

Technical Note

# Effects of the ADN Dignidad cash transfer program for food security on out-migration in Colombia

Authors: Pablo Celhay, Pedro Held and Sebastian Martinez  
International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

July 25, 2025

# **Effects of the ADN Dignidad cash transfer program for food security on out-migration in Colombia**

This technical note summarizes the impacts of the ADN Dignidad<sup>1</sup> program on out-migration of participant households in Colombia. Beginning in 2019, ADN Dignidad provided cash assistance for food security, equivalent to 77 USD per month, to eligible Venezuelan and Colombian-returnee migrant and refugee households in Colombia for up to six months. The program also provided participants information on nutrition and food security, protection, household economy, livelihoods, and migration regularization. The program aimed to improve access to basic food, non-food items, and shelter. The program's impact evaluation used a regression discontinuity design to compare outcomes of eligible (treatment) and ineligible (control) households around the eligibility threshold. Martinez and Celhay (2023)<sup>2</sup> and (2024)<sup>3</sup> find that participant households experience a host of positive impacts, including reduced food insecurity and coping strategies, increased income and expenditures, reduced perceptions of discrimination and insecurity, improved social integration and higher subjective life satisfaction.

In this note we analyze the impact of the program on out-migration of participants using data from two post-intervention household surveys that tracked a sample of approximately 4300 applicants, of which roughly 2,000 were treatment and 2,300 were control households. The first follow-up survey was conducted 7 to 9 months after individuals applied to the program (1 to 3 months after participants finished the program) and the second survey 19 to 26 months after the initial application. Surveys were conducted by telephone, with multiple attempts to locate the respondent if the call was not answered. Subjects not reachable by phone were tracked to their last known place of residence and additional attempts to locate them were made using popular messaging apps and social media. Despite extensive tracking efforts, attrition rates in the population were 26% in the first follow-up survey and 32% in the second follow-up survey.

---

<sup>1</sup> ADN Dignidad is implemented by CUA Consortium integrated by Action Against Hunger, Danish Refugee Council and Norwegian Refugee Council, and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). The opinions expressed in this technical note are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of BHA, CUA Consortium, 3ie or its donors or board of commissioners.

<sup>2</sup> Celhay, P, Martinez, S, Impact Evaluation of the ADN Dignidad Program: Understanding the impact of a Humanitarian Cash Transfer (HCT) program in Colombia, 2023. 3ie Impact Evaluation Report 137. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.23846/ADNIE137>

<sup>3</sup> Celhay, P, Martinez, S, ADN Dignidad Long Term Impact Evaluation, August 2024 (forthcoming).

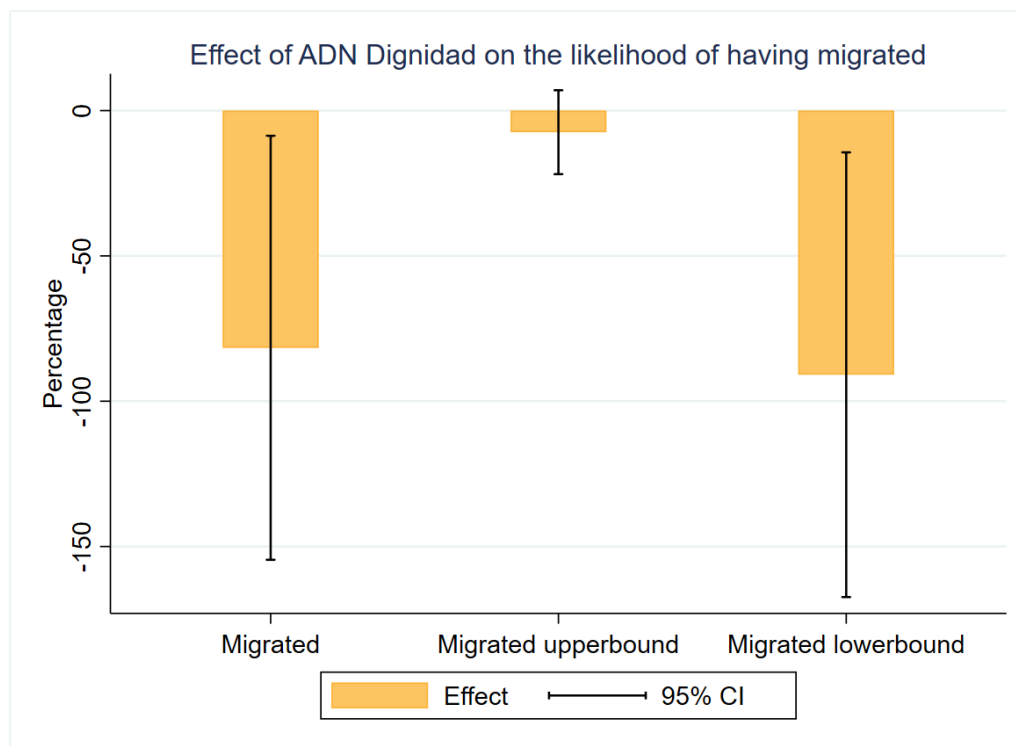
We classified an applicant as having migrated if they were reported to have left Colombia and/or were living abroad without plans to return. To determine this, we used information collected by enumerators during their repeated attempts to contact participants across survey rounds. Since the first follow-up survey did not directly ask about migration, we relied on the notes enumerators recorded during these contact attempts. In some cases, respondents themselves mentioned being abroad, while in others enumerators noted that households had moved out of the country. If someone was outside Colombia with no intention of returning, we classified them as having migrated, even if they ultimately completed the survey. Because recording this information was not mandatory, the number we identified should be considered a conservative estimate. Using this approach, we identified 41 households that had migrated, 24 of which did not respond to the survey.

The process of determining migration status for the second follow-up survey was more straightforward. One of the response options available in the survey was "applicant migrated," making it easier to identify migrants. However, as with the first survey, the total number of migrants could still be underreported. This is because respondents had to state expressly that they had migrated for it to be recorded. Some subjects may have refused to participate in the survey without giving a reason or never answered the phone and were not locatable through other means. Of the 3,189 households we attempted to contact in the second follow-up survey, 105 were identified as having migrated. Among these, 89 did not respond to the survey. As before, if migration was indicated at any point during multiple re-contact attempts, we categorized the household as having migrated.

Using our original study sample of 4,300 subjects, we compiled this data into a dichotomous variable equal to 1 if the individual was confirmed to have migrated within the 26 month period, and zero otherwise. Using these data, we estimated the effect of participating in the ADN Dignidad program on the likelihood of migration. The analysis reveals that over the study period, the migration rate in the control group was 3.9%. In other words, in the absence of the program, we would expect that approximately 4% of program participants would have migrated outside of Colombia. **Results of the impact analysis show that ADN Dignidad reduced the likelihood of migration by 3.5 percentage points, an 82% decline relative to the control group.** This effect is statistically significant

at the 95% confidence level in our preferred specification.<sup>4</sup> The relative effect size is presented graphically in the first column of Figure 1.

Figure 1: Effect of ADN Dignidad on Migration



Since our measure of migration is susceptible to measurement error, particularly under-reporting amongst subjects that were not located in the follow-up surveys, we construct upper and lower bounds of potential impacts on migration. In the most conservative scenario, we assume that all unreachable households had migrated (middle bar). In this case, participants were 7% less likely to migrate than non-participants. However, this difference is not significantly different from zero (null result). On the other hand, in the least conservative scenario, where we assume none of the unreachable households had migrated (other than the confirmed migrants), **we find that program participants were 90% less likely to migrate relative to the control group.**

The empirical analysis of ADN Dignidad's impact on migration is particularly relevant given theoretical ambiguity regarding the potential direction of the effect. On the one hand, ADN Dignidad provides cash assistance that could generate an income effect and provide seed capital to finance

<sup>4</sup> Results presented in this note are from a quadratic function (a degree-2 polynomial) of the regression discontinuity model. These results hold for a cubic (degree 3) function. A linear function (degree 1) produces negative, but smaller and not statistically significant treatment coefficients.

out-migration. On the other hand, there is strong evidence that the program improved participants' economic and social integration in Colombia, potentially generating an “anchoring” effect. Based on the analysis presented in this note, we can say conclusively that ADN Dignidad did not result in increased out-migration of participants, and in our most conservative scenario may have had a null effect. Despite the limitations on our ability to fully capture out-migration in the study sample given high attrition rates, results of the present analysis strongly **suggest that the program had large and statistically significant impacts on reducing migration to locations outside of Colombia.** Extrapolating our preferred impact estimate of a 3.5 percentage point reduction in migration to the full beneficiary population, a back of the envelope calculation suggests that the program prevented the out-migration of roughly 12,000 individuals during its first four years of operations.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Between 2019 and 2023 the program assisted 344,000 individuals. Taking a counterfactual migration rate of 3.9%, we estimate that 13,416 individuals would have migrated in the absence of the program. The program reduced out-migration by 3.5 percentage points, which translates into a reduction of 12,040 migrants.