

WHEN MOVEMENTS WIN

LESSONS FROM SPAIN'S REGULARISATION MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS FUNDERS

A joint briefing by Ariadne, Calala Fondo de Mujeres, Migration Exchange and
Safe Passage Fund

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Across Europe and the US, anti-rights political movements are gaining ground, with migration often serving as a testing ground for wider attacks on human rights. How states treat migrants is increasingly a test of whose rights are recognised and whose are made conditional. Where rights are curtailed for one group, the broader principle of universality is weakened for all.

But this is also why it is important to learn from where movements are succeeding. In the face of an increasingly coordinated anti-rights agenda, **fundors need not only to understand the threats, but to learn from the movements building power and winning transformative change.**

This is why Ariadne, Calala Fondo de Mujeres, Migration Exchange and Safe Passage Fund came together to produce this insight paper. Regularización Ya! (Regularisation Now!) offers a powerful example of a migrant-led, grassroots movement securing change at national scale: helping to achieve a mass regularisation process in Spain that received 1,174,978 applications. **Its success offers lessons for funders across the human rights field, not only those working on migration, about how communities build power, shift narratives, mobilise allies and sustain long-term movements.**

BACKGROUND

This briefing is based on a webinar hosted by Ariadne, Calala Fondo de Mujeres (Calala Women's Fund), Migration Exchange and Safe Passage Fund in June 2026, which brought together over 50 philanthropic actors. Webinar participants heard directly from two [Regularización Ya!](#) women leaders about their experiences of building power from the bottom up. Representatives from Safe Passage Fund and Calala Fondo de Mujeres also spoke about their learnings from funding and supporting grassroots migrant justice movements, and about the overall funding landscape in Spain.

The webinar created a space for funders working across different parts of the human rights ecosystem to learn from a movement that had achieved transformative change under adverse political conditions. This briefing distils some of the key insights from that conversation, while situating the victory within its wider political and funding context.

It is not intended as a definitive account of the campaign or as a blueprint for replication. Rather, it asks what funders can learn from a movement that succeeded in building collective power over time and what those lessons might mean for funding strategies at a moment when the defence of rights requires stronger connections across movements, issues and geographies.

This insight paper explores how self-organised, migrant-led movements can build power and achieve significant political change, drawing on the case study of Regularización Ya! and lessons from the movement leaders themselves. It also brings together reflections from funders who supported the movement, including Safe Passage Fund and Calala Fondo de Mujeres, offering practical insights into how funders can identify and support emerging movements, build proximity to grassroots communities and develop relationships based on trust, flexibility and long-term support. Drawing on these experiences and the wider webinar discussion, the paper considers what funders can do to support migrant-led movements that remain under-resourced despite their growing importance to the defence of human rights and democracy,

A NOTE ON THE CHANGING CONTEXT

While the webinar took place on 2 June 2026, the application period for the extraordinary regularisation process closed on 30 June, with almost 1.2 million applications submitted, far exceeding expectations.

The migration context in Spain has also shifted dramatically since June. In late July, Spain also faced an unprecedented migration crisis in Ceuta, where around 72,000 people crossed into the Spanish enclave from Morocco and many people tragically lost their lives during the crossings. The number of people crossing was unprecedented, but crossings and deaths at the border are not a new phenomenon. The crisis was rapidly exploited by far-right actors and media to amplify anti-migrant narratives across Europe and the UK. Yet, even amid this humanitarian tragedy and intense political pressure, Spain's experience has again demonstrated the importance of resisting the framing of migration as a threat to be met solely with securitisation. It is also a stark reminder of why the lessons from Regularización Ya! and from movements capable of building public support for rights-based approaches to migration remain so important.

2 | CASE STUDY: HOW REGULARIZACIÓN YA! BUILT AND WON TO REGULARISE MIGRANTS IN SPAIN

Spain's mass regularisation programme was secured in a challenging political environment. Across Europe and the US, anti-migrant narratives have hardened, far-right parties have gained political influence, and the language of securitisation has increasingly displaced the language of rights. Unlike many other EU governments, Spain's government is centre-left and has been one of the more openly pro-migration governments in the EU. However, there are growing tensions. Vox, the national-conservative far-right party in Spain, has made opposition to immigration a defining battleground and continues to gain ground, including in regional coalitions with other right-wing parties. It was nevertheless in this context that Regularización Ya! organised, campaigned and won.

Regularización Ya! was founded in 2020 as a self-organised coalition of migrant worker collectives and anti-racist organisations. During the Covid-19 pandemic, migrants played a crucial role in sustaining Spanish society, while many remained undocumented and unable to access healthcare, stable employment, labour protections and other public services.

In April 2020, 120 organisations representing migrants came together to demand urgent, unconditional and extraordinary regularisation. To advance its demand, Regularización Ya! used a Citizens' Legislative Initiative (ILP), a formal mechanism requiring at least 500,000 valid signatures from Spanish nationals to bring a proposal directly to Congress.

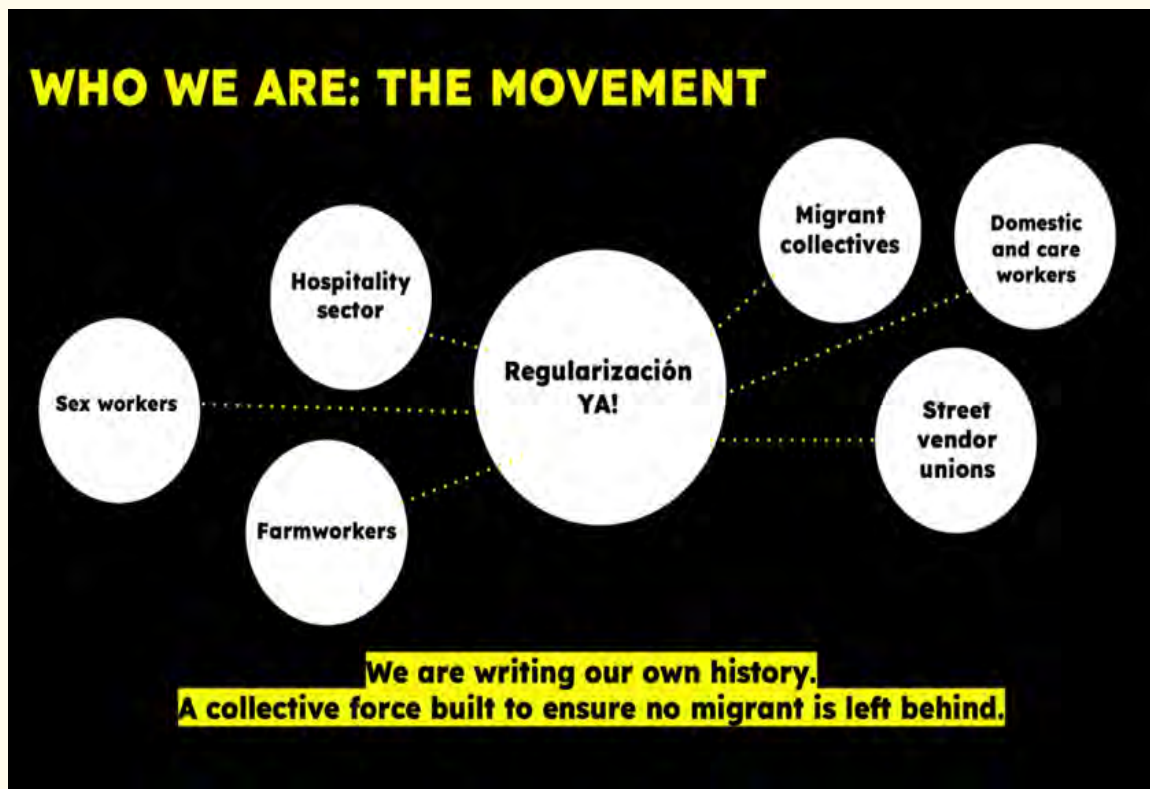


Figure 1: Image from Regularización YA!'s webinar presentation, June 2026.

The movement was built neighbourhood by neighbourhood through mutual aid networks that formed during Covid-19 and continued afterwards.

“We had the power and the conviction that we were going in the right direction – from the streets to Congress.” Regularización Ya!’s leaders, webinar, June 2026

The movement combined grassroots mobilisation with intensive political advocacy, taking part in media debates, doing outreach and awareness-raising with political parties and different sectors of society. It also made a deliberate choice to frame migrants as people with equal rights, rather than as victims in need of charity. Organisers adapted their messaging linguistically, making their case in Catalan and Basque to build support in regions with distinct political cultures and parties with influence in Congress.

Despite operating without offices, paid staff or significant institutional backing, and in a tense political climate marked by widespread racism and rising far-right organising, Regularización Ya! surpassed their goal by collecting more than 700,000 signatures, submitted to Congress in December 2022.

In April 2024, Congress voted 310 to 33 to admit the proposal for consideration. Only Vox voted against. When the parliamentary process subsequently stalled, Regularización Ya! continued to campaign for regularisation, contributing to sustained political pressure that ultimately led the Spanish government to adopt an extraordinary regularisation programme through a Royal Decree. Two years later, in April 2026, it was finally settled: the Regularización Ya! campaign had won. Anyone who had lived in Spain for at least five months, arrived before 1 January 2026, and had no criminal record could now apply for regularisation.

The movement also built strategic alliances across the political spectrum, mapping who held influence with which political actors. For example, partnering with the Catholic Church enabled pressure to be applied to both the centre-right Partido Popular and the governing Socialist Party (PSOE), in ways that the movement itself could not. Links with anti-fascist organisations and grassroots street movements also kept the coalition grounded in its activist politics.

When the application window closed on 30 June 2026, around 1.2 million applications had been submitted. For many, this opportunity to regularise their status in Spain represents the difference between a stable life and continued exploitation.

THE WORK GOES ON

Spain's administrative system was overwhelmed by the number of applications for regularisation. Immigration offices not designed or staffed for a process of this scale buckled under demand, while many applicants faced significant barriers in obtaining the required documentation. War, weaker state infrastructure and legal barriers in some applicants' home countries made the necessary paperwork effectively impossible to obtain.

Again, migrant communities were the ones driving the largely unfunded and often invisible work forward, providing hands-on administrative and digital support to people navigating an opaque and hostile bureaucracy, as well as running crowdfunding drives, hosting fundraising events, selling merchandise, and building legal aid networks staffed largely by migrant lawyers.

“Bureaucracy, fees, digital barriers and administrative overload are fences too – and like all borders, they do not affect everyone equally.” Regularización Ya!’s leaders, webinar, June 2026

KEY INSIGHTS FROM MOVEMENT LEADERS ON FUNDING MOVEMENTS

The Regularización Ya! campaign offers several lessons about what becomes possible when movements are trusted and given room to lead, even when under-resourced.

Building power from the streets

From the outset, Regularización Ya! defined itself as a political movement with one clear demand: unconditional regularisation. This clarity shaped their communications, guided coalition choices and kept the campaign focused across six years and multiple political setbacks.

The movement was built neighbourhood by neighbourhood, through mutual aid networks that formed during Covid-19 and continued ever since. To gain signatures, volunteers put on fluorescent yellow vests and carried tables to public spaces, working in situations that the movement leaders described as often tense and sometimes openly hostile or racist.

“Our movement happens in the street... Getting signatures was valuable enough to spend our Saturdays there...every weekend, every night, every afternoon after we finished work”. Regularización Ya!’s leaders, webinar, June 2026

Shifting the narrative

Regularización Ya! made a deliberate choice to actively endorse a language around solidarity, and framing migrants as people with equal rights instead of as victims in need of charity. The movement also made a successful strategic choice to adapt linguistically, with organisers making their case in Catalan and Basque. This enabled them to build support in regions with distinct political cultures and parties with influence in congress.

Allowing for new alliances

Another key element of Regularización Ya!’s approach was to build strategic alliances across the political spectrum, by mapping who held influence with which political actors. For example, partnering with the Catholic Church enabled pressure to be applied on both the centre-right Partido Popular and the governing Socialist Party (PSOE), in ways that the movement itself could

not. Links with anti-fascist organisations and grassroots street movements also kept the coalition grounded in its activist politics.

Sustaining organising through trust, flexibility and long-term horizons

Regularización Ya! insisted that Spain's migrants lead their own struggle, not NGOs or other allied organisations, however sympathetic. Far from a statement of distrust, this was a condition for authentic solidarity. The movement also required funders and allies to accept a relationship built on trust, with long-term horizons rather than set project cycles.



Figure 2: Photo credit Regularización YA!, June 2026.

3 | INSIGHTS FROM FUNDERS WHO FUNDED THE MOVEMENT

The webinar provided an important opportunity to learn not only from Regularización Ya!'s leaders, but also from the funders who supported the movement. This perspective was particularly valuable for the other funders in the room. Too often, philanthropic learning focuses on movements only once a victory has been secured. Hearing directly from funders who had identified, trusted and supported the movement offered a rare opportunity to examine the funding decisions and relationships that can help create the conditions for success.

Representatives from Safe Passage Fund and Calala Women's Fund shared candid reflections on what shaped their approaches to funding Regularización Ya! and grassroots migrant justice movements more broadly. Their experience points to several practical lessons for funders seeking to support movements that may be emerging, under-resourced or operating outside the conventional boundaries of institutional philanthropy.

Proximity to ground-level reality is a precondition for effective grantmaking

Institutional distance from communities, activists, and the realities of organising can shape which groups are seen as legitimate, which demands are considered fundable, and which movements remain invisible. Safe Passage Fund, a women* and activist-led intermediary that supports migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking and diaspora communities across Europe, seeks to bridge this gap through its Activist Council, a participatory grantmaking body made up of people with lived experience of migration and displacement. By placing decision-making power in the hands of those closest to the issues, the fund builds relationships with groups that might otherwise remain off funders' radar.

This approach is reflected in how Safe Passage Fund identified Regularización Ya!. A member of the Activist Council, who works with Top Manta, a clothing brand and cooperative founded by undocumented African migrants in Barcelona, introduced the movement to the fund. That trusted connection gave Safe Passage Fund the confidence to recognise the movement's significance and move quickly to provide support. This illustrates how proximity to communities is not simply

a matter of inclusion, but a strategic advantage that enables funders to identify and support impactful movements that might otherwise be overlooked.

For larger institutional funders, building that proximity means investing in trusted intermediaries who are closer to the ground, and whose participatory mechanisms bring decision-making closer to grassroots realities.

Movements are not projects, and flexible funding can make all the difference

Both Safe Passage Fund and Calala approach funding social movements as long-term processes built through relationships, trust and collective action, rather than as projects with shorter or fixed timeframes. Regularización Ya!'s success resulted from years of organising, much of it invisible in conventional reporting terms involving ongoing coordination, care, strategic thinking, narrative change, and building and maintaining coalitions.

Funders wanting to resource movements could therefore benefit from moving towards flexible, multi-year core support that allows organisations to respond to political opportunity, sustain their infrastructure, and invest in leadership.

Spain's philanthropic ecosystem reflects broader structural constraints

Calala noted that in Spain, social justice funding has historically flowed primarily from public institutions rather than private philanthropy, and that private funders have tended to concentrate support on service provision, humanitarian response and established NGOs. The philanthropic environment remains, by their account, relatively cautious about politically contentious agendas and reluctant to fund organisations or movements that fall outside conventional definitions of credibility.

This dynamic is not unique to Spain. Across Europe, intermediary funds and feminist funds play a critical bridging role precisely because they are closer to grassroots realities, better positioned to identify emergent movements, and more willing to fund the kinds of organisations and agendas that mainstream philanthropy overlooks. Eighty per cent of Calala's staff are racialised and all are migrants – a staffing model that directly shapes what they can see, reach and resource.

Supporting intermediaries is a strategic choice

For funders without established relationships in a given context, or without portfolios explicitly focused on migration, channeling resources through intermediary funds can often be the most

direct route to supporting movements that are migrant-led and under-resourced. Flexible, long-term grants to intermediaries often translate directly into more responsive, more appropriate support for the organisations closest to the ground.

What intermediaries need from funders often mirrors what movements need from theirs: trust, flexibility, a smaller reporting burden, and the understanding that the most important work is often invisible in conventional metrics. Funders who extend those conditions to intermediaries can enable the entire ecosystem to function more effectively.

Reducing the burden on organisers is a form of solidarity

Another important point raised in the webinar discussion concerned the relational dimension of grantmaking. Truly understanding how movements function – so that funders can meet them where they are – can constitute a meaningful shift in how power operates in the grant maker–grantee relationship.



Figure 3: Photo credit Regularización YA!, June 2026.

4 | FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION: WHAT FUNDERS CAN DO NOW

The case of Regularización Ya! demonstrates why, at a time of growing pressure on human rights across Europe, it is important to learn not only from the threats facing movements but from where movements are achieving change.

The case study from Spain does not offer a model that can simply be replicated elsewhere. Movements operate within different political, social and institutional contexts. Nor can any single grant, organisation or funding strategy determine whether a movement will succeed. But the experience of Regularización Ya! does highlight choices that human rights funders can make in supporting the conditions in which movements can build and sustain power.

A. Fund power alongside provision

Continue to support the services, legal assistance and emergency responses that people urgently need. But alongside these, invest in organising, leadership and collective power. For human rights funders, this means considering whether funding portfolios provide space for the longer-term work through which communities can organise, develop strategy and influence the systems affecting their rights.

B. Put resources closer to the ground

Look beyond established institutions and create pathways for community-led actors to access flexible resources. Funders will not always have the proximity, relationships or contextual knowledge needed to identify emerging movements directly. Trusted intermediaries, participatory grantmaking mechanisms and organisations with strong links to affected communities can help bring funding decisions closer to grassroots realities.

C. Make the long term possible

Use multi-year, flexible funding to give movements the time and space to build relationships, develop strategy, respond to political opportunities and meet their everyday needs. The case-

study from Spain also highlights the importance of funding movements before success is evident. By the time a movement has achieved a major policy victory, many of the conditions that made that victory possible have already been built over years of organising.

D. Strengthen the connective infrastructure

Fund the networks, intermediaries, convening spaces, communications capacity and shared infrastructure that enable movements to work together. This includes supporting the relationships across sectors that can help movements build broader constituencies and influence. In the Regularización Ya! case, strategic alliances were an important part of the campaign's ability to translate grassroots organising into political change.

E. Invest in narrative power

Support people closest to the issues to shape the public narrative, not simply appear within it. Communications and translation capacity, and the ability to develop messages for different audiences can enable movements to challenge exclusionary narratives and build broader support. Funders can treat this work as part of the infrastructure of movement-building, rather than as an additional communications activity.

F. Act collectively

No single funder needs to address these challenges alone. Networks, pooled funds and collaborative grantmaking can help funders share knowledge, coordinate support and move resources more effectively. This is particularly relevant to European human rights funders working across different issue areas. The pressures facing migrant rights are connected to wider questions around democracy, gender, racial justice and civic space. Greater coordination across these areas can help ensure that funding strategies reflect the interconnected nature of the challenges movements are addressing.

5 | CONCLUSION

The political environment can make sustained progress on human rights appear increasingly difficult. The experience of Regularización Ya! provides evidence that significant change remains possible, including in challenging political contexts.

Its success was the result of sustained organising over time. It depended on people directly affected by injustice having the ability to organise and lead; on relationships and networks built over years; on the capacity to respond to political opportunities; on strategic alliances; and on the development of narratives capable of reaching beyond the movement's traditional base.

Philanthropy cannot create or control these conditions. But it can influence whether movements have access to the resources, relationships, infrastructure and time required to develop them.

The experience of Regularización Ya! demonstrates the importance of supporting the conditions in which communities can organise, claim their rights and influence political change. For European human rights funders, the task is not simply to respond to current pressures, but to consider how funding can support the longer-term capacity of movements to shape what comes next.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN PUTTING TOGETHER THIS BRIEFING

[ARIADNE](#) is Europe's leading network for social change and human rights, connecting over 650 representatives from more than 120 foundations and philanthropists across 20+ countries. United by the belief that collaboration drives deeper and more lasting change, Ariadne creates trusted spaces for exchange, learning, and collective action, helping social change, human rights, and democracy philanthropy remain responsive, inclusive, and bold.

Based in the United Kingdom

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[CALALA FONDO DE MUJERES](#) is a foundation founded in 2009 with the dream of Spanish and Central American women from promote the rights of women and LBTIQ+ community members in Central America and Spain.

Based in Spain

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[MIGRATION EXCHANGE](#) is a UK-based charitable programme, whose mission is to cultivate insight, collaboration and collective action, towards changing the UK migration

system for good. MEX's purpose is to be a bridge between funders, charities and communities, shaping a future together where all people who migrate are met with care. Through convenings, reports, strategic interventions on preparedness, and pooled funds, MEX gathers and shares insight, unlocks resources, and creates spaces for collaboration and collective action.

Based in the United Kingdom

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SAFE PASSAGE FUND is a women*-led intermediary fund, channeling resources to strengthen a connected movement for belonging, dignity, and inclusion across Europe.

Based in Germany

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