



Healthy Nutrition

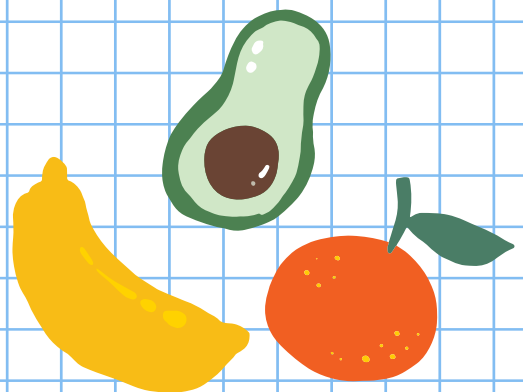
for the Care of Life

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With the support of the:
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Educational spaces on nutrition and care in the pregnancy and breastfeeding, Cúcuta © IOM 2025

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1. Maternity on the border

Pregnancy is a stage in which women require care, support, and guidance. Guaranteeing timely access to comprehensive health services, adequate nutrition, and guidance is essential to protect women's lives, their babies, and their right to a safe maternal experience. However, for many, what should be essential can become difficult to attain, especially in border areas and in contexts of crisis and migration, where limited access to basic services

and scarce resources place significant strain on these women and their families.

This is the everyday reality in Cúcuta, a border city between Colombia and Venezuela and one of the country's main destinations for migrants. Although migration has revitalized some sectors of the local economy, it has also exposed preexisting social disparities. These gaps particularly affect migrant women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, as they face unemployment, economic instability, and multiple barriers to consistent access to health care and adequate nutrition—conditions that are essential for protecting their well-being and that of their children.

Considering this context, the “healthy nutrition for the care of life” strategy, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) from July 2025 to April 2026 as part of the Vincula Project, emerges as a concrete, humane, and effective response.

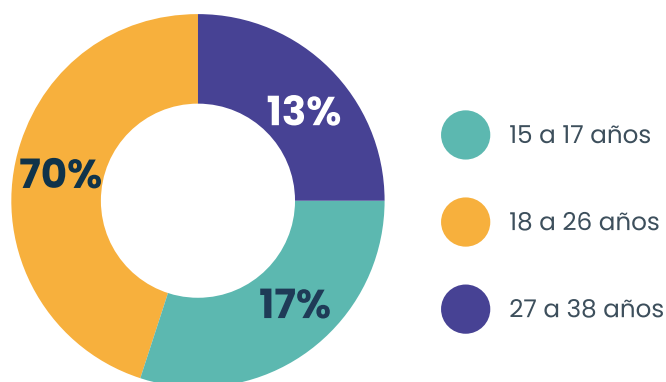
With the support of the Citi Foundation, the strategy implemented a comprehensive approach that integrates nutritional health, education, and access to food through cash transfers.

The cash assistance was distributed via prepaid cards and provided exclusively for food purchases. Access to these cards was contingent on participation in the program’s nutritional and educational components.

Pregnant and breastfeeding women with low gestational weight benefited from the strategy through access to counseling, psychosocial support, nutritional health services, and a variety of nutritious foods. The participants improved their nutritional status, strengthened their support networks, and gained autonomy to make informed decisions about themselves and their babies’ health.

Developed with support from the private sector and in coordination with the health system, this cash-based intervention for nutritional health offers valuable lessons worthy of being shared and replicated in regions where women and their families need it most.

37 mujeres beneficiarias de la estrategia alimentación saludable



2. The strategy

2.1 Nutritional Health Care

The starting point for the strategy was comprehensive nutritional care. Each woman began the process with an initial assessment that made it possible to classify her nutritional status and identify the main associated risks. This assessment was not a one-time event but rather the beginning of ongoing support.

The Cúcuta Health Secretariat accompanied the strategy from the outset, helping to identify pregnant women through its database, which compiles reports of underweight pregnant women referred by both public and private institutions, thereby enabling the IOM team to contact these potential beneficiaries.

Monthly nutritional checkups allowed the team to monitor each woman's progress, adjust recommendations, and reinforce key self-care messages. This ongoing monitoring not only had an impact on their nutritional status but also helped strengthen the bond between participants and the health care system, building trust and promoting adherence to other services offered by public institutions to pregnant women.

The strategy focused on migrant women not enrolled in the health system; and for many of them, it was the first time they had ever received comprehensive nutritional care. Being heard by



Nutritional assessment for pregnant women, Cúcuta © IOM 2025

a health care professional and having a dedicated space of their own made a significant difference in their overall experience.

"Thanks to the program, we've improved our eating habits; I feel more confident [...] I've been preparing to feed my baby complementary foods, so I can put into practice everything I've learned about care and nutrition."

Ommaira,
28 years old.

2.2 Nutritional supplement for pregnancy and breastfeeding

The support provided by a nutritionist was reinforced by the distribution of nutritional supplements specifically formulated for pregnancy and lactation. These supplements, aligned with national dietary guidelines, addressed identified needs and helped improve the participants' nutritional status.



Distribution of Nutritional supplement for pregnancy and breastfeeding, Cúcuta © IOM 2025

The nutritional supplement consists of a powdered formula dissolved in water, designed to provide additional nutrition alongside the regular diet. Because it was easy to incorporate, its consumption became part of the beneficiaries' daily routine.

According to the implementation team, the supplement also took on symbolic value, as the beneficiaries perceived it as a sign of care

and recognition, which strengthened their commitment to the process and their motivation to adopt healthy habits.

2.3 Educational spaces on nutrition and care

Designed as participatory and hands-on sessions, these meetings addressed topics such as mindful eating, breastfeeding, making the most of food shopping budgets, and care during pregnancy and lactation.

The educational spaces were built on the exchange of experiences and knowledge, recognizing women's cultural practices and adapting the contents to their everyday reality.

Six sessions were held at the facilities provided by the Medcare health care institution, which ensured a suitable and comfortable environment for the participants.

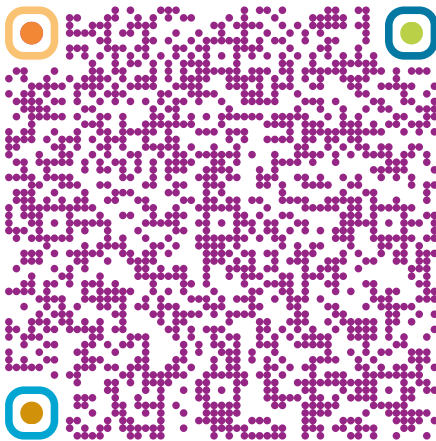


Educational dynamic "El Mercadito Consciente", Cúcuta © IOM 2025

As an educational resource, the project's professionals designed a workbook intended as a practical tool to support the learning process. This workbook brought together the main topics covered in the sessions, including nutritional needs during pregnancy and breastfeeding, as well as guidance to reinforce learnings.



Cover of the teaching guide designed by the professional team.



This approach enabled them to translate what they learned into real changes: new ways of planning grocery shopping, preparing meals, and prioritizing their own well-being and that of their children.

Likewise, the sessions brought together people with whom the women have close emotional ties, such as their partners, children, mothers, and friends, thereby strengthening their support networks.



Educational spaces on nutrition and care in the pregnancy and breastfeeding, Cúcuta © IOM 2025

2.4 Food Vouchers

This voucher component was key to bridging the gap between knowledge and the actual ability to acquire a varied and nutritious food supply. Through monthly vouchers for food purchases, the women were able to put into practice what they had learned in the educational sessions.

The beneficiaries received a monthly voucher over a six-month period, which they redeemed at a supermarket chain, prioritizing food purchases based on their nutritional needs at each pregnancy stage and/or breastfeeding phase.



A migrant woman buying groceries with a voucher provided by the project, Cúcuta © IOM 2025

In addition to alleviating immediate needs, this mechanism also promoted autonomy: the participants, along with their families, were able to decide what to buy, how to manage their budget, and how to prioritize nutritious foods. Thus, the voucher became a tool for empowerment, not just monetary support.

"The change was clear from the beginning, because we didn't have enough resources to eat properly, and we learned to eat in a healthier way, and we learned how to organize ourselves when it came to grocery shopping."

María José,
24 years old.

3. Results and Impact

Results of the strategy are reflected in both measurable indicators and personal transformations, although the latter are harder to quantify. Throughout the intervention, participating women showed improvements in their nutritional status, adherence to health checkups, and consistent participation in educational sessions.

The most significant impact, however, comes from changes in daily life. Women began to plan their shopping more carefully, diversify their diets, and incorporate self-care practices that had previously seemed out of reach. According to the implementation team, the beneficiaries have expressed feeling less stressed and more capable of taking care of themselves and their families.

[View Life Story →](#)

"After participating in the program, I felt more prepared and confident. I realized that I could make decisions to improve my own life and my family's."

Yorgelis,
20 years old.



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"It's been a whole new learning experience and a personal growth journey. Nutrition is essential for life; I love learning, especially about nutrition. I love taking care of myself, and thanks to this program, I've learned how to take care of my loved ones."

Ommaira,
28 years old.

The results show that strategies like these not only contribute to improving the nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women—which has a direct impact on preventing complications during childbirth, the postpartum period, and the neonatal period—but also promote resilience at the individual and community levels.

4. Conclusions

The “Healthy Nutrition for the Care of Life” strategy is an example of how partnerships between international cooperation and the private sector can generate effective and humane solutions to complex challenges.

The strategy demonstrates that it is relevant and strategic to replicate cash-based interventions focused on health, which—in addition to in-kind support—facilitate access to comprehensive services, thereby contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals linked to reducing maternal and child mortality.

Strategies such as this one address urgent needs through a rights-based approach that is replicable, efficient, and aligned with the private sector’s social investment priorities.

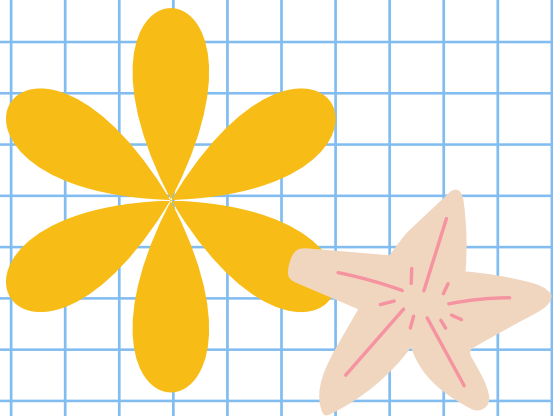
The implementation process has shown that improving maternal health—particularly

in vulnerable contexts—requires comprehensive approaches that combine technical support with the recognition of the conditions and capabilities of women and their families.

This experience offers great potential for scaling up to other regions affected by multiple crises—such as migration, armed conflict, and natural disasters—as long as there is coordination with local health authorities and health care providers with the capacity to deliver nutritional care, along with partnerships with local businesses to distribute the vouchers.

Finally, this intervention is an invitation to join forces in promoting maternal and child health and community resilience. It represents a concrete opportunity to become part of a proven, transformative initiative with high social impact.







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