

Southern Cone

September 2020

The UNHCR Multi-Country Office for Southern Latin America, with presence in Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile, covers **Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay** and offers humanitarian assistance, protection services, support to authorities and

implementation of durable solutions and socio-economic inclusion. Since March 2020, the **humanitarian impact of COVID-19** on asylum-seekers, refugees and Venezuelan refugees and migrants has been disproportionate since most of them have lost their jobs and livelihoods.

UNHCR is providing assistance to cover their **most pressing humanitarian needs** (shelter, food, hygiene kits, clothes and cash-based interventions). This humanitarian response was scaled up during the winter.

KEY INDICATORS

67,346

Number of **people in vulnerable situation** in the COVID-19 context who received **assistance** (March - Sep 2020)

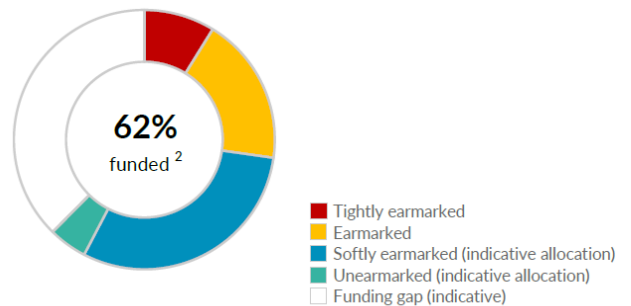
9,097

Number of **people** who have accessed **protection services** (March - September 2020)

FUNDING (AS OF 22 OCTOBER 2020)

USD 25.6 million

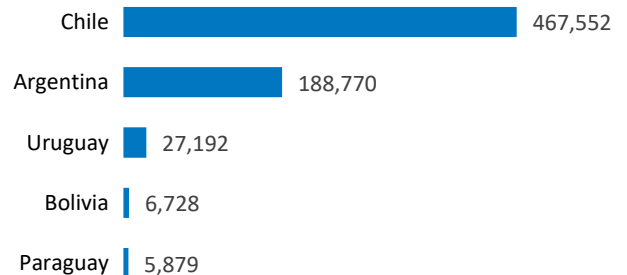
requested for the Argentina Regional Office



Delivery of core relief items to refugees in Chile © UNHCR

POPULATION OF CONCERN (AS OF JUNE 2020)*

696,121



* Figures include refugees, asylum-seekers, Venezuelan refugees and migrants and others of concern.

Update on Achievements

Operational Context

The humanitarian impact of the pandemic on refugees, asylum-seekers and Venezuelan refugees and migrants continued to be difficult and disproportionate due to COVID-19 related lockdown measures with a varying degree of severity in most of the countries of the sub-region, as many continue without means to reengage in income and livelihoods activities. Many continue to lack shelter, food and money to pay for their basic needs. As of end of August, the countries covered by the Southern Cone Regional Office counted with almost 1.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19. **Border closures were maintained in the five countries but attempts to cross borders using irregular routes were reported.** The Government of Paraguay approved the gradual, partial and temporary reopening of the Friendship Bridge that links the Paraguayan town of Ciudad del Este with the Brazilian city of Foz de Iguazú.

During September, Chile hosted virtually the VI Round of the Quito Process and the Santiago Declaration was adopted. Issues related to COVID-19, socio-economic integration, family reunification, asylum and refugee protection, trafficking and smuggling of migrants (including children and adolescents), voluntary return to Venezuela were treated during the meeting. During the Technical Meeting, the Group of Friends of the Quito Process was formally constituted. Germany, Canada, Spain, USA, France, The Netherlands, Switzerland and the European Union are now part of this group and will provide technical and financial assistance to the Quito Process, as well as to help raise international awareness regarding the Venezuelan migration and humanitarian crisis.



The sixth technical meeting of the Quito Process was held on 23 -24 September in Santiago de Chile © UNHCR

Achievements



PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- In September, **UNHCR provided advice to and referred for further assistance** some **987 refugees and migrants** in **Argentina** remotely (784 Venezuelans). Majority of the cases were Venezuelans, most of them living in the greater Buenos Aires area. In **Chile**, **111 new Venezuelan cases received direct counselling by UNHCR** in Arica, Antofagasta and Santiago. Additionally, 18 new cases from other nationalities. In La Paz, **Bolivia** some **299 refugees and migrants** received advice and protection services, most of them Venezuelans, while in **Uruguay**, UNHCR's partners provided remote **advice to 63 Venezuelans**.
- **On 16 September, a group of ten Venezuelans entered Uruguay claiming refugee status, through the Paysandú-Colón international bridge, from Argentina**. All persons had COVID-19 tests done, testing negative, and UNHCR partner, at the request of the Uruguayan government, provided humanitarian assistance (shelter and food) for the group as long as they need to remain under quarantine (at least seven days), in spite of not having presence on this part of the country.
- **UNHCR and its partner agencies continued monitoring the situation in Bolivia on the Desaguadero (border with Peru) and Pisiga (border with Chile), as partners continue recording a higher number of Venezuelan families seeking to irregularly cross into Chile**. According to the border police, there has been an increase in people self-declaring as having crossed the border irregularly in 2020, with a substantial increase in these numbers seen especially in July and early August. UNHCR in Chile is developing leaflets providing information on irregular entry and its implications to be made broadly available, warning of protection risks and providing information on legal avenues for entry.
- **UNHCR and partners inaugurated a new Attention and Orientation Point (PAO) in Chuy**, on the border between Uruguay and Brazil. This space is created in line with UNHCR's strategy of strengthening capacities at borders and it will adhere to the Regional Network of Support Spaces initiative. The opening of a presence in Chuy is strategic for UNHCR, taking into consideration that it is the third point of entry with the highest number of asylum applications presented to border authorities. During September partners provided advice and counselling to more than 250 refugees and migrants on issues related to access to asylum, migratory regularization and documentation, to social benefits and employment.
- In **Argentina**, **UNHCR signed a Cooperation Agreement with the National Secretariat of Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice** with the aim of strengthening the second instance of the refugee status determination procedure. The agreement also foresees for cooperation between the two agencies on access to rights for refugees, stateless persons and applicants for both conditions.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- While many countries in the region have made substantial efforts to ensure continued access to asylum despite border and office closure of the National Refugee Commissions, a backlog of **more than 30,000 pending asylum applications remain of concern to UNHCR in the five countries**.
- **Irregular border crossings, especially in Bolivia and Chile, are on the rise and expose refugees and migrants to increased protection risks**, of trafficking, SGBV and exploitation, etc. UNHCR is

working with partners to inform about risks and provide assistance and protection where cases of irregular crossings have approached UNHCR and its partners.

- While **borders are closed** during the emergency lockdown, UNHCR and its partners **continue monitoring the situation at the borders and providing humanitarian assistance** to refugees and migrants stranded at borders. UNHCR is advocating with authorities to transfer these persons to their final destinations, as well as to facilitate the entry to the territory of individuals to apply for asylum and for family reunification purposes.
- **UNHCR learned of several cases of Venezuelans who entered Argentina within the framework of the "Program for Assistance to Venezuelan Migrants" (established in 2019) are being subject to unprecedented requirements to advance in their regularization processes in the country.** Most of the accounts mention having received intimidation when they do not have valid passports / IDs and the presentation of criminal records from Venezuela for the change of category from temporary to permanent.



EDUCATION

Achievements and Impact

- In **Bolivia**, UNHCR and its partners continued the initiative to organize **mobile friendly spaces for 323 children** (Aula Móvil) to the accommodations where UNHCR is providing shelter to Venezuelan families, supporting children with school materials and educational books, conducting games for children, mainly around hygiene and prevention measures against COVID- 19, as they had no access to **educational nor recreational means**, nor to distance or virtual schooling. This initiative was considered by UNHCR as one of best good practices around the world to deal with the issue of education of children during COVID-19.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have been closed and affected the most refugee and migrant children who statistically have less access to technology, internet and materials to follow classes remotely.



HEALTH

Achievements and Impact

- In **Bolivia**, UNHCR along with partners continued doing both **medical visits to the shelters** where Venezuelan refugees and migrants are hosted and providing **remote medical consultations** benefiting some **172 persons** in September. In **Santa Cruz, Bolivia** UNHCR and partners participated in a **jornada comunitaria for health promotion**, gynaecology, general medicine and paediatrics care for Venezuelan families, in which around **130 people were treated**.
- In **Chile**, **77 persons** were assisted with medical assistance, at partners' facilities and during home visits held in Arica.



- In **Uruguay**, partners continue to **refer people to virtual psychological one-on-one sessions and virtual workshops for refugees and migrants in times of COVID-19**, in coordination with the Montevideo's Faculty of Psychology.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Refugees and migrants report to be facing challenges in terms of **accessing health facilities due to lack of documentation**, as well as difficulties in **accessing medical treatments; and medications**. Moreover, many of them developed physical and mental conditions, and/or saw their pre-existing diseases worsening (i.e. high blood pressure, skin conditions caused by stress, depression, fatigue or anxiety).



FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

Achievements and Impact

- In La Paz, **Bolivia**, some **344** refugees and migrant benefitted from the **distribution of food in shelters** where they are being hosted during the quarantine period. In Arica, Antofagasta and Santiago, **Chile**, UNHCR and partners distributed **food boxes for 109 refugees and migrants**.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

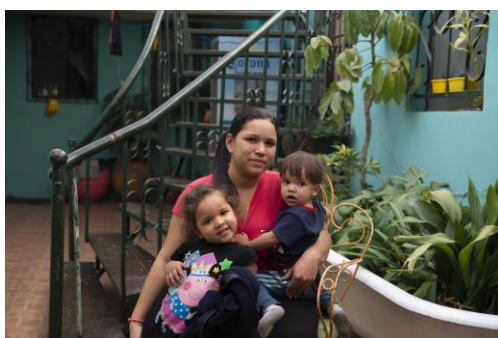
- Based on the latest round of the High Frequency Survey, in **Argentina** some **73 percent of the interviewees confirmed that they have reduced their amount/quality of meals per day**, and **11.5 per cent manifested to have access to only one meal or less per day**.



UNHCR supports refugees and migrants receiving food box delivered by the Municipality of Estación Central in Chile ©UNHCR



SHELTER AND NFIS



Venezuelan family in one of the UNHCR supported shelters in La Paz, Bolivia / @UNHCR

Achievements and Impact

- In **Paraguay**, UNHCR's partner distributed **7,000 soaps donated by UNILEVER**.
- In **Argentina** UNHCR continued to provide shelter to **75 vulnerable refugees and migrants**, who had no housing and/or that were on transit once the COVID-19 outbreak began and were to reach other destinations in the country. In **Bolivia**, partner agencies provided shelter to some **190 refugees and migrants**. In **Arica, Chile**, **83 persons** received financial assistance to cover **rent payments**.
- In **Bolivia**, **partners' shelters supported by UNHCR in La Paz began a reopening to the reception of new cases under new protocols** to ensure greater safeguards against COVID-19. Some 12 persons, including families with children who have arrived in Bolivia, were received in the shelters in recent weeks, following the trend of increasing entry of Venezuelans irregularly through Villazón (border with Argentina).

- In **Chile**, UNHCR distributed **emergency assistance** (hygiene kits, winter clothes) **for 58 refugees and migrants in Santiago de Chile**, and for **21 refugees and migrants in Arica** (hygiene kits, gas cans, mobile phone SIM cards). In **Bolivia**, 87 refugees and migrants benefitted from the **distribution of hygiene kits and cleaning supplies in shelters** where they are being hosted.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Results from the last round of the High Frequency Survey in **Argentina** indicate that **66 per cent of interviewees have reduced their expenses in non-essential items, some 25 per cent are not paying their rent in order to cover other needs.**
- **The housing situation of refugees and migrants continues to deteriorate in Argentina.** Although the decree that prohibits evictions remains in force until the end of September, different measures of coercion have been reported to UNHCR, used mainly by landlords and managers of informal rentals to force the exit of those who cannot pay for the accommodation. There is also evidence of a differential impact on single men, in a context where the capacities of housing of hostels and official shelters are at their maximum capacity or closed to the entry of new cases, as prevention measures against COVID-19.



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE

Achievements and Impact

- In **Argentina**, UNHCR partners provided **multipurpose cash assistance (CBI)** to some **949 refugees and migrants** to cover for their most basic needs. In **Chile**, UNHCR used digitally administered vouchers to distribute **cash assistance** to **71 refugees and migrants**. In **Uruguay**, UNHCR's partner provided **cash** assistance to **30 Venezuelan refugees and migrants** to cover for their shelter and documentation needs. In **Paraguay**, UNHCR's partner provided also **cash assistance to 20 Venezuelans** to support their basic needs.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Results from the last round of the High Frequency Survey in **Argentina** indicate that **55 per cent of interviewees had not had a single remunerated hour during the week the survey was conducted.**
- UNHCR's funds for CBI are insufficient to cover the growing needs of refugees and migrants in the Southern Cone caused by COVID-19. Limited funds have led UNHCR to restrict the assistance to the individuals with the direst needs for support. UNHCR estimates that **some 646 families have not been provided with needed CBI support due to lack of funds.**



DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Achievements and Impact

- **As part of the reactivation of the Cities of Solidarity Initiative, UNHCR organized two national meetings of the Cities of Solidarity of Argentina (21 cities) and the one of Uruguay (9 cities).** Parties shared information on ongoing activities, discussed common challenges, and identified opportunities to impact in policies and programs for the socio-economic integration of refugees and migrants. By the end of 2020, four sociodemographic studies on the situation of people in need of international protection will be carried out in Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Mendoza and Salta provinces, as

well as the development of four strategies for labour insertion, in coordination with the private sector, in the municipalities of La Matanza, Mar del Plata, Quilmes and Pilar (Argentina). The meetings resulted in mapping of local structures and services currently at the disposal of refugees and migrants, a set of indicators for measuring the institutional capacity of local governments to fulfill the Cities of Solidarity criteria, and the creation of two national networks to complement efforts and maximize effectiveness.

- On 29 September, the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay and UNHCR held a workshop** to consolidate best practices, identify opportunities, and analyze challenges of the **rural resettlement programme**, implemented since 2016. The Uruguayan government committed to further their involvement in resettlement, including new nationalities and profiles, a wider spectrum of complementary pathways and extended opportunities for family reunification.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- UNHCR has already launched **seven socio-economic recovery projects in Argentina and Uruguay** in previously identified sectors of the economy that are still active in the sub-region. Some 13 projects aiming at the socio-economic recovery of refugees and migrants in the sub-region remain unfunded (USD 3 million). However, some commitments have been made by donors and more socio-economic recovery projects will start in the coming months.

Working in partnership

- UNHCR works with **19 partners, most of them civil society organizations** in order to **provide protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants** in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.
- In all five countries, **UNHCR works in close coordination with governmental counterparts**, namely National Refugee Commissions (CONARE), Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Social Development, the National Migration Directorates, Ombudsperson's Office, local governments, among others.
- UNHCR works together with other UN agencies, such as IOM, ILO, UNICEF and UNWOMEN. In all five countries, **UNHCR together with IOM leads the national Platforms for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela**, with some **34 partners** for the **Southern Cone chapter** (Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay) and **17 in Chile**.

Financial Information

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to this operation as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programs with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds in 2020

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