



“While the COVID-19 pandemic has **yet to reach its peak** in Latin America, overstretched public health services will **continue to be challenged** over the coming months. We urge the international community to **generously provide support** through this revised **response plan**.”

Eduardo Stein

Joint UNHCR-IOM Special Representative
for refugees and migrants from Venezuela

[Read](#) the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP)

Situational Highlights



Some countries have announced measures to relax confinement or curfews to be implemented progressively since May in certain regions or locations of Argentina, Colombia or Peru. Lockdowns continue or are even tightened in others, such as the Para State, Brazil, El Salvador or Trinidad and Tobago as COVID-19 cases rise across Latin America.

Despite border restrictions, cross-border and internal displacements are recorded in the region of people aiming to return to their countries of origin after evictions or being laid off, but also in search of safety. In this context of uncertainty, some have been detained after violating confinement measures. Further

displacement within countries and across borders might be expected due to social unrest but also linked to persistent violence.

Concerns persist over COVID-19 cases among people of concern in host countries and on the move, including potential outbreaks in collective sites or migratory detention centers. As OHCHR alerted this week, chronic overcrowding and inadequate access to health services in detention facilities in the Americas may contribute to a rapid spread. To reduce a potential outbreak, Mexico has released most of the people in immigration centers. Access to asylum procedures, though still possible in person (Canada, Mexico, Belize, Guatemala)

by remote means (Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay) is in many cases on hold during the emergency (Panama). Access to territory has become increasingly hard as a result of the closure of borders, and there is concern in Costa Rica about possible pushbacks. The response to cases of internal displacement are being coordinated with state authorities and ombudsman's offices (El Salvador, Honduras). On 11 May, UNHCR issued a set of [recommendations](#) urging Governments worldwide to pay urgent attention to the plight of millions of stateless people and to ensure their coverage in the COVID-19 response.

Challenges



Scarcity is triggering unrest in some countries. Advocacy efforts are most needed to counter hostility of local populations, attacks and threats, or public statements scapegoating refugees, migrants and deportees, who in some cases have required special protection measures such as relocation. LGBTIQ+ people have also voiced concerns over their access to asylum, health services and to humanitarian assistance programs.

Despite challenges related to mobility restrictions, procurement shortages of protective equipment, security concerns, and even negative public opinion regarding support for refugees or people in mixed movements, UNHCR is progressively resuming activities in consonance with States measures. Advocacy efforts with authorities are ongoing in order to prevent evictions and foster inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in national programs.

UNHCR's response in the Americas



Despite the pandemic-related restrictions, UNHCR continues to work to provide life-saving assistance, through cash and voucher mechanisms, but also to strengthen national health responses to contain the spread of the disease. In coordination with States, the UN system, civil society and also the refugee population and its hosting communities, UNHCRs is enhancing Governments' health response through the dissemination of COVID-19 public advisories, training and the provision of protective equipment, refugee housing units (RHUs) to set up isolation or medical areas, or through the support to dedicated spaces for quarantine population, as shelters or medical facilities. Alternative accommodation has also been provided for many people requiring quarantine after crossing a border.

In **Ecuador** and **Mexico**, in cooperation with the refugee population, UNHCR is providing masks for health care workers and individuals in local prisons. In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR identified among POCs 20 health professionals with the required skills to respond to the call for experts launched by the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), and more than 30 refugee medical students in Cuba to support house-to-house visits. In Panama, UNHCR provided facemasks to the local Red Cross, who are at the frontline providing assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. With the coronavirus crisis exacerbating already dire humanitarian needs globally, timely and flexible support from governments, the private sector and individuals remains critical to ensure the ability to respond.

UPDATES FROM COUNTRIES

(Please note the list is not exhaustive and mostly reflects the reporting period.)

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Brazil: In Belem, a new shelter for the indigenous population was inaugurated on 5 May. The space will have a capacity to house 500 indigenous Venezuelans who will be relocated from inadequate municipal and state shelters as well as from severely overcrowded private housing. A group of 123 indigenous Warao who were being temporarily hosted in a public school since being evicted from private housing in mid-April were the first to move into the space.
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Colombia: UNHCR and partners in Antioquia provided support to 2,900 Venezuelans, internally displaced persons and local families in Medellin, Bello and Apartadó with cash for rent, food, basic needs and livelihood protection. UNHCR in Barranquilla offered logistical support to the Department of Atlántico with the distribution of 2,000 food kits in the southern municipalities of Suan and Campolacruz.
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Costa Rica: Some 90 households, mostly Nicaraguans, received food and hygiene items in the northern region in the communities of Upala and Los Chiles, an additional 209 hygiene kits have been distributed. Also in support to the Government health response, UNHCR is providing accommodation for refugee families requiring isolation as a preventive measure.
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Dominican Republic: UNHCR co-leads the interagency coordination efforts of the protection sector established during the COVID-19 crisis and coordinates joint initiatives for an inclusive response that takes into account needs of Venezuelans and people of Haitian descent in need of a nationality solution.
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El Salvador: Since March, the Protection Cluster led by UNHCR, reports that 297 communities affected by internal displacement have been supported through humanitarian organizations, 22,678 people were informed through social media campaigns and digital platforms and, 3,622 individuals at-risk have received humanitarian assistance.
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Guatemala: UNHCR and partners in Tecún Umán assist asylum-seekers in paying rent, buying beds, kitchen utensils, and providing hygiene kits. UNHCR and the Red Cross provided humanitarian assistance to asylum-seekers and people in transit in Petén. UNHCR has provided information to 1,050 refugees and asylum-seekers on COVID-19 prevention measures via WhatsApp and SMS.
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Mexico: More than 4,300 asylum-seekers and refugees have received humanitarian assistance, including cash for rental housing. UNHCR is also delivering dignity kits for women to 50 shelters as well as antibacterial gels, facemasks/protection eyewear and other sanitary and hygiene products to 90 shelters. Portable sinks are also being installed in shelters, community centers and some public spaces.
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Peru: UNHCR is coordinating actions to support over 640 people in the 20 shelters/hotels/temporary collective centers hosting refugees and migrants, mostly from Venezuela. In Lima, UNHCR and partners IFRC, Illari Amanecer and Plan International, are supporting 13 shelters as well as one temporary collective center hosting over 80 Haitian citizens stranded in transit, with basic items, food and hygiene.
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Uruguay: 180 people (104 Venezuelans, 45 Cubans) have received remote orientation and guidance. 27 people received cash support, while another 360 individuals were referred to other NGOs to obtain hygiene kits. Additionally, 200 phone SIM cards were distributed among households of concern to ensure constant communication.
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Venezuela: UNHCR is supporting quarantine centers in Apure (with 400 sleeping mats and 130 bamboo mats), Ciudad Guayana (with bunk beds and bed linen to receive 120 persons), Guajira (with mattresses, lamps, hygiene kits for 300 people), Tachira (with personal protection equipment for the Ombudsperson personnel) and Zulia (by doubling the capacity of two transit shelters). 14 community structures in Táchira received hygiene kits in cooperation with HIAS.

The national Platform in **Colombia** (GIFMM) launched the results of a [Joint Rapid Needs Assessment](#) developed by 13 partners, analysing the situation of refugee and migrant households in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 20% of the households reported receiving any source of income and 48% reported to receive none. Main needs are food (95%), support with shelter (53%) and employment (45%).



Stories from the field

“On many occasions, we have run out of food... and have had to rely on donations,” said David, who arrived in the Peruvian city of Cusco, along with his wife and children, in 2018. “The pandemic made a situation that was already difficult for many Venezuelans that much more difficult.”

More than five million Venezuelans have fled food and medicine shortages, rampant inflation, insecurity and persecution, mostly to other South American nations. Before the start of the COVID-19 crisis, David conducted in-person group counselling sessions in Cusco to help distressed recent arrivals from Venezuela and local residents of his host community, with the assistance of UNHCR.

As soon as Peru adopted COVID-19 lockdown measures aimed at stemming contagion, the sessions moved online. David now leads two-hour-long Google Meet sessions twice a week, each assisting around 20 participants. You can read the story [HERE](#).



Coordination and Response to date



RMRP

The revised Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) was released on 12 May 2020 through a [joint UNHCR-IOM press release](#). With the participation of now 151 partners (14 new compared with the original plan launched in November 2019), reviewed financial requirements amount to US 1.41 billion. Some 31% of activities (USD 439 million) have been introduced /

re-prioritized to respond to life-saving and emergency needs in the COVID-19 context. The revised RMRP is incorporated in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) for COVID-19. See also weekly [flash update](#) (8 May).



R4V - COVID-19 Flash Update
- 08 May 2020

