

# Impact of Migration on Fire and EMS Clinicians in Southwestern Arizona

## USA Center for Rural Public Health Preparedness

### Background

The purpose of this report is to document the impact of migration across the U.S. southern land border on fire and EMS clinicians in southwestern Arizona.

The project involved the participation of fire departments from Yuma, Somerton, and San Luis, Arizona. As part of the methodology, two key data collection methods were employed: 28 in-depth interviews conducted in January 2024 and a multi-state survey conducted from June to October 2024. The data collected from these methods were analyzed by researchers at Texas A&M University.

### Problem

Migration is primarily discussed within a security context, which enhances focus on law enforcement actions, while minimizing or overlooking the medical and emergency care components of migration. Importantly, infrastructure designed to increase border security often creates more significant rescue and emergency care demand. For example, studies conducted at a trauma hospital in San Diego found a ten-fold increase in border wall-related trauma after the border fence increase in 2017. Another study found a 162% increase in migrant deaths in recent years as the result of border security policy that pushes individuals to cross in more dangerous locations. Importantly, the numbers represent the extremes and, thus, only capture a fraction of what local fire and EMS clinicians respond to.

As the number of individuals entering the U.S. increases and our border security infrastructure expands and extends, call volumes increase, and the asks made our or fire and EMS clinicians stretches them beyond currently available resources and capacity. This not only has impacts on available resources for non-migrant calls but it threatens the physical and mental well-being of fire and EMS clinicians. Identifying and characterizing the impact of migration on fire and EMS is critical to providing them with the resources they need to do their jobs safely and effectively.

### Conclusion

Both the survey and interviews show that migration has a significant impact on the mental and physical well-being of fire and EMS clinicians, but it also has an impact on available resources. CBP reliance on local fire and EMS for emergency care and medical transport without adequate funding and resource compensation is unsustainable. Addressing migration only in the security context is insufficient for the complex, multi-dimensional nature of the issue. More funding and resources are required for border region fire and EMS to adequately protect migrants, the local community, and fire and EMS clinicians.

### Key Findings

#### Survey

- **86%** of Arizona EMS clinicians agreed that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) relies on them for emergency care for migrants
- **83%** of Arizona EMS clinicians agreed that they face language barriers that make it more difficult for them to provide care to migrants
- **69%** of Arizona EMS clinicians agreed that they feel higher levels of stress during migrant surges
- **63%** of Arizona EMS clinicians agreed that they feel more stress when responding to migrant calls compared to resident calls
- **65%** of Arizona EMS clinicians agreed that their department does not have enough resources to respond to migrant calls
- **90%** of Arizona EMS clinicians said they need more federal resources to help them better respond to migrant and resident calls
- **88%** of Arizona EMS clinicians said they need more federal resource to help them better respond to migrant and resident calls

#### Interviews

- Migration results in higher call volumes
- Local EMS hold primary responsibility for emergency care and transport for migrants and residents
- Migrant influxes reduce or eliminate downtime for clinicians
- Migrant influxes create mass casualty-like scenarios
- Responding to migrants is emotional difficult
- More funding is needed