

ARGENTINA – COVID-19

07 August 2020 | Update #17

Key Figures

- **185,711 persons of concern to UNHCR**, including 3,881 refugees, 8,044 asylum-seekers, 443 others of concern, and 176,343 Venezuelans displaced abroad. **Forty-four Venezuelans were reported to have tested positive for COVID-19** in the country. UNHCR partners are assisting them accordingly, whenever possible.
- **Funding: US\$25.5 million** are required by UNHCR for the operation in the sub-region (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay) in 2020, and it has **only covered 48 per cent** of the funds required for its operational needs. **Funding needs have grown USD 1.5 million due to extended situation of the lockdown in the country, where it is urgently needed to cover the most pressing humanitarian needs** (shelter, food, hygiene kits, winter clothing and blankets) of the most vulnerable refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers, mainly **Venezuelans**. While seeking funds to carry out COVID-19 preventive 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. **For the revised US\$755 million appealed for UNHCR's operations in affected countries by COVID-19** until the end of the year, as part of UN inter-agency Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP), **54 per cent has been already funded or pledged**, thanks to the generous and timely contributions of donors.

Situational highlights

- **As of 07 August, Argentina reports 228,195 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 4,251 deaths.** The occupation of intensive care beds in the greater Buenos Aires area, the most affected in the country, stands at 66 per cent of the total available. There is a clear surge in coronavirus numbers since the end of June. On 3 August, the government responded to the increase with a decree banning social gatherings nationwide until 16 August.
- **All staff in Argentina continue teleworking mode**, complying with the sanitary restrictions imposed in the country. Partners continue providing remote assistance to asylum-seekers, refugees, Venezuelan displaced and others of concern in Buenos Aires, La Quiaca, Puerto Iguazú, Posadas and San Salvador de Jujuy.
- **Residents in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area have now spent more than 140 days under lockdown, though some businesses have been granted permission to re-start activity and re-open their doors.** In most of Argentina's provinces, more flexible measures apply as few cases are registered, although there were strong growths in Jujuy (north) and Córdoba (center).
- The **humanitarian impact of COVID-19 on asylum-seekers, refugees and Venezuelan displaced is disproportionate** since most of them **have lost their jobs and livelihoods in the informal market**. Many of them have been confronted with a situation of **being on the street without access to shelter, food and income** to pay for their more basic needs. This **precarious situation** is exacerbated with the **winter**. They cannot access **social programs** due to **lack of documentation** and/or **not complying with requirements related to the length of their residence** in the country.
- **In La Quiaca, Argentina (border with Bolivia), UNHCR has been informed that in recent weeks several Venezuelans have been returned to Bolivia, after attempts to cross the border irregularly by unauthorized points.** La Quiaca's local government resolved to close the town, and non-residents will not be allowed to enter during this week, which will affect UNHCR and partner's capacity for cases management at the Attention and Orientation Point (PAO).

UNHCR's response

- **Over the last three weeks, UNHCR partners provided advice to some 732 persons in Argentina**, 217 of them who got in touch with partners for the first time during last three weeks. **Also, UNHCR partners provided with assistance in cash to some new 631 refugees and migrants** and continued to **provide shelter** to some **79-76 vulnerable refugees and migrants in Argentina** over the last three weeks.
- **UNHCR completed the delivery of 180 food boxes for refugees and migrants in greater Buenos Aires**, as well as food items for a local dining room in the city.
- **In Argentina, UNHCR and partners on the ground continue to analyze the state of affairs at border crossings in the province of Misiones, and inside the province in general.** UNHCR and partners have had contact with at least 15 families who are stranded in Foz do Iguazu, and at least three separated children have been identified as a result of the family units' divisions caused by the closure of borders. **UNHCR and partners are advocating with the respective authorities to facilitate the entry of these cases and assist them accordingly and timely, in compliance with COVID-19 related preventive**

measures. The Attention and Orientation Point (PAO) in this city continues to work remotely, with the teams going to the office for face-to-face attention if the case so requires. Among the main challenges for the population that wants to remain in Puerto Iguazu there are the issues of access to food and the risk of evictions, in addition to restrictions on access to health services.

- **UNHCR and partners are following up on cases of families stranded in San Salvador de Jujuy (Jujuy Province) who have other cities in Argentina as their final destination and who have been receiving humanitarian assistance since March.** Likewise, UNHCR and partners in Jujuy are following up on an identified case of family reunification of a family whose final destination is Uruguay. The province of Jujuy has stepped back to a strict phase 1 quarantine, and in particular La Quiaca (border with Bolivia), which remains now closed to incoming people and transport. Attention and Orientation Point (PAO) in La Quiaca remains closed and staff are working remotely from San Salvador de Jujuy (capital city of the province).
- As part of the **inclusion efforts** being promoted, **the province of Salta along with UNHCR has launched an Intersectoral Roundtable for the Protection and Inclusion of Refugees**, integrating a wide spectrum of institutions that can contribute to the identification, implementation and monitoring of durable solutions for refugees and migrants, including a representative of the Association of Venezuelans based in Salta. At national level, the second meeting of the Roundtable for the articulation and coordination for the inclusion of refugees and migrants met on 04 August with the participation of UNHCR and IOM. The Ministry of Social Development will have act as secretary protempore for 6 months.
- **UNHCR Regional Representative gave an interview to the Venezuelan newspaper “El Nacional”**, on how the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the situation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the Americas and Argentina.

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