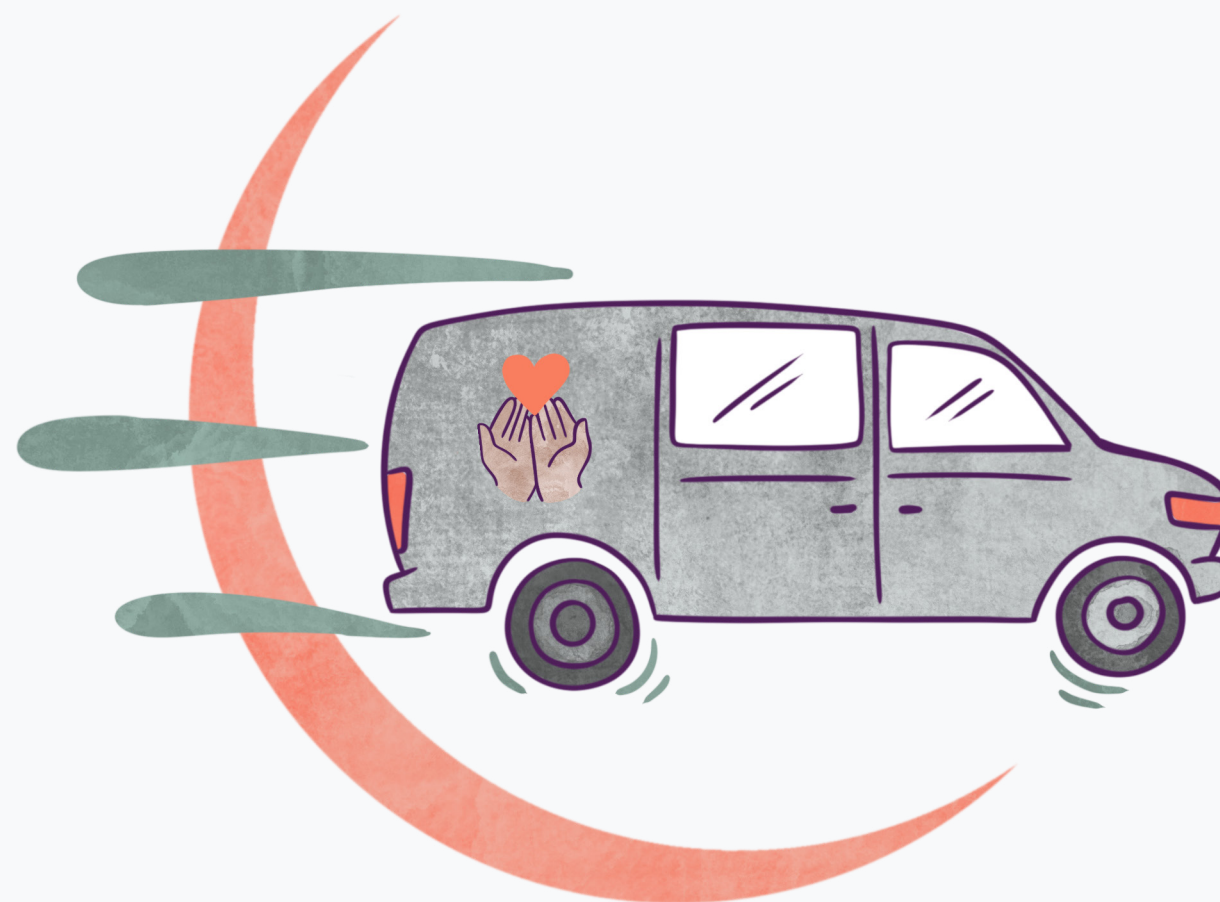


Case study

Centro 32

An in-depth analysis of the trajectory, organisational structure, service model and the groups supported by Centro 32, with thoughts on its impact and the main lessons learned



Centro 32

City Tijuana

Country Mexico

Region Latin America



Organisational profile

Team size	Small (11-50 people)
Age of organisation	1-5 years



Key aspects of our work

Primary contextual issue	Displaced population
Life stage	All
Gender focus	All
Level of intervention	Prevention + promotion Evaluation and direct attention
Annual Reach	15,000+ annual services

“We set out to contribute to the psychosocial well-being of the migrant population, strengthening their capacities and skills to cope with the adversities of their environment.”

Contextual problem

Tijuana, located on the border between Mexico and the United States, is one of the main transit, waiting and destination points for migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing violence, persecution, inequality and political or economic crises. Constant shifts in regional migration policies, tighter restrictions on asylum access, and the dynamics of deportation and prolonged displacement have heightened uncertainty and vulnerability across the border region.

People in subject to migration face persistent barriers to accessing decent housing, healthcare, employment, and social protection, alongside recurring exposure to discrimination, violence and exclusion. These conditions severely impact their mental health and psychosocial well-being, frequently manifesting as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, suicidal ideation and feelings of hopelessness.

The impacts are particularly acute among autonomous women, children and adolescents, and LGBTQ+ populations, who face differentiated risks linked to gender, age, and sexual orientation or identity. Although Tijuana has an extensive humanitarian network, there has historically been a significant gap in culturally relevant and accessible mental health services for migrant and displaced populations, particularly services delivered directly within community and shelter spaces.



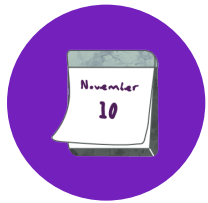
Objectives

Here at Centro 32, we aim to contribute to the psychosocial well-being of people subject to migration through a comprehensive, community-based model that brings together mental health, humanitarian response, education, and community strengthening. We implement culturally relevant and gender-sensitive interventions directly within shelters and community spaces, reducing barriers to access and protection risks.

Our work combines individual and group psychological care, humanitarian assistance, and spaces for learning, self-care, and social cohesion, recognising that emotional well-being and social integration are deeply connected. Through local, national, and international partnerships, we aim to strengthen the individual and collective resilience of migrant and displaced communities, promoting processes of autonomy, dignity and community care.

Mission: To contribute to the psychosocial well-being of the migrant population through collaborative work and comprehensive support.

Vision: To be a benchmark model for reception and support in border environments.



WHEN?

When was the organisation created?

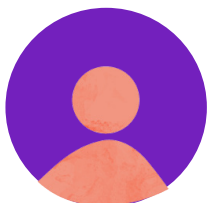
We began our community activities in Tijuana, Baja California in 2016 and, after several years of work and institutional consolidation, we formally incorporated as an independent civil association in 2023.



WHY?

Why did the organisation begin its activities?

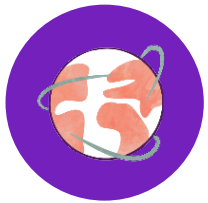
We launched in response to the insufficient institutional capacity to meet their basic and emotional needs. We were driven by the urgent need to provide dignified humanitarian aid, support, and safe spaces for individuals facing displacement, uncertainty and exclusion.



WHO?

Who founded the organisation?

Centro 32 has its roots in the Strategic Committee for Humanitarian Aid, made up of seven female activists who organised solidarity actions in response to the arrival of the Haitian caravan in 2016 and the increase in migrants in the city.



WHERE?

Where did the organisation begin implementing its activities?

The activities began in shelters, community spaces and arrival points for the migrant population. They later expanded to various shelters and community spaces in the city, as well as through remote support and collaborative networks in other territories.



WHAT?

What did the organisation do in its early days?

At the outset, we provided humanitarian aid, support and guidance, assisting in the search for safe places to sleep and generating community support networks. That's when we started identifying the high prevalence of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal ideation in the supported population.



HOW?

How did the organisation's work begin?

We started through volunteering and solidarity networks organised by the Strategic Committee for Humanitarian Aid, with donations and community support.

We subsequently strengthened our work with the support of Families Belong Together and other partnerships.

Organisational structure

Centro 32 has an organisational structure made up of an Assembly, an operational management team, and a multidisciplinary team.

The Assembly—comprising the presidency, secretariat, and treasury—serves as the highest governing body and legal representation.

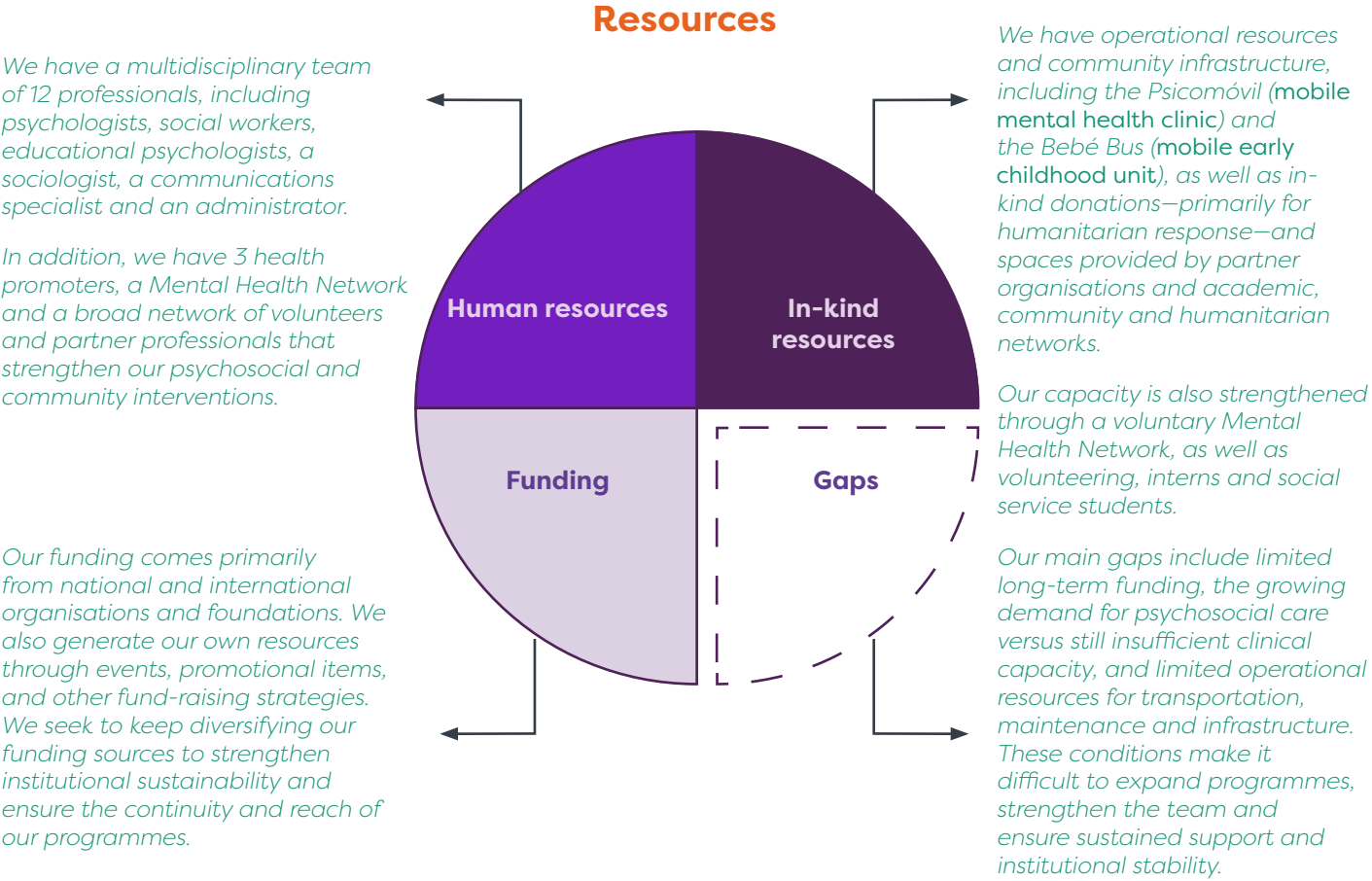
Management coordinates operational tasks and articulates areas such as communication, administration, mental health, humanitarian response, craft projects, entrepreneurship workshops, and early childhood support, backed by volunteers and partner professionals.

Strategic and programmatic decisions are made collaboratively with the team, prioritising consensus and democratic participation. Even the integration of the Assembly was defined collectively by the founding team of Centro 32.

Financial management

We manage our resources through administrative and financial procedures focused on transparency, co-responsibility, and regulatory compliance. As a civil organisation registered in Mexico, we meet our tax and administrative obligations with SAT (Mexican Tax Administration Service), including periodic filings, tax payments, and the maintenance of accounting records, supported by an external accountant. We are currently in the process of obtaining authorised donee status. Financial resources derive primarily from calls and grants from foundations and partner organisations, complemented by in-kind donations and solidarity networks.

Operational and budgetary management is coordinated by management and the administrative area, whilst the Assembly oversees the proper use of resources through periodic accountability processes. Budgets are prepared collaboratively with the people responsible for each area and are reviewed periodically.



Model and activities

Target population

People subject to migration in the border region of Tijuana, primarily autonomous women, children, adolescents and the LGBTIQ+ population, who face **multiple vulnerabilities stemming from displacement, violence, economic hardship and barriers to accessing rights**.

We serve people in various immigration situations, including **internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, refugees, repatriated persons, deported persons, “self-deported” persons and unaccompanied children and adolescents**.

Our approach prioritises those facing **intersections of vulnerability by gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and migratory status**.



Services or interventions

Here at Centro 32, our work takes a comprehensive approach grounded in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), integrated with perspectives on gender, human rights, interculturality, childhood and adolescence, and collective care.

We recognise that migration impacts women, children, adolescents and the LGBTIQ+ population in different ways, so our interventions prioritise emotional well-being, dignity, access to rights and community strengthening. Our model puts people and their community bonds at the centre, fostering processes of self-reliance and rebuilding the social fabric.

1. Humanitarian Response

We address the urgent needs of migrants and displaced persons, prioritising autonomous women, children, and the LGBTIQ+ population.

This includes interventions to promote food justice, the delivery of various donations, support with medical referrals and shelters.

This component seeks to address urgent needs without losing sight of medium-term processes.

2. Mobile Mental Health Clinic – “Psicomóvil”

We provide free, mobile and culturally relevant psychological care at shelters and community spaces.

This includes:

- Individual psychological care (in-person and remote).
- Group psychological care with a psychosocial approach.
- Mental Health Network: volunteer psychologists providing individual care (in-person or remote).

3. Bebé Bus (Baby Bus—mobile early childhood unit)

Programme focused on early childhood for migrants (0-3 years old) and their caregivers.

This includes:

- Mobile Baby Bus: a safe and playful mobile space that promotes attachment, early development and respectful parenting.
- “Nidito” [Little Nest]: a dedicated community space for strengthening bonds and supporting caregivers.

4. Craft Workshops

Collective creative spaces aimed at strengthening community ties, promoting cultural expression and generating safe meeting spaces.

They include:

- Embroidery and jewellery as therapeutic tools and tools for economic independence
- Traditional games to preserve cultural identity and promote community cohesion.

5. Cooking Our Independence

Programme aimed at strengthening the economic autonomy of migrant women through cooking and entrepreneurship workshops, promoting income generation, collaborative work amongst female entrepreneurs and psychosocial support.

This includes:

- Cooking workshops
- Entrepreneurship workshops
- Psychosocial support
- Intercultural recipe book
- Migrant women entrepreneurs network

Centro 32 complements its services with community initiatives that strengthen well-being, the social fabric and the exercise of rights. These include community activities, art and sports projects, health promotion for migrants, early childhood education, an ethically focused volunteer programme and a communication lab that highlights stories of dignity, resilience, and human rights.

Impact

Desired key results or changes



Improvement of psychosocial well-being and strengthening of the resilience and dignity of people subject to migration supported by Centro 32.



Greater access to culturally relevant and accessible mental health care and humanitarian services.



Strengthening community networks, local capacities and collective care spaces that promote integration, autonomy and social cohesion.

Methods

We use a mixed methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative information. We track programme indicators through databases and administrative monitoring tools, including the number and type of services provided, population profiles, and territorial coverage.

We complement this information with testimonials, participant observation, narrative records, photos, participant feedback and follow-up meetings with the team.

The collection and analysis of information involves the people responsible for each programme. This is reviewed periodically, guiding operational adjustments, strengthening the quality of interventions, and responding to changes in the migration context and the emerging needs of the population being supported.

Reflection on the impact so far

Since our early days, we have supported hundreds of people subject to migration through humanitarian, psychosocial and educational interventions implemented at shelters and community spaces. We currently provide around 15,000 services per year, reflecting both the scope of our work and the persistence of needs in the border region.

Beyond these metrics, we have witnessed meaningful progress in emotional well-being, the reinforcement of support networks, and the establishment of safe, dignified environments for displaced populations and migrants. Our efforts have contributed to establishing mental health and psychosocial support as core elements of the humanitarian response in Tijuana.

We have also strengthened links with universities, organisations and local networks that expand the sustainability and territorial reach of the support, recognising that our measurement systems continue to evolve and represent an opportunity for institutional strengthening.

Information Systems

We use a combination of digital tools and administrative records to document and track our activities.

We have an institutional form that collects sociodemographic information from people who participate in the activities; this information is captured and processed in a general way for monitoring and reporting purposes.

The Humanitarian Response and Mental Health areas have specific forms, databases and case management mechanisms, adapted to their programmes. These systems are handled with special care, security and confidentiality criteria.

We complement the quantitative information with qualitative evidence such as photos, testimonies, logs and narrative records.

Learnings

Strengths

A core strength is our deep community roots and the trust built with migrants, partner organisations and counterparts.

We have been able to adapt to changing contexts through a people-centred and collective care approach.

The beneficiaries recognise and legitimise our work as a safe space, whilst partner networks have placed their trust in us to collaborate and refer cases.

Our flexible and innovative model makes us a local benchmark for psychosocial care and support.

Limitations

Our work faces limitations associated with our small team size and high operational demand, which makes it difficult to balance direct service delivery with more robust data management, impact evaluation, and policy advocacy.

Likewise, we face a global reduction in resources and increased budgetary constraints for the migration response.

Compounding these issues are staff burnout and ongoing administrative and fiscal hurdles.

Challenges

A major challenge is sustaining and expanding psychosocial and humanitarian care against a backdrop of increasing migratory complexity and reduced funding.

We seek to strengthen our monitoring, evaluation and public advocacy capabilities without losing the community closeness and direct support that characterises our work.

It is also a challenge to advance in institutional sustainability, the care of the team, and the administrative and fiscal consolidation necessary to strengthen our organisation in the long term.

Opportunities

We see significant opportunities in the growing recognition of mental health and psychosocial support as fundamental components of the humanitarian response.

The trust built with communities and partner organisations, as well as our local positioning as a benchmark for psychosocial care, opens up possibilities to strengthen partnerships, influence and sustainability.



Partnership journey with Ember

Initial assessment

Following the initial assessment, Centro 32 stood out for its deep community roots and the high level of trust it builds among users. This is reflected in ties that remain even after people migrate to other territories. Their care model is characterised by being innovative, creative and flexible, combining a mobile clinic, art workshops, support for entrepreneurship and a network for referral to health professionals. Against a backdrop where other organisations have reduced or suspended their operations, Centro 32 has managed to remain active and maintain its services.

Looking ahead, Centro 32 aspires to serve as a model for peer organisations addressing the mental health needs of displaced and migrant populations. With this in mind, it is essential to strengthen its organisational capacity and ensure the long-term sustainability of its programmes.

At Ember, we identified an opportunity to collaborate in strengthening their vision and intervention model. Whilst Centro 32 has a solid vision and a model that is particularly valuable for its responsiveness to the needs of the population it serves, we observe that both could benefit from clearer, more concise, and better-structured documentation. Additionally, we identified an opportunity to share best practices regarding team care and well-being, aimed at strengthening organisational sustainability and supporting the continuity of its work over the long term.



Notable achievements

Centro 32 has experienced significant institutional strengthening over the past year. One of the most significant advances was the review of its organisational vision, which the team felt no longer adequately reflected the unique value of its psychosocial support model. As a result of this process, the organization now possesses a formally documented vision and mission aligned with a collective understanding of its core purpose. This refinement has empowered them to convey the impact of their work with heightened clarity, authority, and conviction to key stakeholders, including partners, donors and strategic partners.

Building on this momentum, the organisation also advanced the documentation of its overarching intervention framework. Whilst this continues to be flexible and able to adapt to changes in context and the needs of the migrant populations arriving in Tijuana, the process allowed for greater clarity on its main components and approaches. Furthermore, the team recognised the need to establish protocols to enhance staff safety and wellness whilst operating in complex and high-risk environments, which will be prioritised at the next phase.

Centro 32 also has clear protocols for data collection, facilitating the monitoring and documentation of the impact of its work. However, some limitations related to the operational capacity to keep information updated systematically remain. Moving forward, the organisation aims to enhance these processes to generate timely data and insights, supporting informed decision-making and effective reporting of outcomes.

Institutional communications stood out as a primary organisational strength for Centro 32 from the start of the support process. The organisation has established a clear, coherent public identity that continues to gain momentum through its engagement in cultural and artistic initiatives. Additionally, through the collaboration with Ember, efforts were made to broaden the organisation's visibility amongst academic audiences, including its participation in a conference hosted by the National School of Social Work at UNAM university and the development of a photographic and journalistic project aimed at highlighting the experiences, motivations, and challenges of the team members.

Another key highlight is the strength of the organisation's collaborative networks. Over the past year, Centro 32 has strengthened both its local and international ties, enabling it to respond to a broader range of migrant population needs and expand the reach of its services through strategic partnerships.

Despite securing the necessary resources to maintain operations over the past year, the organisation's financial situation remains uncertain, primarily due to the short duration of the funding received, which in many cases does not exceed six months. However, it is worth noting that three of the funding grants received during this period resulted from direct invitations, reflecting the recognition and trust the organisation has built up amongst funders and partners. In addition, the organisation obtained a small amount of funding thanks to a connection facilitated by Ember. Moving forward, key priorities include reinforcing fund-raising capacity, potentially through dedicated staff tasked with tracking funding opportunities, overseeing application timelines, and leading grant drafting efforts.

Finally, significant progress was made this year in the area of organisational well-being. As with many small organisations, Centro 32 faces constant pressure to dedicate most of its resources to the direct care of the population it serves. However, recent experience has shown that small investments in team well-being can have significant impacts on their ability to work and on sustainability. Supported by Ember's Well-being Fund, the Centro 32 team conducted a retreat focused on self-care activities and strategic reflection. In this context, the organisation has started drawing up protocols and institutionalising well-being and self-care practices, laying the foundation for a stronger, more resilient organisational culture.