

UPDATE ON UNHCR COVID-19 RESPONSE IN COLOMBIA - #8



UNHCR distributed 110 school kits in the community of Brisas del Norte (Riohacha, La Guajira). ©UNHCR/Bonivento, I.

CURRENT CONTEXT

The Colombian Ministry of Health confirmed **73,572 cases of COVID-19** as of Tuesday, 23 June with Bogota concentrating the highest number (22,409 confirmed cases). A total of 2,404 individuals have died from COVID-19 and **30,459** cases have recovered.

Between 4 April and 22 June, 43,787 Venezuelans are known to have returned to Venezuela from Colombia.

On 5 June, Colombia migration authorities issued [Resolution No. 1265](#) which outlines the protocol for the return of Venezuelans and details coordination measures between local authorities, Migración Colombia, local health institutions and

the police. Under this resolution, Venezuelans who decide to return are at risk of losing their refugee status or having their application for asylum rejected.

Quotas have been established for the maximum number of returnees that can be received in Venezuela via the humanitarian corridor that is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (100 people per return day via the Arauca border crossing, and 300 per return day in Cucuta). This new measure has resulted in a bottleneck of people waiting to cross the border, many of whom are being forced to sleep on the street or in public areas without adequate biosecurity measures, sanitary services, medical first aid, and orientation and information services. In Arauca, local

authorities designated a new temporary holding place for Venezuelans wishing to return in the municipality of Tame; between 50-150 people become stranded there on a nightly basis.

A District Court in Arauca ruled in favor of the rights of Venezuelan refugees and migrants after a complaint filed by the Local Ombudsperson's Office (*Personería*) in Tame on behalf of Venezuelan refugees and migrants attempting to return to Venezuela. The Court ordered the national border authorities, health authorities, governors and mayors of the implicated states and municipalities to work together to guarantee the right to life, human dignity and health of Venezuelans traveling on foot through the department of Arauca wanting to return.

To respond to the situation of hundreds of Venezuelans stranded near the Simón Bolívar International Bridge in Norte de Santander, and to prevent greater health risks that increase when crowds gather, local authorities established as part of their contingency plan the Transitory Health Attention Center (CAST in Spanish) at the Tienditas International Bridge.

At the request of the authorities, members of the GIFMM in Norte de Santander are supporting this initiative with supplies, such as tents, food and hygiene kits, and some services, such as increased hygiene measures to avoid risks of spreading the virus.

In Arauca department, UNHCR and its partners are concerned about increased risks of forced recruitment of adolescents by armed groups. As a result of quarantine measures, families face economic hardship, children are out of school, and several activities providing "protection by presence" had to be halted in at-risk communities. In this context, families are more vulnerable to pressure from armed groups wanting to recruit their children.

The National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences reported that nine Venezuelan women were killed during the period of mandatory isolation starting on 20 March (an increase of 12% from the same period in 2019). There were also 2 suicides, 168 cases of intimate partner violence, 27 cases of domestic violence and 75 cases of sexual violence against Venezuelan women in the same period.

The Children's Delegate of the Ombudsperson's Office identified 54 unaccompanied and separated Venezuelan children in North Santander, 129 in Arauca and 107 in la Guajira during the period of COVID-19. From 16 March to 12 June, UNHCR registered 2,206 cases of children at risk and 90 cases of unaccompanied and separated children.

The enrolment of Venezuelan children in the education system has decreased from 206,225 in 2019 to 128,133 in the first four months of 2020. Main barriers for enrolment include the lack of school meals, insufficient access to electronic devices and connectivity, and school supplies, as well as issues related to armed conflict, which could result in an increase in school dropouts.

COVID-19 RESPONSE IN NUMBERS

From 15 March to 15 June:

- UNHCR has donated **187 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs)** and **113 tents** to hospitals, clinics, UNHCR-supported shelters, and local health authorities in 10 departments.
- A total of **436 vulnerable persons have been sheltered in the hotel network** in Riohacha and Maicao.
- **47 telephone reception points operate** nationwide to provide information and orientation services.
- **UNHCR has remotely registered 14,399 families (51,915 individuals, 73% female)** in PRIMES. The locations with the highest number of calls were Bogota (24%), Norte de Santander (18%) La Guajira (16%) and Antioquia (13%). 54% of calls were related to legal and physical protection needs including access to assistance, followed by issues of children at risk (12%), serious medical conditions (11%) single parents (10%); women at risk (6%).
- Life-saving assistance has been provided to **208 SGBV survivors** in the framework of the Regional Safe Spaces Network (Cucuta, Riohacha, Arauca. **130 SGBV**

survivors have been registered and oriented over the phone.

- In the framework of the anti-xenophobia campaign *Somos Panas Colombia - Valientes*, and in partnership with UN Women, a total of **10,302 people were reached through social media** with information for women and girls facing sexual and gender-based violence in Atlántico and Arauca.
- Information on helplines was disseminated to **205,317** people in Colombia through social media, including **159,558** in Arauca, La Guajira, Bogota and Soacha.
- Emergency cash assistance covering a 2-month period provided to **over 8,155 individuals** across the country through 10 different partners.
- Health authorities in the departments of La Guajira, Norte de Santander and Antioquia strengthened through **9 additional hospital staff and medical professionals, and 22 pieces of communications equipment and computers.**
- Infrastructure improvements and over 11,600 distinct items provided to **10 public hospitals and health institutions**, including ventilators, biomedical supplies for Intensive Care Units (ICU), triage, emergency and hospitalization services.
- **15,669 Personal Protective Items (PPE)**, including surgical N95 and face masks, disposable gowns, face shields, eye protection and goggles, sterile and non-sterile gloves, leggings, infrared digital thermometers, hand soaps, surface soaps, cleaning and disinfecting

materials, donated to public hospitals, health institutions and state institutions.

- **Border monitoring** activities have continued (according to UNHCR monitoring, 43,787 Venezuelans are known to have returned to Venezuela from Colombia Between 4 April and 22 June).
- A digital flyer with recommendations for Venezuelans considering return to their country reached a total of **64,821** people through social media.
- A [video](#) on how to prevent COVID-19 contagion, and [specific messages](#) targeting people living with HIV, reached **over 43,200 people** through social media.
- A complaints mechanism was set up on social media platforms to receive feedback from persons of concern on UNHCR's work, reaching a total of **14,036** people through social media.

UNHCR'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN THE PAST 2 WEEKS

Health and hygiene/prevention measures

UNHCR Apartadó donated biosafety equipment to the local health authorities (400 masks, medical gowns and medical gloves).

UNHCR and its implementing partner PROFAMILIA assisted 222 cases in Cucuta and 139 cases in Arauca, providing general health services and sexual and reproductive health services. Additionally, 17 cases received specialized medical attention in Cucuta.

UNHCR in Medellín donated 2 volistal lamps for two operating rooms for highly complex surgeries to the Metrosalud public hospital. UNHCR also supported the Manrique Hospital in Medellín, which cares for an average of 200 Venezuelan pregnant women per month, as well as displaced populations.

Protection

In Cucuta, 42 children and adolescents were identified as at-risk, including 37 children at risk of not attending school, 3 separated children, 1 pregnant teenager and 1 child with special education needs.

In Norte de Santander, 367 cases and 214 in Arauca were assisted by the Local Ombudsperson's Offices (*Personerías*) with UNHCR's support. 4 asylum applications have been filed in Araucita by the *Personeria* and confirmed to have been issued *salvoconductos*.

A total of 90 cases (57 in Cucuta, 30 in Arauca and 3 in Barranquilla) were referred to their local UNHCR-supported university legal clinics for support in accessing national asylum procedures.

UNHCR held a virtual seminar with Venezuelan refugees and migrants currently sheltered at the Temporary Preventive Isolation Zone in Necoclí near the Panama border, offering orientation and information on the preventive isolation measures, on asylum procedures and on the situation at the border. There are 324 people in mixed migratory movements currently residing in this shelter.

In the framework of the project "Strengthening the Community Action Board (JAC) and ADN Paz Catatumbo", a radio program started providing informational messages related to the COVID-19 context. As part of its communicating with communities strategy, UNHCR and partners continue to design and disseminate informational material, provide training and psychosocial support through WhatsApp groups in the framework of various community-based projects.

In its social media platforms, the UNHCR-led anti-xenophobia campaign *Somos Panas Colombia* hosted a [virtual event](#) titled *Humanidad en Armonía* on 20 June to commemorate World Refugee Day. Participants included Felipe Munoz and various partners as well as public figures and media influencers like Daniel Samper, Alfonso Herrera and Natalia Reyes, among others. The piece produced by [Valientes](#) for Barranquilla with useful information for women on SGBV continues to be published on social media platforms.

Mitos vs personas reales, a joint initiative between *Somos Panas Colombia* and IOM with the

participation of Caracol Media continues on various platforms such as [Noticias Caracol](#), [Blu Radio](#), [Shock](#), [Somos Panas Colombia](#).

Shelter, NFIs and WASH

In Quibdo (Choco department), UNHCR installed 3 Refugee Housing Units in the Ismael Roldán Hospital.

UNHCR donated 100 school kits to support remote education in the municipalities of Apartadó and Carepa (Antioquia). Furthermore, 110 school kits were delivered in Brisas del Norte, La Guajira, a community hosting many refugees, returnees and displaced persons. Water pumps were delivered to Brisas del Norte community which will facilitate access to water for households.

FUNDING NEEDS

Under its revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal, UNHCR is appealing for USD 745 million globally, including USD 17.3 million in Colombia. UNHCR's Global Appeal is now funded at 32%, with USD 242 million contribution received.

UNHCR's response in Colombia is possible thanks to the contribution of private donors and:

Austria, Canada, Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), Chanel Foundation, Denmark, European Union, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Republic of Korea, KOICA, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Oro Molido Foundation, Sweden, Switzerland, UN Human Security Trust Fund (UN HSTF), UN Peacebuilding Fund, United Kingdom, United States of America, and USA for UNHCR.

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