



## Situational Highlights



**Cash assistance, otherwise known as cash-based interventions, (or CBI for short) is an integral part of UNHCR's overall response to the coronavirus pandemic. Cash assistance helps blunt the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 by providing families with immediate life-saving support.** UNHCR is also working to fully include refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and stateless people in governments' national preparedness and response plans. Our cash assistance is, therefore, delivered

in close collaboration with governments, humanitarian and development partners, as well as the private sector, and in line with the UN Principals' Cash Statement.

[UNHCR Cash Assistance and COVID-19: Emerging Field Practices](#)

provides a few examples of how UNHCR operations are adapting existing CBI programs by introducing new approaches and technology; increasing the use of digital payments; designing new cash

grants and targeting criteria to assist new vulnerable populations; adjusting systems and complaints and feedback mechanisms; aligning cash assistance with national social safety nets; and developing exit strategies.



## Challenges



UNHCR and its partners have seen a sharp **increase in the number of Venezuelans returning home** amidst the crisis—which has cost many their jobs and also, for some, their housing, too. While most are returning from neighboring Colombia, others are coming back from as far afield as Ecuador and Peru. UNHCR, as part of the Humanitarian Country Team, is providing support to the most vulnerable among this population group.

## UNHCR's response in the Americas

**Many refugees, IDPs and other people of concern work in the informal sector, often without social protection.** Due to restrictions on movement that have been imposed by governments across the region in a bid to staunch the virus' spread, many refugees and others are losing their sources of income, which, in turn, further hampers their ability to make rent and buy food and other essentials, such as medicine. Evictions, compounded by the closure of some shelters, have led to a spike in homelessness which has further eroded public perceptions of refugees and migrants.

To cope with these challenges, UNHCR in the Americas is scaling up the use of CBIs to deliver life-saving assistance and services and also adjusting implementation procedures to ensure that the most vulnerable, and those most affected by COVID-19, can continue to be reached.

Measures that UNHCR is taking, together with its partners, include:



- Expanding the targeting criteria and/or setting up new CBI programs to assist those most affected by COVID-19



- Setting up hotlines, which ensure continuous two-way communication with persons of concern and allow the agency to receive and screen requests for assistance



- Shifting to remote registration, ID verification, eligibility assessment and prioritization for CBI assistance in order to continue to assist existing caseloads, as well as new beneficiaries, without in-person contact



- Shifting, wherever feasible, to digital means of payment and digital cash (e.g. mobile money, cards, etc.)





- Advancing and frontloading beneficiary payments initially scheduled for the next 2-3 months



- Adopting strict hygiene measures and social distancing protocols to minimize physical contact and the risk of contamination during payment distributions



- Working closely with national governments to ensure that humanitarian assistance is aligned with national social protection responses and advocating that persons of concern be included in the national social safety net programs being rolled out by governments



The following are some examples of concrete actions that UNHCR is undertaking in its CBI programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: (Please note the list is not exhaustive.)



**In Brazil**, new remote beneficiary assessment procedures have been introduced to minimize in-person contact. Assistance is provided through cash cards which can be reloaded remotely and used in ATMs and points of sale throughout the country, as well as for online payments and transfers, thus minimizing the need for in-person payouts. Since the start of the outbreak, UNHCR Brazil has assisted 474 persons of concern—despite the fact that it is operating with a CBI budget that covers only 24 percent of initially anticipated needs. In light of the pandemic, those needs are likely to rise exponentially.



**In Colombia**, UNHCR will start distributing cash to 200 families in the border town of Arauca this week. In Medellin, UNHCR is partnering with the City Hall to provide multipurpose cash grants to 400 at-risk families. In Bogota and its satellite city of Soacha, a new emergency cash program will benefit up to 700 Venezuelans and vulnerable host community families. UNHCR and partners are using mobile money and cash transfer through agents to reach persons of concern throughout the country while minimizing the need in-person interactions. UNHCR is also currently piloting the use of an alternative mobile transfer platform to further diversify distribution mechanisms and scale up CBI-delivery capacity.



**In Ecuador**, UNHCR has quickly adapted its existing CBI program, designed to help very vulnerable populations cover their basic needs, and shifted to conducting remote case evaluations via phone or videocall. Additionally, beneficiaries no longer receive cash in hand but now are able to withdraw their transfers from ATMs using PIN codes. UNHCR has also broadened its targeting criteria to include families that now face serious protection risks after having lost their livelihood as a result of the pandemic. Thanks to this change, 1,178 families received UNHCR cash assistance, delivered throughout the country by partner organization HIAS between March 18<sup>th</sup> and April 10<sup>th</sup>.



**In Guatemala**, three months-worth of multipurpose cash assistance has been extended to persons of concern found to be extremely vulnerable to the coronavirus. Distribution of entitlement cards, allowing people of concern to access to the cash assistance at national bank branches, will be carried out following strict social distancing protocols. The sectors covered will include food, hygiene and, according to vulnerability profile, accommodation needs.



**In Honduras**, UNHCR delivers its cash assistance using mobile phone transfers, therefore minimizing physical contact with persons of concern as most of them have SIM cards, which allows them to access mobile phone carriers' money transfer services. Registration and targeting of our persons of concern are managed remotely by the implementing partner in charge of cash assistance for UNHCR.



**In Mexico**, UNHCR is expanding its multipurpose cash assistance, delivered through a debit card transfer mechanism, in order to 1) enable people to make necessary payments for rent, food or other basic needs; 2) mitigate some of the negative socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on families and communities; 3) deliver targeted assistance for persons of concern who face protection risks. Assistance is being provided through a registration procedure in the context of COVID-19 to process asylum applications through telephone interviews. UNHCR registration for Case Management and Scorecard targeting methodology assessment are also managed remotely by UNHCR. To minimize the risk that persons of concern descend into poverty and adopt negative response mechanisms, UNHCR Mexico has adjusted the criteria for cash assistance to allow for expanded eligibility.



**In Panama**, CBI assistance complements the Panamanian government's social protection response, which aims to help cover the cost of food and medicine to vulnerable families living in poverty. Up to two months' worth of assistance can be delivered in advance, via our partners. For those receiving aid to pay for lodging, payments are made directly to landlords' bank accounts, thus preventing persons of concern from having to leave their homes. UNHCR Panama and its partners are also coordinating to put in place a more efficient transfer mechanism, such as prepaid debit cards, to be delivered directly to persons of concern's homes.



**In Peru**, UNHCR has switched to fully remote registration and assessment procedures—and continues to provide cash to existing beneficiaries through pre-paid cards. UNHCR and partners have also begun to use a mobile transfers mechanism which allows for transfers via mobile phones, thus enabling new beneficiaries to receive assistance despite the significant movement restrictions in place. UNHCR's assistance is in line with the amount the government is providing to vulnerable Peruvian families as part of its emergency response to the pandemic. Since the start of the crisis, UNHCR and partners have assisted some 1,648 cases, or 5,579 individuals—84 percent of whom received mobile payouts. Still, the CBI program urgently needs to be scaled up, as does complimentary assistance, such as shelter support, aimed at those not eligible to receive CBI.

## Stories from the field

The pandemic is further testing refugees—whom, having faced often terrible ordeals when forced to flee their homes, tend to be a particularly resistant and adaptive group. In conversations with refugee restaurateurs in the Brazilian mega-city of São Paulo, UNHCR staffer Miguel Pachioni saw several creative ways in which these entrepreneurs were adapting their businesses to the new reality of social isolation. For example, a Congolese-born refugee named Pitchou was now using internet-based delivery services to reach customers kept indoors by stay-at-home orders. His restaurant, a vegan African restaurant called Congolária, had been forced to shutter, but by pivoting to a delivery model, Pitchou is still managing to maintain his six-year-old business afloat and support his family. “We’re working really hard to keep up with the orders,” said the 38-year-old, adding that he’s also begun advertising online and has changed up his working hours in response to the crisis. You can read the story [HERE](#)



# Coordination and Response to date



The **Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform** is revising the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) to ensure it includes activities to cater to refugees, migrants and affected host communities impacted by COVID-19. The **R4V coordination platform** prepared [a list of good practices](#)

[promoted by States](#) across the region to ease the inclusion of refugees and migrants from Venezuela in their response to the COVID-19 emergency. The Platform continues to produce weekly [flash updates](#) and various thematic guidance for the inter-agency response, all available at [R4V.info](#).

## Good practices promoted by States:



**MIRPS** Countries part of the regional framework for the comprehensive protection and solutions to forced displacement in Central America (MIRPS) held an extraordinary plenary session to discuss the impact and ways they were

responding to the humanitarian consequences of COVID-19. Despite implementing critical restrictions to contain the spread of the virus, the seven countries are striving to guarantee access to certain rights to forcibly

displaced people in the region, including healthcare, the automatic extension of documentation and the inclusion of displaced people within social assistance programs.

For more information about the MIRPS, [click here](#)



## Don't miss out

### GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN COVID-19

UNITED NATIONS COORDINATED APPEAL  
APRIL – DECEMBER 2020

"I see three critical areas for action: First, tackling the health emergency. Second, we must focus on the social impact and the economic response and recovery. Third, and finally, we have a responsibility to recover better."

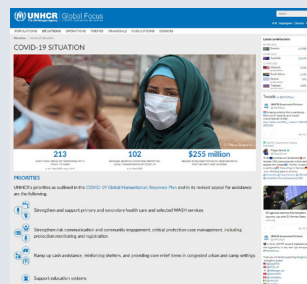


**António Guterres**  
Secretary-General, United Nations

For more, [click here](#)



### UNHCR's revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal

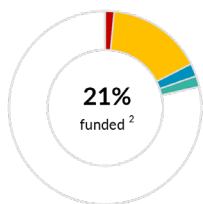


For more information, [click here](#)

# Funding the response

## Financial Information

### UNHCR Americas - Funding Update



### THE AMERICAS

as of 14 April 2020

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

**\$ 528.1 million**

UNHCR's financial requirements 2020<sup>1</sup>

Notes:  
1. The financial requirements for The Americas are for the operations in Belize, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America and Venezuela.

While seeking funds to carry out COVID-19 preventative measures and response activities, UNHCR stresses the need for support to be in addition to the existing critical funding requirements laid out in UNHCR's regular Global Appeal for 2020. It is vital that the

international community keeps supporting the millions of refugees and internally displaced people already living a precarious existence, for whom already limited self-reliance opportunities are likely to shrink further as a result of the economic impact of the crisis.

Total contributed or pledged:

**USD 175M**

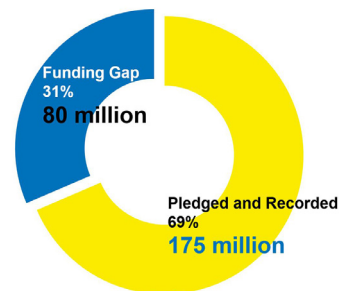
Including:

United States	\$64.0M
UK	\$25.0M
Japan	\$23.9M
European Union	\$17.9M
Denmark	\$14.6M
CERF	\$6.9M
Canada	\$6.4M
Ireland	\$3.3M
Sweden	\$3.0M
Sony Corporation	\$3.0M
Education Cannot Wait	\$1.8M
Australia	\$0.8M
Private donors	\$0.3M

FUNDING (AS OF 16 APRIL)

**USD 255 million**

requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally over the next nine months



UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally, and to the Americas, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funding.

### Thanks to donors in 2020:

