

# Bolivia

## March 2022

Hosting some **10,963 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, most of them from Venezuela**, UNHCR works with the Bolivian government and partners **to guarantee their rights, advocate for their access to territory, asylum and regularization**, while providing with partners **basic goods and services**, such as temporary accommodation, food and hygiene kits, as well as supporting the livelihoods of refugees and migrants through strengthening their autonomous

businesses. In 2021, UNHCR's operational capacity was expanded through agreements with new partners, **to provide assistance, protection and livelihoods support in main urban centres** (La Paz, El Alto and Santa Cruz de la Sierra), **and border areas** (Desaguadero, Pisiga, Villazón and Villamontes). Bolivia remains a **destination and a transit country** for asylum-seekers, refugees as well as for migrants.

The aftermath of COVID-19 still requires the strengthening of the humanitarian response in terms of access to shelter, food, water, clothing and hygiene kits for an increasing number of persons in need as well as strategic support to enhance refugees and migrants' capacity to develop socioeconomic independence in Bolivia. .

### POPULATION OF CONCERN

# 11,871

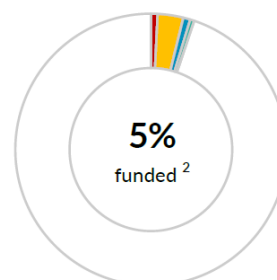
Refugees	1,131
Asylum-seekers	37
Venezuelans displaced abroad	10,703

Source: Official information provided by the Government, as of June 2021

### FUNDING

# USD 49.3 MILLION

requested for the **Regional Office including Bolivia in 2022**



- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

### UNHCR PRESENCE

The UNHCR Regional Office for Southern Latin America based in Buenos Aires covers operations in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

#### Staff in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay:

- 63 National staff
- 11 International staff
- 1 field presence in La Paz



Photo: UNHCR / Sara Aliaga. Venezuelan entrepreneur during a fair in La Paz.

## Results in 2021

- In 2021, UNHCR through its partners provided support to **2,871** persons in vulnerable situations through **multi-purpose cash assistance** and some other **5,296** with **in-kind assistance** to cover their basic needs; **1,439** vulnerable individuals were provided with **temporary accommodation**; **7,691** individuals were provided with **free legal assistance, orientation, information** and referral to various service providers; **241 cases of child protection were treated and supported by UNHCR** and/or partners. Additionally, some **3,059** people received **primary health care** attention, while some **85** people received **livelihoods training or support**.

## Working with Partners

- UNHCR works in close coordination with government counterparts, namely the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, that presides the **National Refugee Commission (CONARE)**, with representatives of the **National Directorate of Migration** and the **Ministry of Justice and Institutional Transparency**, where UNHCR is a member with voice together with a partner agency from the civil society (**Pastoral Social Caritas Boliviana**). Also, UNHCR works closely with the **National Office of the Ombudsperson**, and other decentralized organisms, such as the **Office of the Public Defense for Children and Adolescents**.
- A bilateral cooperation agreement was signed between UNHCR and the **National Office of the Ombudsperson in 2019**. The agreement's main objective is the strengthening of technical capacities to provide orientation and legal assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees in Bolivia and to conduct border monitoring, among other joint activities that benefit persons of concern (PoCs). Currently, UNHCR is supporting the new Office of the Ombudsperson in Desaguadero, within the border Assistance and Orientation Point (PAO).
- UNHCR has broadened the network of partners to scale up the operational capacity on the ground including activities not only in **La Paz**, but also in **El Alto**, **Santa Cruz de la Sierra** and at the **borders**. With **Pastoral Social Caritas Boliviana (PSCB)**, UNHCR provides counselling and basic humanitarian assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers. In addition, UNHCR partnership with **World Vision Bolivia**, who cooperates with **Red Cross Bolivia** and the **National Office of the Ombudsperson's Office**, provides child protection services, primary health care, information services and legal orientation and assistance. UNHCR also has an agreement with **Caritas Switzerland** through which it provides and improves shelters for migrants and refugees and supports entrepreneurship with seed capital and training, in coordination with **Fundación Scalabrini Bolivia**. In the context of this agreement, UNHCR also assists **sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)** survivors, provides child protection through available services, supports children to access remote education, and engages with local communities, through **Fundación Munasim Kullakita**.
- UNHCR co-leads jointly with IOM the **National Response Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela where 7 partners –UN, CSOs, Refugee's and Migrants' organizations** implement the Response Plan 2021 for the **Southern Cone** complementing Governmental capacities in main urban and border areas of the region.

## Main Activities

### Protection & Durable Solutions

- Provide technical support and advice at the request of national authorities involved in the implementation of fair and efficient **refugee status determination procedures (RSD)** and participate in CONARE's sessions, as established by the law.
- Improve reception conditions and capacities at the main entry **border** of PoC (Desaguadero) through joint **support spaces**- called Assistance and Orientation Points (PAO)- acting as a "one-stop" point where refugees and migrants have access to information, connectivity and communication services, legal orientation and primary health care services. In other border areas, UNHCR with its partners are strengthening monitoring and response capacities (borders with Chile, Argentina and Paraguay)
- Support the **Regional Border Protection Network** led by civil society institutions and faith-based organizations, together with national human rights institutions working with migrants and refugees at the border areas of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru to coordinate activities with a regional perspective to better identify PoCs to UNHCR, prevent their refoulement and support them through legal counselling, shelter and humanitarian assistance.
- Strengthen institutional capacities of the **National Office of the Ombudsperson** to ensure asylum-seekers and refugees have access to legal orientation and assistance with a focus on refugee status determination and migration procedures.
- Promote actions addressed to prevent, identify and respond to situations of **gender-based violence (GBV)** affecting refugee women and children in coordination with local partners. Regular protection dialogues and empowerment activities are developed with refugee women along with assistance to individual cases.
- Promote activities to meet the specific protection and developmental needs of girls and boys and their families. UNHCR

has reinforced shelters by including **child-friendly spaces** which provide a safe space to learn and play. This has been recognized as a good practice world-wide. UNHCR and its partners are also piloting a project that provides community psycho-social support and engagement through a mobile service which functions as an informal “class-room” for children, where also the family, and specially women, benefit from an active listening service by trained staff in La Paz, El Alto and Santa Cruz.

- Advocate for the adoption of a law for the protection of **stateless people** and the establishment of a stateless determination procedure in line with the pledges made by the Government of Bolivia (Brazil Plan of Action).

### **Humanitarian Assistance, Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance**

- **Humanitarian assistance** is provided to vulnerable PoC upon arrival and in main urban centres and at the borders to ensure that their basic needs are covered using in-kind (including warm clothes, first aid kits and kitchen sets) and cash-based assistance. A winterization campaign is about to start for the provision of blankets and winter clothing for new arrived PoCs.
- Through UNHCR’s partner agencies, asylum-seekers and other PoC receive **information and orientation** regarding access to rights, protection and local integration, and vulnerable cases are referred to migrant shelters and community kitchens. Durable shelter solutions and socio-economic inclusion are achieved by using counselling, referrals to specialized services and the provision of multi-purpose cash grants.
- Support infrastructure improvements **of shelters** to improve the quality of assistance provided to refugees and migrants.
- **Boost opportunities for self-reliance, integration and empowerment of PoC** through strengthening business creation endeavours of PoC.

#### **Community based approach in practice: participatory assessments 2021**

Participatory assessments 2021 involved **12 focal groups where 142 refugees and migrants** -mainly women and children- **from Venezuela** living in the cities of La Paz-El Alto and Santa Cruz de la Sierra shared their views on current protection risks and barriers to rights’ access, as well as proposals on how to face them. Among the main topics discussed were issues related to transit and access to territory; legal status in Bolivia and documentation; access to rights (housing, health, education, employment); sexual and gender-based violence; child protection.

As regards **border management and protection safeguards**, most of participants had accessed to Bolivian territory through irregular pathways mainly through Desaguadero and, in fact, 90 per cent of them were not holding a regular status in the country. Those restrictions in the access to territory exposed participants to protection risks such as health risk exposures, low weather, bribes, extorsions and threats. Moreover, participants reported the impossibility to file asylum at CONARE due to their nationality, even when they were supported in their claims by protection partners.

In terms of **socioeconomic integration**, participants expressed they faced poor conditions regarding **housing**: precariousness and lack of furniture, overcrowding, situations of violence in shared houses, and high costs for the payment of rent. Health and access to professional attention was another main concern for participants: they mentioned practical and legal barriers for accessing to the SUS (universal public health insurance), the lack of knowledge of health operators regarding the rights of refugees and migrants. Informal work is preponderant among the participants: street retail, fast food, services requiring unskilled labour. Care work was also mentioned, especially by women.

#### **S**

**Special thanks to major donors who have provided funds for the Regional Office and at the regional and global level in 2022:**

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## External Relations

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### **LINKS**

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