



Migrants' Perspectives: Building Trust in Humanitarian Action

Briefing Paper 1: Key Indicators of Competence, Fairness, Integrity, and Inclusion

► Executive summary

Given the vulnerabilities and risks many migrants face throughout their journeys, it is vital that humanitarian organisations are trusted to provide support when needed. Migrants' trust in humanitarian organisations is shaped by demographic factors such as disability, age, and legal status, as well as contextual factors – including migrants' histories of seeking and accessing humanitarian assistance and protection.

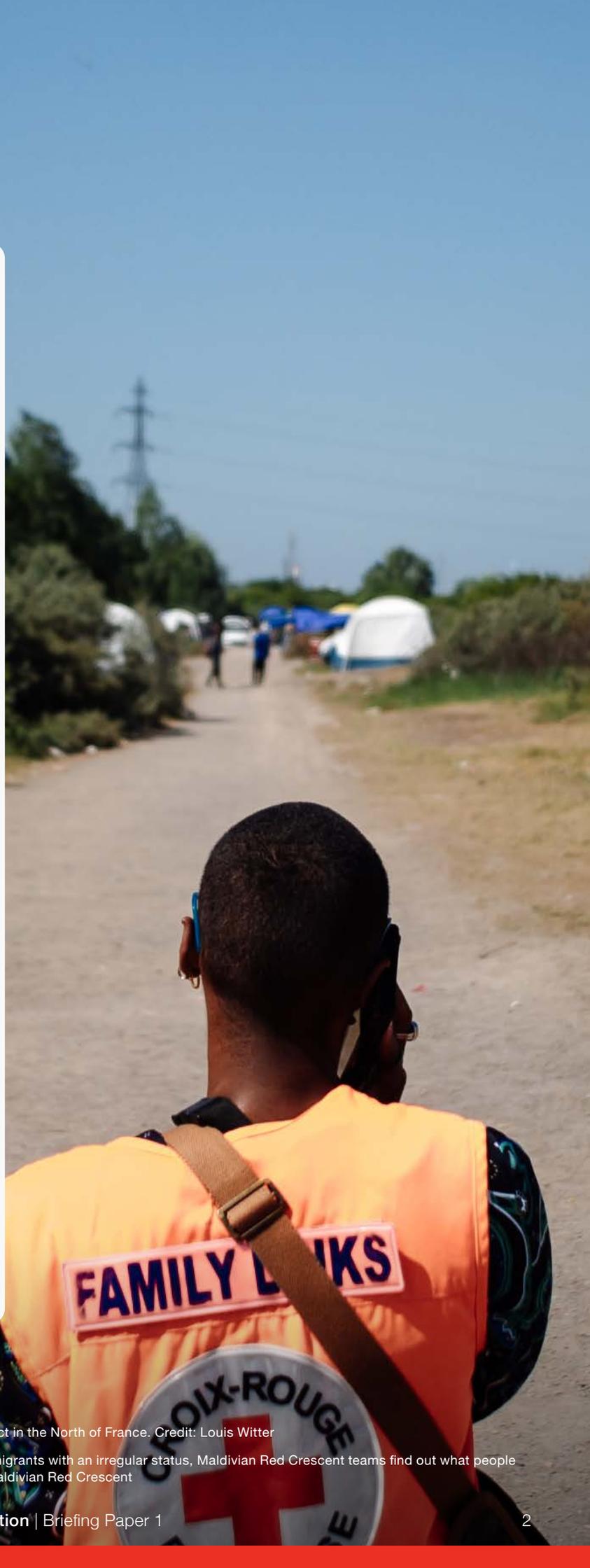
Drawing on survey data collected with migrants in vulnerable situations across 14 selected countries in the Americas, Africa, the Asia Pacific, and Europe, this briefing paper provides insights into migrants' perspectives on **key indicators of trust** in humanitarian action.

The data shows that migrants' access to assistance and protection services – or lack thereof – most clearly influences their perspectives on the competence, fairness, integrity, and inclusion of humanitarian action. This calls for programming and advocacy strategies to increase access to support and to address the assistance and protection needs of all migrants.

The briefing paper also underlines the fears and concerns of migrants relating to humanitarian action – calling for humanitarian organisations to better recognise, learn from, and respond, to the diverse and specific needs of those they seek to serve.

Recommendations

- 1** Humanitarian organisations should improve access to services for migrants in vulnerable situations, including providing targeted and inclusive information, and training staff and volunteers to better understand, and respond to, the needs of diverse groups of migrants.
- 2** Humanitarian organisations must do better to recognise, learn from, and respond, to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of those they seek to serve, especially migrants living through protracted crises or lengthy immigration/asylum determinations.
- 3** Humanitarian organisations should adhere to, and advocate for, principled humanitarian action in the context of migration and increase efforts to ensure migrants are not at risk of detention and/or deportation if they seek humanitarian assistance and protection.
- 4** Humanitarian organisations should continue to invest in initiatives, including research, that enables them to learn from the diverse lived experience of migrants and to incorporate their priorities, needs and vulnerabilities into programming and advocacy.



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

Cover photo: As part of efforts to engage migrant communities, especially migrants with an irregular status, Maldivian Red Crescent teams find out what people know and think about COVID-19, the vaccine and what they need. Credit: Maldivian Red Crescent

► Background

Humanitarian action is built on trust. Without it, the ability of humanitarian organisations to reach and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable – including migrants – is greatly diminished. For migrants facing increasing risks, harm, discrimination, and vulnerabilities as part of their migration journeys, foregoing humanitarian assistance and protection because of a lack of trust can have life-threatening consequences.¹

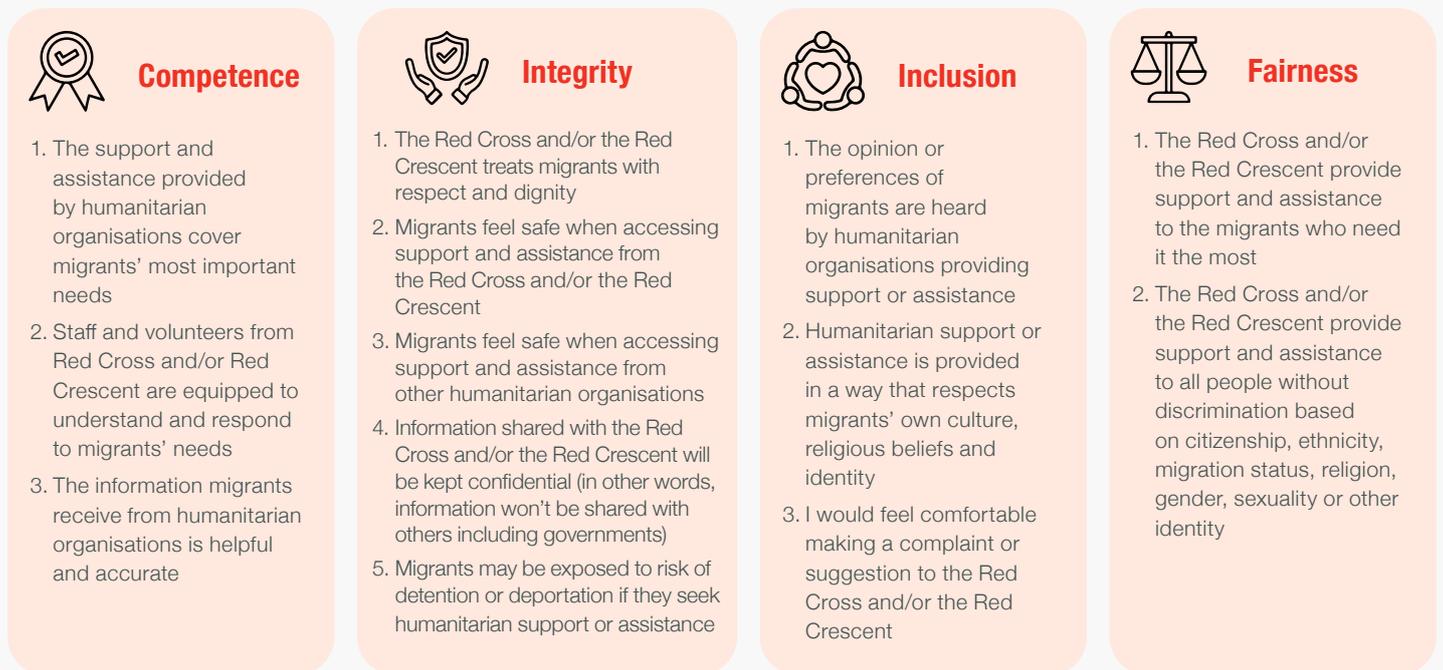
To gain insight into migrants’ perceptions of, and trust in, humanitarian action, the Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab conducted primary research – including interviews, focus groups, and face-to-face and online surveys – with over 16,000 migrants in vulnerable situations across 15 countries in the Americas, Africa, the Asia Pacific, and Europe.²

In general terms, ‘trust’ refers to the positive expectation or belief about the behaviour, reliability or ability of another person or institution. Trust is often associated with particular attributes such as competence and values or ethical behaviours.³ For this project, migrants’ trust in humanitarian action was assessed using four key indicators: competence, fairness, integrity, and inclusion – with 2-5 perception questions used to measure each indicator (see **Figure 1**).⁴



Argentine Red Cross provides humanitarian assistance and protection to migrants in need from many countries arriving and travelling through its borders. Credit: Cruz Roja Argentina

Figure 1. Indicators of trust: questions on competence, integrity, fairness and inclusion



1 In line with the strictly humanitarian approach to migration of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement), that focuses on migrants’ needs and vulnerabilities, irrespective of legal status, type, or category, the project covered a broad spectrum of migrants (i.e., persons who leave or flee their home to go to new places abroad to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects). This includes, but it is not limited to, migrants with a regular or irregular status, asylum seekers and refugees, people whose application for asylum has been refused, returned migrants, deportees, and stateless people, who at various stages of their journeys have accessed or needed different forms of humanitarian assistance and protection. For more on the Movement’s approach to migration, see: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2009). ‘Policy on Migration’, [available online](#).

2 Primary research took place in 2022 and was conducted in collaboration with 15 participating National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Data cleaning and analysis for this briefing paper has been conducted by Morgan Richards-Melamdir, Sector Lead for Poverty and Inequality, [Global Insight](#).

3 See for instance: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017), ‘OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust’, [available online](#); Edelman (2020), ‘Trust Barometer – 2020 Report’, [available online](#).

4 The focus on these four indicators followed an extensive review of definitions and measurements of trust used by intergovernmental, humanitarian and development organisations, as well as consultations with staff from participating National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC. For more detail, see the [global report](#).

The project intentionally did *not* explicitly ask migrants whether they trusted Red Cross and Red Crescent actors (or other humanitarian organisations). This choice was based on a recognition of the unequal power dynamics at play in the humanitarian space, where people who are dependent on humanitarian organisations may hope or report that organisations are trustworthy, even if humanitarian organisations and the support provided fail to meet their expectations or needs.⁵

Instead, the project conducted a broader assessment of crucial aspects of humanitarian action, such as the competence displayed by humanitarian staff, the reliability of information provided, or the relevance of support offered. In other words, the four indicators of competence, fairness, integrity, and inclusion were used to map migrants' lived experience, perspectives on, and trust in, humanitarian organisations and the humanitarian assistance and protection they had sought and/or received.

The initial findings of this project – including a detailed methodology and a discussion on the limitations of the data – have been previously published in a [global report](#). This briefing paper presents additional findings from the survey data based on comparisons of migrants' responses to 13 Likert scale questions designed to assess their perspectives on competence, fairness, integrity, and inclusion.⁶ These questions allowed migrants to rank their perspectives and experiences on a 5-point scale, from negative to positive (see **Figure 1** for the questions that were asked).

This briefing paper only reports findings that are statistically significant across 14 selected countries.⁷ This means the findings reported here are unlikely to have occurred by chance: hence, some relationships that may appear of interest are not mentioned because their significance could not be proved across all 14 countries.⁸

► Key findings and recommendations

To be able to reach and respond to the needs of migrants, humanitarian organisations need to build and maintain migrants' trust. The findings discussed here indicate that trust cannot be taken for granted, and that factors such as migrants' access to support have a major influence on their perceptions of, and trust in, humanitarian action. Furthermore, findings demonstrate that learning from, and responding to, the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of migrants is central to building and maintaining trust with them.

FINDING 1: ACCESS TO SUPPORT BUILDS TRUST

Findings highlight that a migrant's history of accessing assistance and protection services is the clearest determinant of their perceptions of humanitarian action. In particular, the more services migrants have access to, and the more widely those services are sourced, the more positive their perception of humanitarian action across all four indicators. Based on an index combining questions on these indicators, with the range being 1 (low) to 5 (high),⁹ migrants who reported receiving no support, rated their perceptions of humanitarian action

significantly lower than migrants who reported receiving 1 type of support, 2-3 types, and 4+ types.¹⁰ Likewise, migrants' perceptions are more positive if they reported receiving support from more types of actors, with migrants who received no support from any actors rating their perceptions significantly lower than migrants who received support from 1, 2 or 3+ actors.¹¹

Looking at individual indicators and questions (see **Figures 2 & 3**), the largest differences were found in migrants' perceptions of competence. Unsurprisingly, migrants who reported receiving no support at all, had lower perceptions of competence in general, and were less likely to agree with the statements 'the information migrants receive from humanitarian organisations is helpful and accurate' and 'staff and volunteers from the Red Cross and/or the Red Crescent are equipped to understand and respond to migrants' needs' in particular. Additionally, and as highlighted in Figures 2 & 3, migrants who reported receiving no support had lower perception scores on the fairness, integrity, and inclusion indexes overall, and on key individual questions related to equity, diversity, and safety in particular.

5 van Praag, N. (2019) 'Building and Busting Trust in Humanitarian Action', [available online](#).

6 A Likert scale is a rating scale used to measure opinions or attitudes in a five-point or seven-point scale, usually from strongly agree to strongly disagree (or vice versa).

7 Migrants in the Maldives were surveyed a part of a larger needs assessment being conducted by Maldivian Red Crescent (MRC). MRC did not use the standard questionnaires employed across other countries and thus the results are not included in this briefing paper. The category 'other' includes a small number of supplementary countries – primarily Syria – where data was collected for the online survey.

8 Some relationships that may appear starkly different in the descriptive statistics are not mentioned because (i) the sample of migrants (based on a specific category) was too small to be confident about the finding or (ii) certain countries with comparatively large numbers of migrants from a specific category skewed the relationships present in other countries.

9 For example, to create the integrity index, each response option (strongly disagree to strongly agree) for the individual perception questions on integrity was assigned a number (1-5). Then, the numbers from each individual's response were averaged to create an integrity 'score' for that individual. Subsequently, the average score for each individual was averaged to get a measure of migrants' overall average perception of integrity across the entire survey sample. The same process was done for each of the other indicators individually and combined for trust. Scores run from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest score (i.e., completely negative perception); 3 representing a neutral score; and 5 representing the highest score (i.e., entirely positive perception).

10 With mean, or average, scores of 3.52 (received 0 types of support), 3.68 (received 1 type), 3.75 (received 2-3 types) and 4 (received 4+ types).

11 With mean scores of 3.52 (no support from 0 actors), 3.71 (support from 1 actor), 3.8 (support from 2 actors) and 3.87 (support from 3+ actors).

Figure 2. Trust indexes (by level of support)

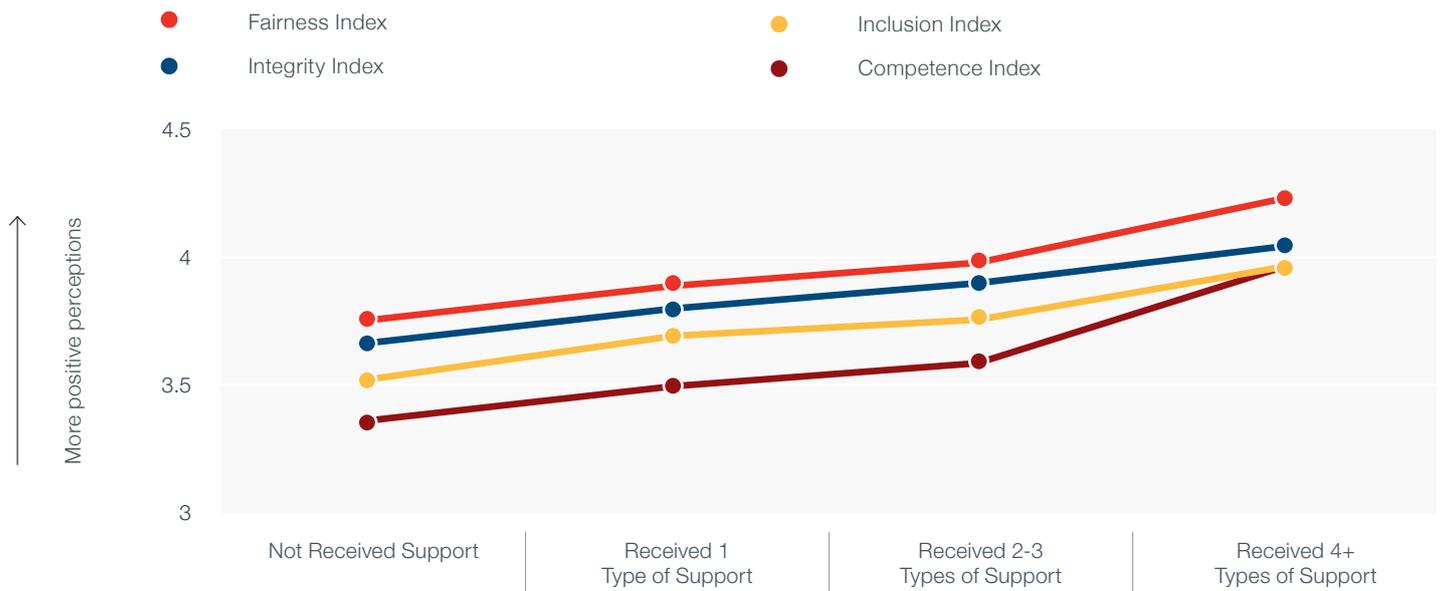
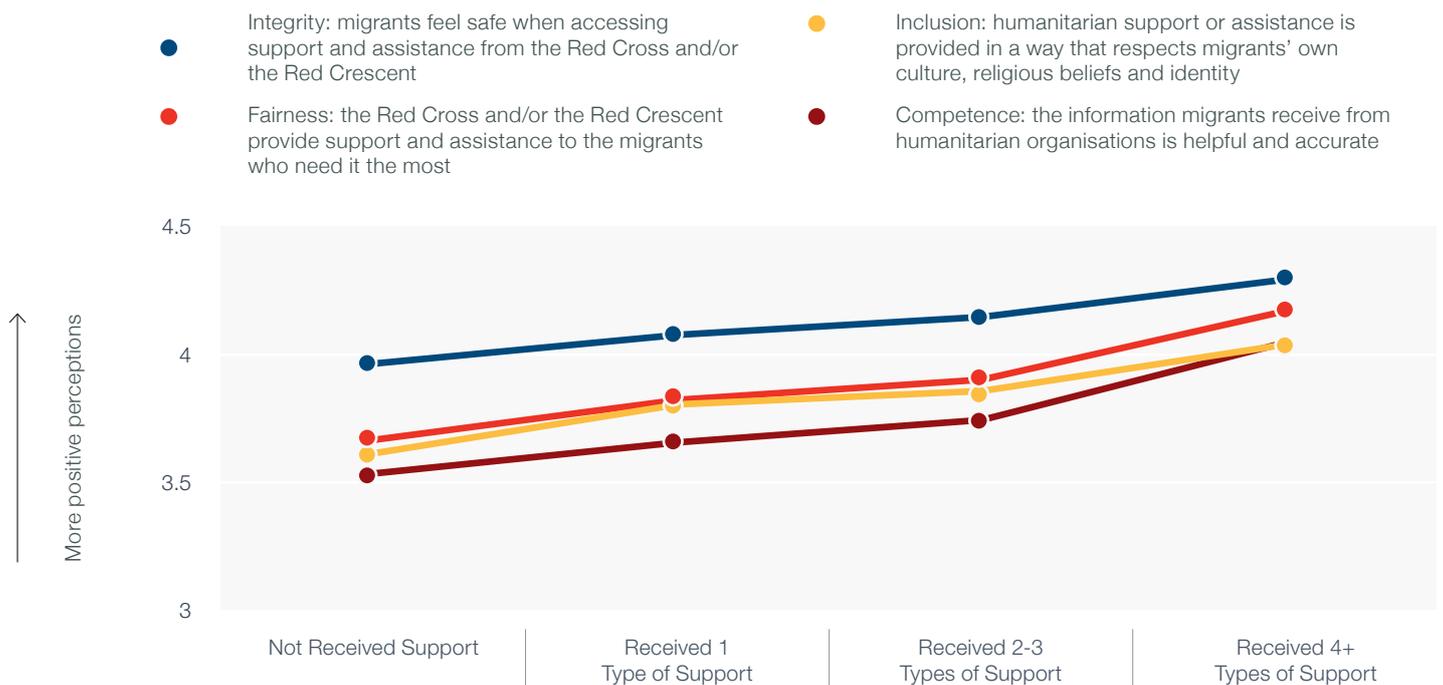


Figure 3. Selected questions on competence, integrity, fairness and inclusion (mean agreement, by level of support)



Regarding access, migrants who reported needing, but not receiving, support on at least 1 or 2+ stages of their journeys also tended to have more negative perceptions of humanitarian action. In other words, the more frequently a migrant had experienced an unmet need for support, the lower their perceptions were.¹² However, for the indexes of fairness, integrity, and inclusion, this relationship was not as consistently statistically significant as the finding for level of support or number of actors discussed above.¹³

In terms of competence, migrants who reported needing, but not receiving support, on at least 1 or 2+ stages of their journey had progressively lower perceptions of competence in general and were less likely to agree with the statements 'the support and assistance provided by humanitarian organisations cover migrants' most important needs' and 'staff and volunteers from the Red Cross and/or the Red Crescent are equipped to understand and respond to migrants' needs' in particular.

¹² With mean scores of 3.79 (no stages with an unmet need), 3.59 (at least 1 stage with an unmet need), and 3.46 (2+ stages with an unmet need).

¹³ While the direction of the relationships was the same for the indexes of fairness, integrity, and inclusion (i.e., those who needed support and did not receive it tending to have more negative perceptions), the relationships only achieved statistical significance with the inclusion of Türkiye.

Key insight: Migrants' positive perceptions of, and trust in, humanitarian action is directly influenced by their access to assistance and protection services when needed. This applies to all four indicators of competence, integrity, fairness, and inclusion, and is linked most strongly to perceptions of competence.

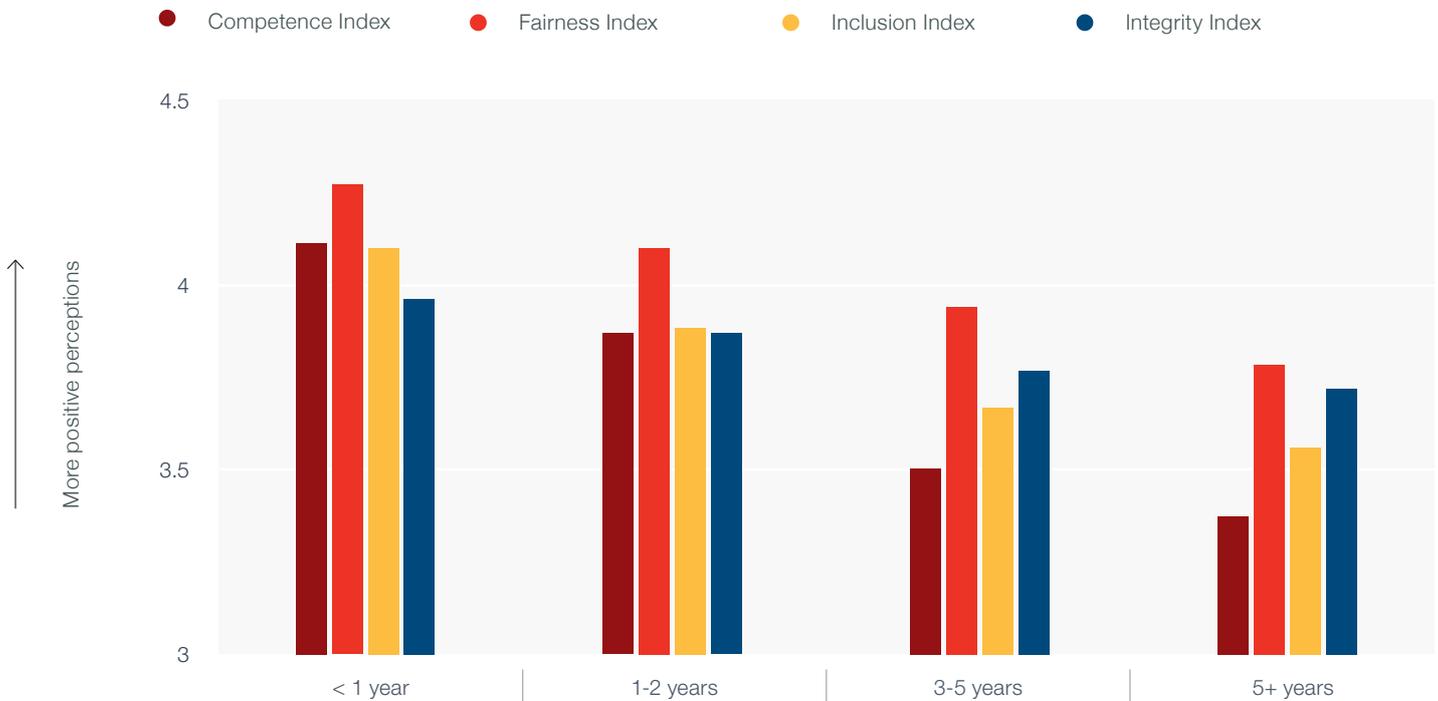
Recommendation 1

Humanitarian organisations should improve access to services for migrants in vulnerable situations, including providing targeted and inclusive information, and training staff and volunteers to better understand, and respond to, the needs of diverse groups of migrants.

FINDING 2: TRUST VARIES BASED ON TIME AND STAGE OF JOURNEY

After access to support, length of time was the second clearest variable influencing migrants' perceptions of humanitarian action. Migrants who had spent longer in their current location had lower positive perceptions of competence, integrity, fairness, and inclusion (see **Figure 4**). The difference between newly arrived migrants (less than 1 year) and recent arrivals (1-2 years) was rarely statistically significant, however, for those in the 3-to-5-year range and the 5+ year range, differences are consistently significant for all the indexes and for most individual questions as well.¹⁴ Once again, the largest difference was in migrants' perceptions of competence. The longer a migrant had been in their current location, the lower their perceptions of competence were in general, and the less likely they were to agree with the statement 'the support and assistance provided by humanitarian organisations cover migrants' most important needs'. This finding could have important implications for the work of humanitarian organisations providing support to migrants living through protracted crises or lengthy immigration/asylum determinations.

Figure 4. Trust indexes (by length of time)



¹⁴ With mean, or average, scores of 4.03 (less than 1 year), 3.86 (1-2 years), 3.66 (3-to-5-years) and 3.57 (5+ years).

Key insight: Migrants who had spent longer in their current location had lower perceptions of competence, integrity, fairness, and inclusion.

Recommendation 2

Humanitarian organisations must do better to recognise, learn from, and respond, to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of those they seek to serve, especially migrants living through protracted crises or lengthy immigration/asylum determinations.

The data reveals that the stage of journey – i.e., whether a migrant was in transit, at their destination, or had returned to their place of origin (either voluntarily or involuntarily) – also impacted their perceptions of humanitarian action, albeit not as consistently in terms of statistical significance as the findings for level of support, number of actors, or time presented above. In general, and compared to migrants at their destination, migrants who identified themselves at the stage of return had more positive perceptions of the competence, fairness, and inclusion of humanitarian action.¹⁵ However, migrants at the stage of return had lower perceptions of integrity in general, and were significantly more likely to believe that ‘migrants may be exposed to risk of detention or deportation if they seek humanitarian support or assistance’. In contrast, migrants who identified themselves at the transit stage tended to have more negative perceptions of humanitarian action compared to those in destination countries,¹⁶ though this was not consistent across indexes or questions. Notably though, migrants in transit were significantly and consistently more likely to believe that seeking assistance may expose them to the risk of detention or deportation.

Key insight: Migrants in transit and returned migrants were more likely to believe that seeking assistance may expose them to the risk of detention or deportation.

Recommendation 3

Humanitarian organisations should adhere to, and advocate for, principled humanitarian action in the context of migration and increase efforts to ensure migrants are not at risk of detention and/or deportation if they seek humanitarian assistance and protection.



Sudanese Red Crescent Society volunteers provide humanitarian assistance to Ethiopian refugees in Eastern Sudan, including supporting access to clean water. Credit: Sudanese Red Crescent Society

¹⁵ With mean scores of 3.84 (return) and 3.65 (destination).

¹⁶ With mean or average scores of 3.56 (transit) vs 3.65 (destination).

FINDING 3: AGE, ABILITY STATUS AND GENDER AFFECT TRUST IN COMPLEX AND CONTEXT SPECIFIC WAYS

The relationship between migrants' demographics and their perspectives on humanitarian action varied between indexes and individual questions and were thus not as consistent in terms of statistical significance as the findings described in the two sections above. For instance, in term of age, there was no clear relationship across all indexes. There were, however, some findings that are useful for humanitarian organisations to consider. In general, perceptions of integrity followed the strongest linear path in which positive perceptions increased with age. In particular, and compared to those aged 26-35 and 36-49, younger migrants (those aged between 18-25 years old), were less likely to disagree with the statements that 'migrants may be exposed to risk of detention or deportation if they seek humanitarian support or assistance' and were less likely to agree with the statement that 'migrants feel safe when accessing support and assistance from the Red Cross and/or the Red Crescent' – thus highlighting prevalent fears among the youngest cohorts of migrants.¹⁷ Furthermore, younger migrants tended to have more negative perceptions of inclusion, compared to those aged 26-35 and 36-49.

In terms of ability status, migrants with a disability or chronic condition tended to have lower perceptions of humanitarian action. These differences were, for the most part, not statistically significant across all indexes, with a few notable exceptions. Compared to migrants without a disability or chronic condition, migrants with a disability or chronic condition had lower perceptions of integrity in general and were more likely to believe that 'migrants may be exposed to risk of detention or deportation if they seek humanitarian support or assistance'. Migrants with a disability or chronic condition also reported lower perceptions to the following individual statements on competence and fairness: 'staff and volunteers from the Red Cross and/or the Red Crescent are equipped to understand and respond to migrants' needs' and 'the Red Cross and/or the Red Crescent provide support and assistance to all people without discrimination based on citizenship, ethnicity, migration status, religion, gender, sexuality or other identity' – thus highlighting important gaps that need to be addressed.¹⁸

In terms of gender, while women's perspectives on competence, integrity, fairness, and inclusion tended to be slightly more positive than men's, differences were often relatively small in magnitude and were not true for every country surveyed. Additionally, while no significant differences exist when comparing those with 'other' gender identities to men or women, this does not necessarily mean that differences do not exist, but rather, that the number of migrants with this type of gender identity surveyed per country (N) was too small for the differences to be statistically significant while also controlling for country-specific differences. If anything, this highlights the need for further research that explores the lived experience and perspectives of those with diverse gender identities to ensure humanitarian actions meets their needs and expectations.

17 Differences with older groups (50-59 and 60+) were not significant.

18 The differences in each of these three statements were statistically significant with the inclusion of Türkiye. The direction of the relationship (migrants with disabilities or chronic health conditions having lower positive perceptions) was the same for countries excluding Türkiye. This suggests the inclusion of Türkiye introduced a high enough number of cases to enable statistical significance to be achieved for each statement.

Key insight: More efforts are needed to build trust and respond to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of certain groups of migrants, including younger migrants and those with a disability or chronic condition.

Recommendation 4

Humanitarian organisations should continue to invest in initiatives, including research, that enable them to learn from the diverse lived experience of migrants and to incorporate their priorities, needs and vulnerabilities into programming and advocacy.



Project SALAM, French Red Cross. Credit: Jill Coulon

► Conclusion

These findings indicate that if humanitarian organisations are to build and maintain trust with migrants they face a formidable challenge: they must not only increase access to support in a time when the assistance and protection needs of migrants are rapidly growing in both scope and scale, but they must do so in way that recognises and responds to the diverse thoughts, fears, and concerns of the migrants they seek to serve.

This calls for further investment in initiatives that enable humanitarian organisations to incorporate migrants' priorities, needs and vulnerabilities into programming and advocacy. Furthermore, this points to the urgency of engaging in dialogue with States to advocate on the humanitarian needs and protection risks of migrants and on possible solutions to prevent and respond to these.



Maldivian Red Crescent teams share health information in languages that migrants understand and promote access to relevant services, to ensure everyone has access to important information about protecting themselves and their families from COVID-19, and accessing vaccinations. Credit: Maldivian Red Crescent