

Digital innovation case studies

Using technology to provide migrants with information, connection and support

Location:

Latin America and Carribean (LAC)

Themes:

Migration, Advocacy, Church and community mobilisation

Background

Latin America is living through its biggest exodus in history, with almost 8 million people on a migration journey. In particular, millions of Venezuelans have been forced to abandon their homeland due to political and economic turmoil and an ongoing humanitarian crisis. Most of the 8 million have stayed within the Latin American region, but many have faced discrimination, racism and closed borders.

In June 2019, Tearfund founded the advocacy campaign *Como nacido entre nosotros* ('As born among us'), which takes its name from God's call, in Leviticus 19:33–34, for foreigners to be treated as native-born. This campaign calls on the church to respond to migrants in a spirit of acceptance, inclusion, welcome and love. More than 70 churches and regional Christian organisations are now campaign partners.

Through this campaign, Tearfund's joint work with faith communities, government authorities and civil society has allowed migrants to receive coordinated practical assistance. Part of this work included the development of an innovative and free digital application (app).

About the application

The app provides:

- information for migrants on their legal rights in each country
- a directory for humanitarian and comprehensive support
- spiritual encouragement through Bible reflections and audio clips

See the app in action in this short video: [Spanish](#) | [Portuguese](#) | [English](#)

Development process:

Ideation

The idea was born out of a regional gathering of churches and Christian organisations that support and advocate for migrants in Chile, Brazil and the five countries of the Andean Region¹. The 'humanitarian road' concept was the basis of this digital innovation, where migrants could find, at their fingertips, both practical and spiritual support for their journey.

Discovery

Initial research was carried out to investigate whether other apps or sources of information were available that met the identified needs. Three core requirements would make this application different from others in the marketplace:

- It would provide content for the complete migrant journey, working across countries in the region.
- It would provide access to the rich source of support provided by churches alongside that of civil society and public organisations.
- It would address both the practical and spiritual needs of people on a migration journey.

Development

The most challenging and critical stage of the process was content gathering: without accurate information the app would not be used. A consultant was engaged for two months to gather and verify content. Overall the development process took six months to complete and the app was launched on International Migrants Day (18 December 2020).

Technical specification:

- Created using [Mobincube](#), a multi-platform app builder.
- Android native app: While the app builder platform offered the functionality to create both Android and iPhone native applications, research showed that Android is the most widely used and accessible mobile operating system in LAC. Therefore a decision was made to launch the application only on Android at this stage.
- Small file size: Many migrant users reported limited storage capacity on their devices. This app requires only 7MB of local storage.
- Offline and online content: the core information is available offline with further information available through in-app links to organisation/church websites.

Expected impacts

- **Wide reach:** Using Mobincube allowed us to roll out a low-cost solution that is free to the user and widely available in the Google Play store. Despite no money being spent on promotion or marketing, almost 500 users - from across Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela - downloaded the app in the initial two months after launch. This shows the huge potential of the app to reach a large number of people within a limited budget.
- **Greater awareness:** This app brings together several sources of information and gives people on a migration journey centralised access to the entire network of support that is available to them -

¹ 68 churches and Christian organisations attended this inter-denominational event, convened by Tearfund in Bogotá - Colombia, February 2020

from churches, civil society and public organisations. This allows those using the app to make more informed choices about their support options.

- **Spiritual encouragement:** Whether migrants have a Christian faith or not, everyone needs encouragement when on a difficult journey. Reflections and spoken words accompany the migrant with reassurance that they are not alone.
- **Connection and relationship:** The app provides a bridge between the local church, who are able to provide support, and the people on the road who need help along the way.

Challenges

- **Data management:** The app is only as good as the information it contains, so ongoing resourcing and processes will be required to ensure up-to-date and accurate data. In the discovery phase it became clear that there are more churches that support and advocate for migrants than previously was imagined. This increases the cost of data management, but also poses a wider challenge around training churches to be more effective within the constraints of their capacity.
- **Promotion:** 60 per cent of app downloads come from referrals and 40 per cent as a direct search in the Google Play Store. In order to increase uptake we need to increase engagement with Christian organisations so they promote the app more in their region.
- **Security:** Due to security concerns, it was not possible to include the details of some agencies working in high-risk areas. This limits the network of support in some locations.
- **Poor response rate:** In the digital age, user expectation is that communication is instant. While the app provides a bridge to supporting agencies, the onus is on those agencies to provide timely responses to enquiries. However, due to competing demands on the time and capacity of support organisations, users may not receive the information they need in the timeframe they need it. This can result in the migrants uninstalling the app or not using it further. We are looking into ways to improve the users' experience of the app.

Next steps

- Further activity is planned to increase promotion among churches and improve the directory in Central America.
- An evaluation is planned once the app has been in operation for over six months.

More information

- Download the app from Google Play store. Search 'como nacido entre nosotros'. *Please note: the app is only available in Latin America and the USA.*
- Visit the website: www.comonacidoentrenosotros.org
- In Spanish:
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