Chaves, P. (2021). Shaping alternatives to development: Solidarity and reciprocity in the Andes during COVID-19. *World Development*, 139, 105323.

28. Rahman-Shepherd, A., Clift, Ch., Ross, E., Hollmann, L., Mark, N., Wakefield, B., Patel, Ch., & Yates, R. (2021). *Solidarity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Has the world worked together to tackle the coronavirus?*. Chatman House. https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/2021-07-14-solidarity-response-covid-19-pandemic-rahman-shepherd-et-al_0_0.pdf

1.2. Solidarity with social impact

The scientific literature is increasingly considering social support networks as a key element to overcome situations of social exclusion, as well as the social impact of intervention programs based on solidarity during their implementation process.²⁹

Specifically, the European Research Framework Program research project SOLIDUS³⁰ has analyzed the success of solidarity initiatives (in areas such as employment, housing, health, education and citizen participation) and the common elements of these actions that can be transferable to different contexts. These elements that foster solidarity with social impact include:³¹

- 1 Democracy in decision making, involving end users in the planning, design and evaluation of policies.
- 2 Diversity and plurality among technical staff and/or volunteers.
- 3 Transparency and accountability in its internal and external relations.
- 4 Social recognition and credibility (receiving recognition, positive media attention, or public attention for their work).
- 5 Legitimacy of the action through the demonstration of the social and political impact in a visible and sustainable manner over time.
- 6 Extension of solidarity actions, meaning to successfully manage its scale, whether small or large.
- 7 Focus on generating public and institutional awareness of a social issue and potential remedies.
- 8 Creating meaning in participation. Seeing one's own participation as valuable and taking into account all the actors involved in the initiative in order to maintain an ongoing commitment.

29. Matuli-Domadzi, V., Munté-Pascual, A., De Vicente-Zueras, I., & León-Jiménez, S. (2020). "Life Starts for Me Again." The Social Impact of Psychology on Programs for Homeless People: Solidarity Networks for the Effectiveness of Interventions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 3069

30. Soler-Gallart, M. (2015-2018). *SOLIDUS: Solidarity in European societies: empowerment, social justice and citizenship*. Horizon 2020. European Commission. <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/649489>

31. Solidus Consortium. (2018). *Handbook on fostering solidarity. Successful strategies of public-private cooperation in instilling solidarity practices. Guide for social actors and policy makers*. Horizon 2020. European Commission.

1.3. Community participation as key to social intervention

Different research and international organizations have been indicating for years that involving the entire population in public affairs is the key to responding to social needs. Social movements are pressing for a democratic culture that allows people to participate in decisions that directly influence their living conditions.³²

These issues became more evident in the wake of the pandemic³³ and even the World Health Organization itself set as a goal: *“that people-centered and community-led approaches are championed widely - resulting in increased trust and social cohesion, and ultimately a reduction in the negative impacts of COVID-19,”* doing so under the following criteria: a community-led response, grounded in evidence-based community goals, bolstering local capacity and solutions, and strengthening coordination to enhance the response’s effectiveness.³⁴

The European Commission’s Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 specifically recognizes the role of migrant associations as a host community in our societies: *“Migrants are often part of various forms of socialisation in the diaspora communities in the EU Member States. Diaspora can play a critical role to support inclusion in host societies, contribute to investments, innovation and development, while also preserving relationship with countries of origin.”*³⁵

32. Boje, T. P. (2017). Concluding Essay: Social Activism Against Austerity – The Conditions for Participatory and Deliberative Forms of Democracy. *Journal of Civil Society*, 13(3), 349–356.

33. Al Siyabi, H., Al Mukhaini, S., Kanaan, M., Al Hatmi, S., Al Anqoudi, Z., Al Kalbani, A., Al Bahri, Z., Wannous, C. & Al Awaideh, S.T. (2021): Community Participation Approaches for Effective National COVID-19 Pandemic Preparedness and Response: An Experience From Oman. *Frontiers in PublicHealth*, 8:616763

34. Organización Mundial de la Salud [OMS] (2020): *Estrategia global de comunicación de riesgos y participación de la comunidad para la COVID-19, diciembre del 2020 – mayo del 2021: orientaciones provisionales*, 23 de diciembre del 2020. Organización Mundial de la Salud. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/341326>

35. European Commission (2020). *Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*. Brussels

It prioritizes the active participation of migrants and migrant associations in public decision-making and their respective policies and programs (in design, implementation, and evaluation) as a process for their empowerment and as a guarantee that inclusion policies are more effective and reflect real needs.

These priorities are related to the concept of “social capital,” being the collection of potential connections and social interactions that exist within communities in areas like networks, norms, trust, and shared expectations and which facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit.³⁶

For social capital to have more impact, it is required not only strong ties within an organization or community (“bonding social capital”), but also the ability to generate them with other communities (“bridging social capital”), as well as the ability to establish relationships with people, organizations, or institutions that are in more influential positions of power than one’s own (“linking social capital”).³⁷ Social institutions such as associations, churches and neighborhoods are important for the creation, maintenance, and impact of social capital in communities, neighborhoods, and cities. In this sense, migrant organizations, as many studies have shown, increase the resources and capabilities of individual migrants, facilitating their incorporation into the host society.³⁸

36. Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nonetti, R. Y. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.

37. Woolcock, M. (1998). Social Capital and Economic Development: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis and Policy Framework. *Theory and Society*, 27(2), 151-208

38. Álvarez de los Mozos, P. (2013). *Capital social de las asociaciones de inmigrantes. Asociaciones bolivianas, colombianas, ecuatorianas y peruanas en Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid y Valencia* (Vol. 9). Universidad de Deusto.

The members of migrant associations often define themselves as a community. It should be noted that the concept of community has often been reduced to a link to a specific place, although the term community can also refer to a network based on interaction,³⁹ such as migrant associations. A community where its members do not always live in the same neighborhood or town and what unites them is an identity, origin, language, relevance, shared interests and/or social ties, and that is the force that encourages them to mobilize.

The process of building interpersonal relationships is fundamental for social movements to forge shared understandings, commitments, and action⁴⁰. Networks of social relationships and common goals that ties individuals together within communities have great potential for collective action to help achieve public policy objectives, as has been demonstrated during the pandemic.⁴¹ Activating or converting social ties and these relational resources to achieve collective goals generates the so-called “collective efficacy”⁴² and social capital needed to address the social problems to be tackled with a greater likelihood of long-term success.⁴³

39. Räsänen, A., Lein, H., Bird, D., & Setten, G. (2020). Conceptualizing community in disaster risk management. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 45, 101485

40. Ganz, M. (2010). Leading Change. Leadership, Organization, and Social Movements. In N. Khurana & N. Rakesh (Eds.), *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice: A Harvard Business School Centennial Colloquium* (pp. 527–568). Boston: Harvard Business Press

41. Savelli, I., & Morstyn, T. (2021). Better together: Harnessing social relationships in smart energy communities. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 78, 102125

42. Sampson, R. J. (2006). Collective Efficacy Theory: Lessons Learned and Directions for Future Inquiry. In F. T. Cullen, J. P. Wright, & K. R. Blevins (Eds.), *Taking stock: The status of criminological theory* (pp. 149–167). Transaction Publishers.

43. Kaplan, S. D. (2021). Building Relationships, Strengthening Neighborhoods. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 19(4), 40–47

1.4. Leading change through dialogue

There is a growing demand for increased dialogue in decision-making that affects our lives, both as individuals and as a community. The centrality of dialogue in our society⁴⁴ has influenced the de-monopolization of knowledge, that is, making it evident that there are no experts who have all the social and cultural knowledge necessary to make effective proposals for everyone: we can all contribute arguments from our different experiences and cultural resources.⁴⁵

In recent years, the concept of co-production or co-creation, has been increasingly being put forward in more and more areas (economic, business, social, scientific). In the public sector, it refers to the process in which both governments and citizens have the potential to jointly define and create public services through dialogue, emphasizing the participation of citizens in all its phases: planning, design, management, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation. That collective collaboration, allowing people to be active agents, has been a key element of success in public health protection efforts in the COVID-19 crisis,⁴⁶ as it has provided flexibility and responsiveness to neighborhood demands and created better solutions and public value for the entire community.^{47, 48} The lessons learned in the territories where this co-creation took place, and which are transferable to any context, indicate how cooperation, mutual aid, and counting on citizenship at all levels is fundamental for a successful fight against the pandemic, together with digital technologies as tools for this purpose and to improve the effectiveness of crisis management.

44. Flecha, R. (2022). *The Dialogic Society: The sociology scientists and citizens like and use*. Hipatia Press. <https://hipatiapress.com/index/en/2022/12/04/the-dialogic-society-2/>

45. Aubert, A., Flecha, A., García, C., Flecha, R. & Racionero, S. (2008). *El Aprendizaje Dialógico en la Sociedad de la Información*. Barcelona: Hipatia Press

46. Andersen, D., Kirkegaard, S., Toubøl, J., & Carlsen, H. B. (2020). Co-Production of Care during COVID-19. *Contexts*, 19(4), 14–17

47. Zou, Y., & Zhao, W. (2021). Neighbourhood governance during the COVID-19 lockdown in Hangzhou: coproduction based on digital technologies, *Public Management Review*, 24(12), 1914-1932.

48. Ratten, V. (2020). Coronavirus (covid-19) and social value co-creation. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 42 (3/4), 222-231

For decades and in many fields of study, there is ample evidence that demonstrates the potential and effectiveness for social improvement of interventions based on dialogue and interaction with the entire community.^{49, 50} Public policies and social intervention with the greatest social impact incorporate a dialogic perspective in which the protagonism lies with the people themselves. That is:



Incorporating their vision and experience in the definition of the measures to be taken, breaking bureaucratic dynamics and recognizing the capabilities that people have to participate in the transformation of the situation of exclusion they are suffering.⁵¹



Activating a transformation process and making decisions based on its priorities, through a process of open dialogue with the rest of the social agents.⁵²



Including scientific evidence of social impact in the dialogue.⁵³

49. Arnkil, T.E., & Seikkula, J. (2006). *Dialogical meetings in social networks*. London-New York: Karnac.

50. García-Carrión R., López de Aguilera G., Padrós M. & Ramis-Salas, M. (2020) Implications for Social Impact of Dialogic Teaching and Learning. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 11, 140

51. Brown, M., Gómez, A. & Munté, A. (2013). Procesos dialógicos de planificación de los servicios sociales: el proceso de cambio en los barrios de La Milagrosa y La Estrella (Albacete). *Scripta Nova. Revista Electrónica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales*, 2013, vol. 17, num. 427.

52. Munté Pascual, A., & Vicente Zueras, I. D. (2012). El "Sueño de Barrio" ¿Un nuevo modelo de Trabajo Social?. *Revista Katálisis*, 15, 254-261.

53. Flecha, R. (2022).

02. Methodology

The methodological design of the research, with a qualitative data collection and analysis, includes 14 interviews with associations of migrants (one of them, a Federation that brings together 23 associations) and religious communities, 2 interviews with technical managers of the public administration and 1 communicative discussion group with beneficiaries of solidarity actions undertaken during the pandemic by associations of migrants.

The research is based on the communicative methodology, which involves the active involvement and joint reflection of the research subjects throughout the entire research process. In this study, the subjects are treated as part of the research team to ensure that their perspectives and insights are considered, rather than treating them as passive “research objects.” This approach is aimed at producing socially beneficial results and generating scientific knowledge that is relevant to society.⁵⁴ From this perspective, the dialogue established between researchers and participants is fundamental, since it is based on the premise that all people have the capacity for language and action,⁵⁵ recognizing people as social agents of change and placing them on the same epistemological level. In the communicative methodology there are no interpretative hierarchies, enabling equitable participation from researchers and participants in the development of new knowledge.⁵⁶

54. Puigvert, L., Christou, M., & Holford, J. (2012). Critical Communicative Methodology: including vulnerable voices in research through dialogue. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42, 513–526

55. Gómez, A., Puigvert, L., & Flecha, R. (2011). Critical Communicative Methodology: Informing Real Social Transformation Through Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(3), 235–245.

56. Gómez, A., Padrós, M., Ríos, O., Mara, L.-C., & Pukepuka, T. (2019). Reaching Social Impact Through Communicative Methodology. Researching With Rather Than on Vulnerable Populations: The Roma Case. *Frontiers in Education*, 4.

2.1. Participants

On the one hand, the participants in the research belong to associations of migrants or religious communities present in the three territories of the Basque Country. The territorial criteria where they operate, the diversity of countries of origin of the entities and the participation of vulnerable or underrepresented groups have been taken into account. On the other hand, two people in charge of social action and immigration services from two municipalities in the province of Bizkaia who collaborated with associations of migrants in the provision of services took part in this research. Finally, the discussion group was compounded by young people without family references in the Basque Country who were in a situation of residential exclusion during the pandemic and who received support from an association of migrants.

Research participants	
Association Amazigh en Bizkaia - Agharas	Association Guine Vizcaya
Women's development cooperation association Kongovascas FAMEK ELKARTEA	Association Haldi Fotty – Debatimos y acordamos
Association of the Nepali Community of the Basque Country EUSKONEPAL	Association Oodua Progressive Union – Yoruba y amigos de Yoruba en el País Vasco
Immigrant Women's Association "Malen Etxea"	Federation of Immigrants of Bizkaia – FEDAIB
Association of Saharawi Women in the Basque Country – La Liga	Romanian Orthodox Church of Bilbao
Association of foreign professionals of Euskadi – Prestaturik	Technician of the Social Action Area of the City Council of Barakaldo
Association of Senegalese in Bizkaia - Teranga	Technician of the Cooperation, Coexistence and Festivities Area of the Bilbao City Council
Saharawi Diaspora Association in Bizkaia (DISABI)	Group of young migrants without family references in the Basque Country
Folkloric Group Association "Chile Lindo"	

The following criteria were taken into account for the selection of the interviews:

- To have developed rapid, flexible, and effective relief initiatives during the pandemic.
- For entities:
 - To be an association of migrants.
 - To have internal democratic systems in place, such as: distributed leadership, the ability for those affected by an action to decide on it or to participate directly in the organization and decision-making processes of the entity, and the promotion of volunteerism.



2.2. Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants with the following objectives: first, to learn about the solidarity actions developed by migrant organizations in the Basque Country to face the consequences of the pandemic; and second, to identify the common elements that generated a greater impact on social cohesion and the overcoming of social inequalities.

A contrast group made up of migrants was formed for the purpose of developing the scripts and interview questions. They also reviewed and contributed with their expertise to the data collection and analysis, effectively taking part in the entire research process in accordance with the study's communicative orientation, as described above. All the people interviewed also saw versions of this investigation expressing their contributions about it.

An inductive analysis of the data was carried out, with a double dimension of analysis in "exclusionary aspects" (i.e., those barriers that had hindered the associations' attention and intervention on solidarity actions), and "transforming aspects" (those elements that help to overcome or stop social exclusion and discrimination of vulnerable populations) that had been identified in the interventions.

2.3. Ethical aspects

All the research carried out complies with the ethical guidelines of the European Commission (*Ethics Review of the European Commission. FP7, 2013*). Because of this, and in order to protect the participants' right to privacy, the information processing was conducted using these guidelines at all times. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, anonymity, and the voluntary basis of the study. The subjects provided written, informed consent to take part in the research.

03. Results

The primary findings of the analysis show, on the one hand, the identification of obstacles to the planning of solidarity actions and, on the other hand, the transforming aspects that have facilitated an effective response from the associations of migrants, such as:

- a previous experience in providing assistance;
- b new communication channels to organize themselves;
- c the capacity to establish informal networks to act where other institutions cannot reach;
- d the capacity for community mobilization and organization;
- e peer-to-peer support;
- f collaboration with the administration;
- g taking into account the spiritual and religious aspect of the people; and
- h the creation of meaning for participation.

In addition, different social support interventions carried out by the migrant associations were identified, which we classified among the most common types of social support studied:⁵⁷

57. Wills, T.A. (1991). "Social support and interpersonal relationships". In Margaret, Clark. *Prosocial Behavior, Review of Personality and Social Psychology* 12: 265-289.



"informational support": providing useful information or guidance.



"instrumental support": also referred to as tangible support, referring to forms of assistance that are more material or take the shape of services.



"belonging support and emotional support": empathy, concern, affection, trust, acceptance, intimacy, as well as giving a sense of social belonging (e.g., participating in shared activities such as the same collective provision of support that was organized):

Table 1: Types of support provided by the associations of migrants surveyed

Informational social support	Translation of health measures into native languages
	Production of videos in the native languages to explain COVID-19 and provide advice
	Processing of purchase cards and assistance to elderly people in the neighborhoods
	Sending information and advice to the countries of origin
	Search for and facilitation of housing solutions
	Employment counseling
	Guidance for online procedures and documentation renewal through the internet

Instrumental social support	Food and clothing delivery
	Raising money to pay for repatriation of deceased persons
	Sending money to the countries of origin
	Purchase, manufacture, and distribution of masks among the community and to the general population
	Purchase of SIM cards to facilitate Internet access
	Cancellation of membership fees for associations' members
Belonging social support and social and emotional support	Liaison between people in need of help and agencies providing assistance
	Accompaniment of young people living on the street (*through this accompaniment, other types of social support were also provided that fall into the other categories: Spanish classes, cultural activities, translation of documentation, etc.).
	Phone calls (for personal support, to identify needs, etc.) to the people from their own community.
	Accompaniment for victims of gender violence
	Virtual classes for children in their mother tongues or languages spoken in their communities
	Facilitation of worship services and spiritual support

Here below, the results will be presented in depth, emphasizing how the members of the associations have made their knowledge available and mobilized their contacts or resources to provide this support out of their good will, even adding their own money to finance the expenses and frequently carrying out this work after long hours of work (as essential workers).

3.1. Barriers to organizing solidarity actions

The management of volunteers and the organization of activities to be taken initially proved to be one of the key challenges, for a variety of reasons, including coping with the uncertainty and fear of contracting the virus, being unable to move, or worrying that the police would arrest them.

Due to the extremely high demand for assistance, another challenge encountered was the difficulty to respond to every demand. This was compounded by the fact that the administration was less focused on the issue, which had an impact on both the participants in the groups and the individuals in need, who turned to their points of reference:

"If you needed something that used to take a month, in that time it took three, four, five months... the deadlines were greatly extended and the form of information was getting out of hand... everything became obsolete. In a week everything became obsolete."

(Association 2)

In addition to this face-to-face closure of many public services and changing guidelines and information, the digital divide that many people experience further impacted them, increasing the demand for assistance and hindering the capacity for guidance and accompaniment as all procedures became online.

Another barrier to act was the economic fragility of many of the members of the associations (many people had become unemployed, or in very precarious situations), which in turn reduced the economic capacity of the organizations to respond to their needs (in addition to the difficulty of managing the collection of money when donations were organized).

"There were people who were afraid of not knowing how things are going to happen, how to deal with the uncertainty, fear of losing their job, fear of how to survive in the new situation, how to support people who have had it worse than us."

(Association 13)

It is indicated that this economic factor generated more inequality and created an associative gap between the entities with economic capacity—and which also had institutional support—and those that did not, which

had to make great efforts to continue their work, as was the case of most associations of migrants.

Furthermore, as a result of border closure, relations with institutions and countries of origin became more complicated or virtually non-existent. In consequence, migrant associations felt helpless to manage the repatriation of deceased persons or to carry out cooperative actions. This created yet another organizational challenge:

"It's not an easy situation to send anything. It is not easy to send money. In the pandemic we had collected a lot of things: shoes, medicines, diapers, and much more... We still have some, but we can't send. We could only send by ship and the ship was stopped and we had to send things. It was very difficult to send [...]. We also need to have a place to keep things, to have things ready when we can send them or when someone comes."

(Association 8)

Finally, on some occasions, another excluding factor for the organization of solidarity actions were prejudices, such as seeing migrants as people who only receive aid, thus nullifying their capacity for agency (i.e., the resources that each person has to develop their potential and to decide and act for their own lives):

"Here as they see you are African, they already tell you who you are, and what capacity you have, what possibility you have, because in any office you enter when people are working, they ask you: 'Are you receiving aid? Do you understand? That's not the word, before you ask, you have to know what it is, before anything else, right?'"

(Association 7)

These situations of discrimination and racism were also suffered directly by homeless people:

"When you live on the street, people also look at you badly, you are there and they are biased, they look at you badly, because you do not have clean clothes. It's not because you don't want to, it is because you can't and all of that. You cannot get to know anybody, you are unable to learn anything at all. You can meet all kinds of people and it is more likely that something worse will happen to you. If you are on the street, you

don't find support, help, someone to talk to... It's a path that pushes you to having bad thoughts, you will start having negative thoughts and things like that. Being on the street, raining, you don't have dinner, you go out to get dinner, you get wet. We slept in the fronton down here and the police wakes you up at six o'clock, they tell you people want to play sports. They tell you to get up at six in the morning and what do you do, walk around, you get bored and start walking around and that is it, all day long. Because also during the first four months you cannot register in the municipal census to sign up for any courses or anything."

"And if you have, it is all closed. With the courses people start distance-learning programs, if I am on the street, how am I going to study remotely? If I do not have enough to eat and you have to have a computer, internet..."

"We don't have Wi-Fi here either."

(Discussion group 1)

In the face of many of these obstacles, the great effort and dedication of the members of the associations stands out, often going beyond their own personal and family situation, dedicating many hours, calling and going to many places and mobilizing all possible contacts, as we will see below with the transforming factors that made it possible to carry out solidarity actions.

3.2. Alternative communication channels for organizing

The primary avenues of communication and linking of these associations were likewise diminished as a result of the social distance. Many members' spirits were affected by the lack of face-to-face interaction, but they made an effort to compensate, primarily through WhatsApp groups (which served as the associations' primary means of group communication), as well as through phone and video calls, in order to maintain contact with people in the community. They offered people not only a place to turn to for support and advice when they were feeling down, but also to ask for assistance and express needs, creating this way spaces for self-organization and self-management among the association's members.

"We started to call every day. We have two WhatsApp groups, we have around 300 people. From there we would take a number, call or write and start: 'How are you?', 'How are you doing?', 'How is your family?'. Hereby, we started to find out if they had any problems or difficulties. And, at the same time, there were people who wrote to us saying that if there are people who need something, we are ready to help. In this wise we have maintained the relationship with each other."

(Association 15)

Even if not everyone had access to these communication tools or knew how to use them, the most common applications were explored and a lot of effort was made among the members to assist one another. These communication methods were mostly utilized for internal communication, to strengthen any connections that would be harmed by inability to meet in person, and to plan support activities. External communication or attempting to gain media traction was not pursued (nor were they called), and it was not a top priority for these organizations:

"We never stop working. We are not in the news, we are not on TV, we don't make noise. Our social impact is real, because we were working behind closed doors every day of the confinement."

(Association 9)



3.3. Impact of previous experience on the ability to provide help

One of the main keys in the organizational response of the associations of migrants is that many of them were already carrying out social or solidarity actions towards their community. The effort was focused on adapting the actions to a new scenario with confinements, social distancing, infections, etc.; prioritizing and reinforcing the actions of reception and coverage of basic needs. Other organizations carried out new initiatives, radically different from their usual ones, but they all emphasize that the learning and previous experience of networking with other organizations and institutions, having worked together and having established relationships of trust, made it possible to respond jointly and quickly to problems as they arose, optimizing and leaving resources to each other. Along the same lines, another element mentioned by some entities was having previously participated in associative strengthening programs:

"We get a lot of help from there, I mean tools, learning tools. You learn something and then you incorporate it into your work method, and then it continues. It has been easier for us to organize ourselves internally, having received these workshops to strengthen the association. And to have subjected the association to this dynamic from the beginning. If everything was coordinated or not. It was also to see the association, like opening the hood. To see if all the mechanisms of the association are coordinated, if everything is going well or not."

(Association 1)

It is emphasized that, despite being an unpredictable scenario, the ways of intervening were not so uncertain, since what had been learned and worked on previously was implemented and applied. The emergency situation made emerge the knowledge, model of work, and collaboration that had been internalized:

"When we unexpectedly found ourselves in the pandemic, we started to construct a much more fluid communication thanks to the prior work we had done, which was a mini-network between the institution and the associations. I believe this occurred because it has already been worked on; if you haven't worked on it, this catches you even worse."

(Technician in social intervention 1)

"We can mark different moments: before, during, and after. Before, there was in fact a work already done, a point of reference, of dialogue and exchange and therefore a mutual recognition and trust generated. That was what allowed us to have a certain ease when asking for their collaboration and for them to have the feeling that we did not simply turn to them in an emergency situation, of need, to solve a problem immediately, because they had already been taken into account beforehand. During, I also understand that, as acknowledged social agents, they felt legitimized at the time of entering into this type of public resources, and this type of intervention was structured and integrated into a program that was already being developed before. And then, the after, it is also important as when the hardest health emergency ends and people are deconfined, therefore the sports centers are emptied and those people leave, the people served are not left on the street again, nor is all that previous collaboration abruptly forgotten, because in the during we also took advantage of all that time, to make a diagnosis of the situation of these people: to ask them, for their own situations, their interests and their subsequent needs."

(Technician in social intervention 2)

At the same time, it is also highlighted how the previous experience and the attitude of overcoming, both collectively and individually, provided by the migratory process itself, the conflictive situations or poverty in the countries of origin and having to face other crises in our society have allowed them to build networks of mutual help and a much greater capacity to overcome:

"Since the 1970s, our peoples had lived through poverty, famine, discrimination, wars... For example, if it wasn't war, we wouldn't come here to meet our needs and implement actions of solidarity and aid, so it wasn't the first time we did this type of action. For us, the pandemic is a crisis like the others. We have prepared everything to fight the pandemic and that is thanks to our previous experiences and the fact that we are here. And with the help of other agencies we have been able to maintain our community well."

(Association 3)

3.4. Acting where the administrations or other organizations do not reach

One of the elements that came up most frequently in the interviews was the ability to reach people who otherwise would not have received help, or would have received it quite late. The associations of migrants thus fulfilled a fundamental social task, firstly by not asking for requirements to provide support, and secondly by creating informal networks, which made it easier to know better who needed help (not only for first needs, but also for accompaniment):

"Without us, help would not have reached people because generally people in need don't know anything or anyone here, if they are not integrated into an immigrant unit."

(Association 3)

"The government looks at all ways to help everyone. We come in when the government fails you, we support you, so you don't feel abandoned. [...] Knowing people, as in our case, helps, because if you don't know what's wrong with a person, you can't help them. You have to know, simply holding someone's paperwork won't enable the government to know them, but knowing the person, seeing the reality, what they have, and knowing this, is important."

(Association 6)

"It would not have been possible to reach so many people. It seems unbelievable, but the small associations do the hard work, a lot of people wouldn't get where they need to go to ask for help if it weren't for the small associations. The small associations orient and inform people well, it's all closer."

(Association 11)

They played a vital part in leaving no one behind thanks to proximity, trust, the development of social interactions, agility, and horizontality, among other factors:

"The associations of migrants have a part of street work that large organizations do not have. We always think like that. There is a work that is done before, there is a reception or there is a part where the big organizations do not reach, and this is the street."

(Association 12)

"The most important help has come from people in our area, especially from the associations, because we have no family here. They had the courage to show us the right path and give us training. The help is not just about providing food or buying me something. If you give me training, that is the most important thing. They also help us in the housing part, because we were living on the street before."

(Focus group 1)



3.5. Capacity for community mobilization and organization

The interventions carried out point to the possibility of a quicker, less formalized response. A need arises and an immediate solution is sought, coordinating as quickly as possible with other organizations and adapting to emerging regulations and indications. The associations of migrants are aware of their limited capacity for intervention; yet, making assistance accessible to someone in need was an essential element in providing help:

"The associations are sometimes very attentive to each other, because we know each other. We know each other and each one of us knows the task we are doing at our destination. So there we know who we have to call if there is a problem."

(Association 10)

During the pandemic, preexisting collaboration between groups was strengthened and consolidated, and sentiments of solidarity were also fostered among them:

"The associations of the Federation were all in contact. We knew what everyone was doing and what were their needs. In other words, we did not create more networks because we had the Federation, which in turn has more networks outside. But we have had the links for a long time."

(Association 2).

The contribution that migrants made to the groups and organizations in the destination areas, given their background and expertise, is also mentioned. When it comes to grassroots activism, community organization, and utilizing the full diversity, plurality, and capacity of the community, such contribution is extremely pertinent. This was pointed out by one of the associations:

"This society has a history of grouping together to achieve political or sports objectives, it has a very great capacity for organization, but it does not have a grassroots experience in the area of social action. And we have contributed with what our respective nations have to offer. For better or worse, this includes our knowledge of things like the need to gather with neighbors to request water, etc. Nothing comes to us from the institutions, we are used to finding solutions in community and I believe that this is what we contributed during the crisis to the organizations here, the community work."

(Association 14)

3.6. Peer-to-peer support

Horizontal forms of organization and grassroots structures generated the potential for self-organization, rapid mobilization, high adaptability, and local (or community) knowledge of what was needed at any given moment:

"Solidarity developed from people at risk of social exclusion is important, because they bring new ideas, because they see things from their perspective."

(Association 9)

"That value is particularly great, because, for example, if you have your food for today, tomorrow and the day after; you see someone who does not have even for today, sharing is a good thing and no good thing is denied. Today or tomorrow, it will come back to you. It's like if you throw a ball at the wall, it comes back to you. That's the mindset we want: making sacrifices now is necessary to achieve a better future."

(Association 10)

The number of instances highlighted by the associations where people in need of assistance helped others is pertinent. It is also important to consider how the establishment of this supportive environment spread and how the associations themselves benefited from these acts of solidarity:

"The truth is that the women of the association themselves also had this need. There are some colleagues who were not working, others were on sick leave, but we said that first we have to help others. The women who help also have their own economic problems, their family, most of them had children, but it was like forgetting oneself and thinking about the others."

(Association 13)

These acts of solidarity prompted people to consider those who were even more in need, not just in their own neighborhood or community of origin, but also in other contexts (coworkers, roommates, neighbors, etc.). In these cases, the associations also took action. There are numerous instances of people reporting the dire circumstances of other people, or even giving up on getting assistance so that these people could be taken care of:

"When I offered to help them, they said they knew a couple who were worse off than them, so I said, let's double the help."

(Association 2)

"When I took the contacts and called those people and those people needing help, they have provided us with the contacts of other people, it is also a help. Being in a complicated situation and thinking for another person, imagine, it is a help, it is a great help."

(Association 5)

The associations of migrants did not limit themselves to offering support to people in their own community, but also to people outside their usual network of links. At the same time, a large number of association members separately joined networks of civic solidarity in their cities, districts, or neighborhoods:

"In the end, it doesn't matter if a person from here gets infected, we are going to meet that person someday, so as much as we could, we wanted to distribute [masks] and protect everyone."

(Association 5)

"Maybe it also had something to do with it, seeing that your association is mobilizing, I also have to do something... That contagion [to help]. Since I'm here, I'm joining this other association. That spirit of solidarity was activated a bit, to mobilize more."

(Association 1)

The development and promotion of role models among peers who have previously experienced the same difficulties, exclusion, or discrimination and have been able to overcome it while also organizing collectively and leading solidarity actions are noteworthy:

"The truth is that psychologically we try to explain to those who have just arrived: 'This person who is helping also needs help. This one arrived a couple of days before you and he is already helping. I mean it also helps things go a little better. 'Tomorrow you'll be like that one, who can already walk.'"

(Association 1)

"We created the immigrant associations so that the people who come here do not go through what we have gone through. So that's for sure. I have slept on a bench, I have slept under a bridge... but I want whoever arrives to know that I am here so that they may speak with me in confidence and I can take them anywhere they can be offered something."

(Association 12)



"We have learned that the person alone is nothing, in this world people have to collaborate with people no matter what. We also learned that when a person has the desire to do, they will have people who also have the desire to help you do what you want to do."

(Association 7)

3.7. Collaboration with the administration

The crisis also made it possible to accelerate or initiate a partnership between social organizations and the public sector, with a focus on satisfying people's needs. It is even considered to be a collaborative innovation built on solidarity that might change the public management model:

"Then we clearly saw that more than ever we needed the community [...]. Somehow the associations themselves were telling us 'hey, I offer this, how can we do it', and the other way around, we had a case 'ay, well I'm going to call the Congo association, I have someone who tells me... see if they can help me', suddenly, was public-private collaboration necessary? Something that is intrinsic to our work, but somehow the pandemic said, one way or another. And so, all the time it kind of changed the focus. It was 'I have this demand, I'm going to see what this association is doing...', and the other way around, suddenly associations were also contacting us. We became a much more accessible public administration."

(Technician in social intervention 1)

Despite the initiation of these deeper collaborations, it is also mentioned that the opportunity to change some services was sometimes linked only to the most complex moments of the pandemic, i.e. to a specific need at a specific moment and not as a structural system change. On the other hand, some entities also state that this collaboration did not always take place; among other things, they allude to a lack of information to channel aid from the administrations, lack of solutions or response to precarious situations of overcrowding in housing (with its corresponding risk to health) as well as the lack of a joint and close working approach.

3.8. Spiritual and religious dimension

The consideration of a person's religious and spiritual needs, and hence the social intervention itself, was another issue that was addressed. In the scenario below, Muslim communities themselves worked together to welcome homeless persons in sports facilities throughout the month of Ramadan, providing guidance and assistance both spiritually and in the dissemination of health recommendations:

"It was a coincidence that the month of Ramadan fell during the hardest confinement, with all that this implies in many ways. Taking advantage of the contact, the trust, the mutual recognition that the local administration and the religious confessions [in this case, Muslim representatives in the Table of participation of religious diversity] have for each other, we opened this debate and we thought together how we can collaborate to address this situation [...] The result, in my assessment, was exceptional in the sense that despite all the difficulties of confinement, of fasting [...] the atmosphere was peaceful, calm, there was no serious conflict of any kind, even certain outbreaks of conflict or confrontation that unfortunately were seen in the media at the beginning of the confinement period, disappeared at that time. That is to say that we consider that the work, the contribution that the religious confessions had in this joint work, coordinated with mutual contributions, had a very positive impact on this type of management."
(Technician in social intervention 2)

Other communities and members of religious denominations, structured in worship centers or through the same migrant associations, organized themselves to overcome the difficulties imposed by social distancing and also to address these spiritual needs:

"The hardest thing was Easter because for us it is the most important feast of the whole year. [...] Since there was no possibility for people to participate in the mass, we started looking for a way to do it. The solution was through a telephone, through Facebook. We have transmitted, I don't know how much... a year, I think? [...] We have learned to value the communion among us. We are all important and we have to look for each other."
(Association 15)

3.9. Solidarity as a creator of meaning for the future of the associations

As the crisis dragged on, the associations noted some signs of participation fatigue and a decline in volunteerism. Among other factors, they noted a greater loss of jobs, one year after the start of the pandemic, and a more pronounced economic crisis for their members. Despite these challenges, however, initiating solidarity actions demonstrated that the organization itself could be helpful in crisis situations in addition to the activities it had been doing up until that point, which improved social cohesion and a sense of belonging within the associations.

"The first thing that has been learned within the associations has been online work. There were people who didn't even know how to connect to have a meeting. And then we are prepared to organize ourselves quickly. People know that if a problem arises, we can call each other or someone can directly ask for an online meeting, we talk quickly and look for solutions. I think we are prepared to do a lot of things."

(Association 12)

In addition to what has been accomplished and learned, the associations of migrants acknowledge the persistence of the actions initiated during the pandemic's most difficult times. For instance, these include providing solutions to issues like homelessness or attempting to address the educational disparities brought on by school closures. The tasks of raising awareness and denouncing situations of vulnerability are mentioned as some of the main challenges to be undertaken, since most of the efforts were devoted to covering basic needs.

Moreover, the importance of continuing to support the development and strengthening of networks of solidarity and security is also recognized. In short, the importance of recognizing the organization and the activities done, as well as of learning from them, and of being prepared for any circumstance that may arise in the future:



"I think it all adds up, it can be done in many ways, all that goodwill has contributed something. There are some women who keep calling to chat, to vent their frustration over the issue of gender violence accompaniment. It is a satisfaction because you have been able to help or support other people and we have received a positive return from the people who are satisfied with our help. All this sum of wills has value [...] When you face a difficult situation, from there you get to know your capabilities. We are still trying to fight by highlighting the value of the richness of diversity. No one is safe, we should not lock ourselves up in bad ideas, racism, rumors. We always have to be prepared, this solidarity is maintained among us and we will continue to do so."

(Association 13).

"We are all more prepared, at least we know where to meet and with whom to meet, we no longer have to go looking for each other, we know who and where they are, and what each one can do. The local organizations have observed how communities can function in settings like ours, they have had the opportunity to see how communities work in practice, and this has taught them that their next collaboration with us will be different."

(Association 14).

04.

Discussion of the results

4.1. The value of self-organized solidarity networks

One of the important lessons learned from the emergence of COVID-19 is that solidarity networks, self-organized by citizens and especially by the most invisible groups, are an essential service in our society.⁵⁸ They know their local communities and have the ability to adapt quickly to unforeseen events and difficulties,⁵⁹ making the resources they can mobilize (which are those of their participants: time, skills and effort) more valuable and giving them more leverage to achieve their objectives. This enhances their strategic capability despite the magnitude of the challenge they have had to face.⁶⁰ The actions examined indicate a potential for a further quick-witted and non-bureaucratic responses on the side of migrant associations. When a need materializes, an urgent solution is found while coordinating with other organizations as swiftly as possible, and adapting to the regulations and indications that emerge.

Welcoming, assisting, and connecting newcomers with other groups and with existing public resources, and even collaborating directly with institutions, are daily functions carried out by these entities.

58. Álvarez-Jiménez, G., & Padrós-Cuxart, M. (2017). How Solidarity Influences Political Actors to Manage the Refugee Crisis: the Case of Proactiva Open Arms. *International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(2), 215–229.

59. Jamieson, L., & van Blerk, L. (2021). Responding to COVID-19 in South Africa – social solidarity and social assistance. *Children's Geographies*, 1–10.

60. Ganz, M. (2009). *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mutual aid has the value of providing basic survival needs to people who, for various reasons, fall outside the traditional shelter response, since the members of these groups are both helpers and receivers and can therefore identify in a practical way the basic needs of the populations for whom they are fighting.⁶¹

Trust and shared values increase feelings of self-esteem and security within and among communities, which has been reflected in altruistic behavior, placing what is good for others above what is good for oneself.⁶² As we have seen and as the evidence demonstrates, people from more vulnerable groups find meaning in participation when they are able to improve their lives and give back to their communities.⁶³

These facts cast doubt on several studies that correlate the ability to provide help, volunteer more often, and make financial donations, with people with higher incomes, education levels, or employment positions.⁶⁴

This study demonstrates that a wide spectrum of people, including those without academic background and/or in extremely precarious economic, employment, and social situations, including those in situations of poverty or at risk of social exclusion, have demonstrated solidarity. Such solidarity was not exclusively tied to practical support, but also financial. The embracing, bringing together, organizing, and mobilization of this concern, willingness, and offer has been made possible in large part by migrant associations.

61. Chevéé, A. (2021). Mutual Aid in north London during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Social Movement Studies*, 1–7

62. Igwe, P. A., Ochinarwata, C., Ochinarwata, N., Adeyeye, J. O., Ikpor, I. M., Nwakpu, S. E., Egbo, O. P., Onyishi, I. E., Vincent, O., Nwekpa, K. C., Nwakpu, K. O., Adeoye, A. A., Odika, P. O., Fakah, H., Ogunnaike, O. O., & Umemezia, E. I. (2020). Solidarity and social behaviour: how did this help communities to manage COVID-19 pandemic? *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 40 (9/10), 1183-1200

63. Tellado, I. (2017). Bridges between individuals and communities: dialogic participation fueling meaningful social engagement. *Research on Ageing and Social Policy*, 5(1), 8–31.

64. Bertogg, A., & Koos, S. (2021). Socio-economic position and local solidarity in times of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of informal helping arrangements in Germany. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 74, 100612



Ensuring the identification of needs among social intervention professionals, other service professionals, community agents, and solidarity networks through a coordinated effort has tremendous transformative potential in providing crucial support to those who are most in need.⁶⁵

The COVID-19 crisis has led to partnerships between social organizations and the public sector. This collaborative innovation is built on solidarity and has the potential to create a new system of public management. As we have seen, recent literature suggests that the key to a successful collaboration between the public sector, citizens, and the third sector lies in the establishment of a strong relationship based on co-creation, commitment, shared responsibility, cross-sector support and collaboration, institutional trust, efficient social policies, as well as the inclusion of the voices and participation of all stakeholders.⁶⁶

Therefore, the public sector should seek ways of incorporating migrant associations and groups not only in specific moments such as when emergencies or crises need to be managed, but also in the creation of public policies and in day-to-day social action. Through dialogic collaboration, mutual knowledge and potential can be better utilized, resulting in more effective social intervention.

65. Redondo-Sama, G., Matulic, V., Munté-Pascual, A., & de Vicente, I. (2020). Social Work during the COVID-19 Crisis: Responding to Urgent Social Needs. *Sustainability*, 12(20), 8595.

66. Enciso-Santocildes, M., Vidu, A., & Gómez-Urquijo, L. (2020). Drivers for a cross-sector successful collaboration: the Basque country model of action. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 47(2), 268–284.

4.2. Spirituality in action

In the interviews conducted with various groups of migrants, religion and beliefs were acknowledged as an essential aspect of people. The data collected suggests that this dimension can be categorized into two parts:

- a the provision of services by religious organizations or those inspired by religion; and
- b the implementation of solidarity actions that consider the spiritual aspect of the individuals they assist.

In the first axis, we see how religious organizations serve as points of reference for people seeking physical, social, emotional, and spiritual care in an emergency situation.⁶⁷ They thus become fundamental institutions because of the role they play in many communities, especially in the face of serious events, as we have seen in this research:



they are one of the first places where many people seek help and protection;



they have the trust of their members: the messages they disseminate tend to be more widely accepted, and the people affected are more willing to share about their problems; and



they have informal networks that allow them to respond more quickly.

In line with the scientific literature, this potential can be strengthened to the extent that public institutions rely on these organizations, both in training and in the prevention and joint planning of the response to social needs.⁶⁸

67. Farrag, H., Loskota, B., & Flory, R. (2012). *Faithful action: working with religious groups in disaster planning, response, and recovery*. Center for Religion and Civic Culture, University of Southern California

68. Sheikhi, R. A., Seyedin, H., Qanizadeh, G., & Jahangiri, K. (2020). Role of Religious Institutions in Disaster Risk Management: A Systematic Review. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 1–16

Regarding the second axis, caring for people (and especially in exceptional circumstances like those experienced during the pandemic), involves taking into account their potential religious and spiritual needs; this is a reality that cannot be disregarded. This was addressed in the confinement of homeless youth in sports facilities, and other religious groups likewise ensured this spiritual accompaniment and addressed this dimension. Thus, owing to its importance in many people's lives and the fact that it is a fundamental element of their identity, integrating people's spirituality and religion into the practice of social action becomes essential.⁶⁹ For this, knowledge, values, and skills to address spiritual and religious diversity are fundamental, both in direct practice and in the design and planning of solidarity and social action, as a guarantee to make it more inclusive and effective.⁷⁰ That spiritually sensitive practice is not simply a matter of discussing religion or spirituality with the people being served; it is a way of being and relating in all aspects and settings of helping, and throughout the entire process of social intervention.⁷¹ For years, international social action organizations and academic research have proposed indicators for spiritual competence and evaluation in this field, and it would be opportune to deepen in future research the development of these in the field of solidarity and social intervention together with the role of migrant organizations.

69. Cole, H. L. (2020). Intersecting Social Work Practice, Education, and Spirituality: A Conceptual Model. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 40(1), 68–91

70. Crisp, B.R. (Ed.) (2017). *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Spirituality and Social Work*, Routledge, London

71. Canda, E. R., Furman, L. D., & Canda, H. (2020). *Spiritual diversity in social work practice: The heart of helping* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

4.3. Organizations that prepare the future

A key component of the ability to respond to emergencies or unforeseen crises is the participation in associative strengthening programs⁷² aimed at establishing or enhancing the “bridging and linking social capital” of migrants’ associations and a democratic and dialogic leadership of the migrants themselves. In this regard, the networking that had already been initiated with other associations of migrants and other social entities is highlighted.

Many of the entities interviewed were born as informal collectives, focused on supporting their community in different aspects and often with a mainly cultural approach. Currently, and regardless of the size of the associations, there is a development towards a clear commitment to democratic functioning and more diversified lines of action, with a focus on access to and defense of the rights of migrants, with special attention to the most excluded groups (both in the host countries and in the countries of origin). This has enabled them, albeit with limitations, to be better prepared for such an extraordinary and unexpected situation as that experienced with the pandemic. In this context, the COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the development of the “linking social capital” of migrant organizations, offering, as Marshall Ganz describes: *“the possibility that people can find ways to engage with each other in learning, discernment, and commitment to create collective resources, articulate collective interests, and take collective action.”*⁷³

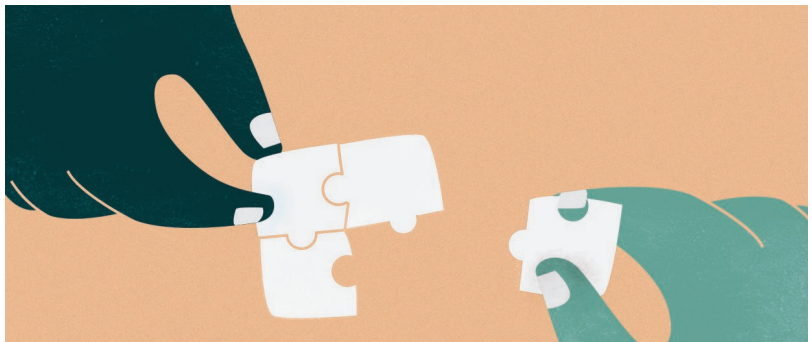
72. Bilbao Urkidi, S. (2013). La participación en el ámbito local como modelo de construcción de la nueva sociedad. *Migraciones. Publicación Del Instituto Universitario De Estudios Sobre Migraciones*, (32), 203-213

73. Ganz, M. (2021). The Role of Leadership in Cultivating Collective Democratic Voice. *The American Prospect*. <https://prospect.org/politics/role-of-leadership-cultivating-collective-democratic-voice/>

Along these lines, we believe that this solidarity work that has been carried out, which has involved a greater mobilization of members, resources, and efforts, should be shared with other entities so that it does not remain a one-off or particular experience with no further impact. Particularly, it would be important to exchange knowledge gained, identify gaps or areas for growth, and learn about other effective, transferrable evidence-based methods. Regardless of how big or little the organization is, developing these relationships and learnings (which is sort of a means to plan or anticipate unforeseen circumstances in the future) can have a big impact on the ability to address the social needs of the communities.

The pandemic has demonstrated the ability of migrant associations to self-manage organizational actions and to assist others. This was not by chance; it was made possible by the social work, the relationships among entities, and the association-building efforts that had started before the pandemic.

For this social action to have an even greater impact in the future, strengthening the community participation mechanisms that have been created is necessary, as well as consolidating these networks and new ways of acting, and developing the capacities of all stakeholders to help communities respond to different challenges and social threats.



05.

Conclusions

Research on solidarity actions developed during the crisis has mainly focused on the study of place-based communities, i.e. those that share a specific geographical location (neighborhoods, districts, villages); on self-managed organizations that have emerged through information technologies; and/or on population profiles with an academic background or high average social status. In turn, migrants or groups in vulnerable situations are only considered as recipients of solidarity and not as active agents in organizing and providing it. This study has demonstrated the ability of migrant organizations to lead and inspire solidarity actions during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also highlighted the significance of these organizations' social capital and their community organization, which is based on interactions rather than being overly tied to a particular location.

The main exclusionary factors in the organization of the solidarity response have been the restriction of mobility and elimination of face-to-face interaction, the precariousness of their own resources (lack of own premises, very small or almost non-existent budget, etc.), the digital divide that affected many people along with having to complete any procedure exclusively online, the changing indications and confusion in the information and calls for aid, the growing need for basic necessities among the most vulnerable, the closure or reduction of public services, the economic vulnerability of many of its members, and the discrimination experienced.

Thanks to earlier experience and work done in establishing informal or formal networks with organizations, collectives, and institutions of all kinds prior to the epidemic, the changing components have evidenced the development in launching solidarity actions. The COVID-19 social and health crisis serves as a stark reminder of the necessity of being prepared to respond to any major threat or emergency by promptly mobilizing skills and resources, as well as the willingness to become informed, educated, and skilled in them. To this is added the capacity for organizational adaptability and the capability to act immediately in the face of any need, mobilizing resources and people, digital communication channels through

mobile messaging to avoid losing contact and promote self-management, peer-to-peer help and in-depth knowledge of the community itself, as well as the propensity to act outside the network and community of origin or belonging.

The solidarity interventions analyzed demonstrate that many people would not have received assistance from any other institution or organization despite their need for it, which is extremely valuable to society. Also, some associations have incorporated people in situations of extreme vulnerability during the pandemic as members of their organization or spearheading solidarity actions, being now referents for other people in the same situation. Additionally, it has been noted that many people in need have turned down assistance or referred it to those who needed it even more (other members of the entity, family members, acquaintances, or neighbors who did belong to their community etc.).

Despite the limitations described above, the COVID-19 crisis has opened up new opportunities and ways of working in collaboration with the political and institutional spheres of power. It is relevant to note the recognition by some entities of the experience acquired through their participation in associative strengthening programs for the development of bridging and linking social capital, which has helped them act more effectively in this emergency. Strengthening programs should place a strong emphasis on the advocacy capacity of migrant groups to play a relevant, stable, or structural role in the co-creation of services and public policies in all areas. This will help enhance this response capacity and advance the creation of linking social capital.

In contributing to the improvement of public management and social intervention, it has become evident how “informal” citizen networks or organized citizens need social action services, and social action services need citizens. In this way, together, it is possible to reach more people in a better way and to act with more professionalism and rigor.

This research highlights the significance of not only relying on the community and the affected people to create and decide the components of the intervention that concern them, but also of incorporating a dialogic approach in these interventions. It is of outstanding importance to move towards a dialogic model of social intervention in which the entire process and decision-making is democratized, transparency is generated, more diversity is incorporated, and the focus is on social transformation and the creation of meaning for all.



Solidarity networks that overcome social distances

The response of migrant associations to the COVID-19 crisis



Migrant associations played an active role in citizen mobilization in the COVID-19 pandemic, **offering social support in the face of inequalities and confinements** by



Creating **new patterns of mutual aid**.



Contributing **to transforming social intervention** and public management.

Results

What enabled migrant associations to **effectively respond and organize solidarity actions**?

01 New ways to communicate



- Mutual aid to break the digital divide;
- New spaces for relationships and self-organization;

02 Previous experience



- Track record in social support actions and partnerships built prior to the pandemic;
- Participation in associative strengthening programs;
- Attitude of overcoming due to the experience/suffering of migration processes (origin, transit and destination);

03 Acting where others do not reach

- Ability to create informal networks;
- Proximity and horizontality: these make it easier to know who needs help;
- Extend coverage to individuals who are not typically accommodated in traditional shelters;

02 Community mobilization and peer-to-peer support

- Close relationship with the community and expanding beyond one's own network;
- Promotion of peer referrals;
- Swift response and capacity to adapt quickly to unforeseen events;

05 Collaboration with the administration



- Egalitarian dialogue with social services and the administration;
- Collaboration with the public sector and other social organizations enabled broader outreach and a more professional, inclusive, and efficient response from all involved parties;

06 Religious dimension



- Religious organizations as trusted points of reference for assistance and protection;
- People's spiritual needs were taken into account;

07 Creating meaning



- The mobilization of associations resulted in an enhancement of their social cohesion and sense of relevance;
- Improving one's own life and contributing to the community gave a renewed sense of purpose to their participation;

Conclusions

The community organization of migrant associations during the COVID-19 emergency **has demonstrated their agency to contribute to social change**



Leading the change

- The solidarity initiatives undertaken by migrant people and their organizations demonstrated their capacity for leadership



Activating self-organized networks

- It is based on self-management, mutual aid, and knowledge of the community itself
- Leadership and the active role of the most vulnerable people are enhanced



Relying on the community

- Networks of social relationships have great potential for collective action that can help achieve public policy objectives

The periods of confinement have highlighted the need for increased **collaboration** between different sectors and communities. **However, such collaboration should not be limited to crisis situations.** To ensure long-term success, it should be based on a number of factors, such as

01

Recognition of the advocacy **capacity of migrant associations**

- Strengthening the orientation of the entities towards the struggle and defense of rights
- Reinforcing inter-associative solidarity
- Consolidating collaboration with other agents

02

Dialogic orientation in social intervention

- Incorporating the vision and experience of the people involved in the initiatives to be taken
- Decision-making based on their priorities and through a process of egalitarian dialogue with the rest of the social agents

03

Community participation in public management

- Co-creation: based on evidence, administration and citizens define, create, manage, and evaluate together:
- Improves the quality of services
- Generates better solutions and more efficient social policies
- Creates value and meaning for all

