

AMERICAS - Covid19

26 March 2020 | UPDATE #2

This update provides information on UNHCR's response to the challenges related to COVID-19 in the Americas, the effect the pandemic has or may have on people of concern to UNHCR in the region, and some of the strategies operations are adopting to continue delivering for persons of concern. Should you need more details on the response put in place in the countries, please contact us.

Situational Highlights

On 25 March, OCHA launched the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), seeking \$1.99 billion until the end of the year. The GHRP includes financial requirements of \$255 million for UNHCR to address new challenges arising because of COVID-19 for refugees and IDPs around the globe. The GHRP includes countries with an HRP or a Regional Refugee Plan (RRP) and the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Venezuela (RMRP). The recent UNHCR appeal of US\$33 million for COVID-19 has been absorbed into the GHRP.

In order to better face the unprecedented challenges linked to the pandemic, UNHCR has decided to activate a **global Level 2 emergency for three months**. This global emergency activation gives country operations additional authorities and flexibilities to ensure protection, assistance and delivery of essential services to people of concern.

At the same time, UNHCR is **updating its risk register** to assess the level of risks taken for operations to be able to continue to deliver to those most in need.

Across the continent, border closures have in effect paralyzed refugees, migrants and asylum seekers and increased the **risks of irregular movements**. Internally, millions of refugees, IDPs and migrants who **depend on the informal sector** to sustain themselves and their families have **lost their source of income** as a result of social control measures (quarantines, lockdowns, curfews). **Closure of shelters or reception centres increase** the level of risk for the most vulnerable, especially those living on the streets.

UNHCR's Response

All operations in the Americas are **reprioritizing their activities** to address the challenges of the pandemic. UNHCR and partners are adapting regular activities to **ensure attention and protection** continues where in-person activities have been temporarily suspended following the national health authorities' guidance. **Information and counselling** continue over the phone, via hotlines and call centres and other forms of remote support. **Engagement with the population of concern** to UNHCR and hosting communities is maintained through community leaders, trusted interlocutors and outreach workers, where possible (using WhatsApp groups, communication trees, among others).

Priority areas in most countries are the following:

- **Border and Protection monitoring:** in collaboration with Governments and partners, UNHCR is putting in place mechanisms to monitor and report protection risks, refer vulnerable cases and advocate with Governments to mitigate potential negative protection effect, including through remote monitoring and where possible by negotiating with national and local authorities for continued humanitarian access.
- **Prevention and control:** UNHCR is ensuring adequate access to clean water, soap and waste disposal in reception centres and temporary shelters. It has stepped up distributions of hygiene kits and enhanced shelter facilities to ensure enough space, reinforced first aid and medical capacity in reception centres. In addition, some support may be provided to local health facilities, depending on availability of funds.
- **Shelter capacity:** in many countries (i.e. Costa Rica, Colombia, Peru), UNHCR is responding to national and local authorities request to contribute to the provision of quarantine spaces, usually through the expansion of reception and communal centres or the provision of the housing unit (RHU).
- **Critical case management:** Operations are strengthening referral mechanism for very vulnerable individuals (women at risk or survivors of SGBV, elderly, those suffering from chronic illnesses and others). In order to support the most vulnerable, plans are in place to accelerate emergency cash-based interventions.
- **Advocacy:** UNHCR is advocating for the inclusion of refugees and persons of concerns in the national preparedness and response plans (i.e. calculation of stockpile needs of medicines, personal protective equipment, ancillary pharmaceuticals and supplies, and laboratory diagnostics).
- **Risk communication and community engagement:** UNHCR is strengthening information on hygiene measure, using both traditional channels and emerging social media platforms in an effort to reach the highest possible number of people on the move.
- **Coordination:** UNHCR co-leads with IOM regional and national coordination platforms in countries with high numbers of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Through the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform, UNHCR and its co-lead are coordinating the Covid-19 response for refugees and migrants in the region. Working with WHO/PAHO, members of the Platform provide regional guidance on adapting modalities of work to ensure continuity of delivery of

life-saving aid and cash assistance (available in a dedicated section of R4V.info), while identifying areas for priority interventions and providing crucial information to refugees and migrants from Venezuela.

Highlights by country and UNHCR Response

Colombia

- **Humanitarian corridors** at the three international bridges in Norte de Santander **have been kept open for people with chronic or critical medical conditions**. As a result of border closures, many have resorted to trying to cross through irregular entry points. UNHCR is concerned that between 16 – 22 of March, Colombian Migration authorities have deported more than 6,000 Venezuelans without health checks, of which many remain stranded in border areas of Venezuela. Conditions in quarantine centres/ community areas are critical.
- The Regional Platform led by UNHCR and IOM coordinating the response to refugees and migrants from Venezuela have published with local and national authorities **a key document outlining measures taken to continue critical activities**, adapting programmes to current restrictions in order to be able to maintain service to persons of concern
- UNHCR is coordinating with WHO, UNICEF and health authorities the **procurement of biomedical equipment requested by health authorities**, as well as of personal protective equipment for partner and health staff. UNHCR has already provided hand-gels, masks and other equipment to local health centres. UNHCR is also partnering with local authorities in opening 10 points in the Medellín city center to serve people in a street like situation with showers, sanitary services, toilet and food.
- **UNHCR activated call centers** in 24 locations nationwide to provide orientation on prevention measures and where to call/go in case of suspected COVID-19 cases, identify cases needing urgent assistance, SGVB prevention and response measures during the mandatory isolation period, rights, regularization procedures and access to services.

Brazil

- Most services in the three **Documentation Centres** in Pacaraima, Boa Vista and Manaus have been suspended. Only extremely vulnerable protection cases will be attended for case management and life-saving support, while documentation support will be provided only for individuals who already had been scheduled for internal relocation travel.
- UNHCR is supporting the national authorities with the **establishment of a new shelter** for the treatment and isolation of suspected and confirmed cases in Boa Vista with a total capacity for 2,700 people to receive both Venezuelans and Brazilians. The space will be divided in two areas, one for medical treatment and the second for protection and triage. Suspected cases in shelters will be referred to this area. UNHCR is helping with the technical advice in the construction, 200 RHUs and the distribution of mattresses and blankets.

Ecuador

- Asylum authorities have officially launched an **email-based system** to receive asylum applications, renew documentation and initiate other procedures such as family reunification requests.
- On 23 March, President Lenin Moreno signed Decree 1020 **extending the process of registration and regularization for humanitarian reasons for Venezuelans in Ecuador**. These activities will be extended for 60 days, starting as of the end of the state of emergency. ¹ In addition, Ministerial Agreement 0000035 (19 March 2020) suspends deadlines and terms in all administrative processes related to human mobility, including RSD and visa renewals, until the end of the emergency declaration.
- UNHCR has adopted key **measures to ensure communication with communities**, including the establishment of emergency phone lines and a WhatsApp information line. Moreover, the office is working with youth youtuber influencers to share information materials with communities.
- UNHCR and partners are also adapting their CBI response both in terms of payment modalities and criteria, which need to be expanded to cater for an increased number of vulnerable refugees
- UNHCR and partners are also strengthening existing shelters and negotiating with hotels to receive refugees and migrants living in the streets or who need a place to quarantine.

Peru

- Authorities will **re-schedule migration services appointments and waive fees for over-stay**. Any order to expel foreign nationals has been suspended and the validity of all temporary and residency cards has been extended for the period of the mandatory isolation policy.
- UNHCR and partners are **adapting their CBI response** around mobility restrictions and sharp rise in the number of very vulnerable refugees needing help to meet basic needs.
- UNHCR is seeking to set up contractual arrangements with hotels to receive refugees and migrants who have lost their home and need to quarantine.
- UNHCR hotlines have been activated to enhance remote support and identification of vulnerable cases.
- Following joint advocacy and support from UNHCR and NGO Union Venezolana, **some 100 Venezuelan doctors are expected to be included into the national health response team** dedicated to the COVID-19.

Caribbean

- The governments of Aruba, Curacao, Dominican Republic, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago have announced the inclusion of non-nationals in the **national medical response**. In addition, Presidency in the Dominican Republic ordered that all arrests for deportation purposes are to be suspended until further notice.
- UNHCR will prioritize activities such as video registration and interviews on a case-by-case basis, cash-based interventions for severely affected POCs, advocacy for the inclusion of people of concern in the national public health response, border monitoring, communication with communities (CwC) and activation of outreach volunteer networks to provide assistance to those most in need.
- **T&T**: UNHCR began discussions with relevant counterparts to offer the Equal Place web-based platforms (which provide accredited education to Venezuelans) to benefit all children in T&T while schools are closed due to COVID-19.

Southern Cone

- In **Argentina, the automatic extension of all temporary and transitory residences** for a period of 30 days as of 17 March has been established. Asylum-seekers' temporary documentation will also be automatically renewed if expired during this period.

¹Erratum: The previous version of this information has been corrected to clarify the scope of two measures issued by Ecuador.

- UNHCR has instructed partners to **prioritize attention to homeless PoCs**, since they are the most vulnerable under the current conditions, providing cash assistance to cases in need for at least 14 days. UNHCR is also advocating for shelters to allow PoCs to be able to stay indoors the whole day, as many of them only allow persons just to overnight.
- In Arica (Chile), through its partners, UNHCR supported with the **one-off distribution of emergency assistance**, with 57 hygiene kits and 25 food baskets to persons in need based on a need's assessment conducted in response to the emergency context of COVID-19.

Venezuela

- **Following a formal request for assistance by the Venezuelan Government**, UNHCR will work to address the four priorities identified by the UNCT: health, wash, protection and nutrition. The Venezuelan government has to date recognized the existence of 105 cases (as of 25.03.2020) of COVID-19.
- UNHCR, in coordination with the regional Office of the Ombudsperson and the Red Cross, distributed 190 hygiene kits, 245 bamboo mats and other NFIs (including sanitary pads and solar lamps) to **four temporary shelters** in Guasdalito and El Amparo in the state of Apure. The local partner Red Cross is present in each of the four shelters, providing basic medical assistance, handwashing stations and connectivity points to facilitate the restoration of family links. In addition, 580 solar lamps and 580 jerry cans will be distributed to **58 community health centres** engaged in the response to COVID-19 in Zulia.

Costa Rica

- **UNHCR supports Costa Rica's Public Health System** to offer medical insurance to 6,000 asylum seekers and refugees who have special medical conditions and live in extreme socio-economic vulnerability.
- Registration of beneficiaries will be conducted by telephone and not in-person to avoid the spread of COVID-19.
- UNHCR will deliver a total of **1,500 hygiene kits** to refugees and asylum-seekers, of which 650 have been already delivered.
- The **Cash-Based Interventions Program** is still running, and sanitary measures are being taken during the delivery of debit cards. The next delivery will be on March 23 for 249 people in extreme socio-economic vulnerability. UNHCR has enabled two specific free hotlines to address consultations related to this programme.

Guatemala

- UNHCR, through partners, is distributing **hygiene kits** to all refugees and asylum seekers in the country. The kits contain soap and a small towel as well as printed WHO information on how to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Our partners are also providing disinfectant gel and soap for hand washing in shelters and transit locations across Guatemala.
- UNHCR has been sharing with our partners of concern WHO messages **through WhatsApp and SMS**.

Mexico

- Mexico is leading an initiative, replicated by many countries, to **match refugees with medical qualifications with hospitals** needing additional staff to cope with COVID response.
- UNHCR developed a **"help" section on the UNHCR Mexican website**, containing info about support services in the field, shelters, asylum procedures, and other: <https://help.unhcr.org/mexico/coronavirus/>
- UNHCR has moved to **telephone-based registration processing**. The procedure has been simplified, although the protection interview and vulnerability screening has been maintained.
- In order to minimize the risk of people of concern ending up in destitute conditions and adopting negative coping mechanisms, UNHCR has increased its reach for a **higher number of asylum-seekers in southern Mexico to receive cash assistance**.

CHALLENGES

Many partners are struggling to continue operating, balancing commitment with national requirements to limit freedom of movement and the safety of their staff. The below is a snapshot of the situation in Ecuador for the week of 22 March 2020 (Please note that the graph is indicative only and a living document likely to change day by day).

Impacto del COVID -19

Respuesta a refugiados, migrantes y comunidades de acogida

Periodo: semana del 16 al 22 de marzo 2020

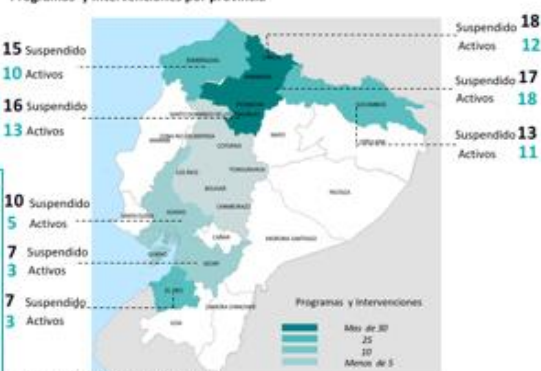


El siguiente documento presenta algunas cifras claves sobre el impacto de la emergencia sanitaria en la respuesta a refugiados, migrantes y comunidades de Acogida.

Información general



Programas y Intervenciones por provincia



Información desagregada por sector

Grupo de trabajo	Sector / Sub sector	Programas / Intervenciones reportadas*	Cambio de modalidad*	Activos + Suspendido*
Programas de transferencias monetarias	CR	13	22%	69%
	General	58	68%	71%
Protección	USBTI	1	0%	0%
Protección	NKA	6	50%	67%
Protección	VNG	7	50%	57%
Salud	Salud	13	71%	54%
	Seguridad alimentaria	40	30%	68%
WAN	NTI	12	0%	0%
	Transporte	1	0%	0%
WAN	Apoyo a vivienda y hábitat digno	2	0%	100%
	WASRI	4	0%	0%
Alojamiento temporal	Alojamiento temporal	10	29%	70%
	Educación	11	21%	45%
Integración	Métodos de vida	19	100%	76%
Integración	Cohesión social	37	71%	46%
Integración	Apoyo a vivienda y hábitat digno	4	33%	75%

Agencias y socios que reportaron
 PMA (ADRA, Plan Internacional, WVI) ECHO (Fundación ayuda en acción)
 OIM, UNICEF, UNESCO, OPS, UNFPA (AVSI, CARE, CSIP, Dialogo Diverso, World Vision)
 ACNUR (ADRA, Alas de Colibrí, Aldes de Oso, AVSI, CDOPI, FUELA, HAIS, MSC, NRC, SRI, WVI)
 Socio principal (Socio implementador)

*Programas / Intervenciones: es el conjunto de acciones planificadas por parte de los socios para dar respuestas a los refugiados, migrantes y comunidades de acogida.
 *Cambio de modalidad: corresponde a los mecanismos tecnológicos que implementan los socios para continuar con el desarrollo de los programas e intervenciones.
 Fuente: Grupo de trabajo de refugiados y migrantes GTRM

*Activos: son todos los programas e intervenciones que continúan operando normalmente, una actividad puede estar activa a pesar de haber sufrido un cambio de modalidad.
 *Suspendidos: corresponde a una medida de pausa temporal mientras dure la restricción establecida por las medidas gubernamentales o se busquen otros mecanismos para activarlos.