

ARGENTINA – COVID-19

26 June 2020 | Update #15

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. **Two Venezuelans were reported to have tested positive for COVID-19** in one of the most populated and poorest neighborhoods of Buenos Aires city. UNHCR partners are assisting them accordingly with shelter and food.
- **Funding: US\$24 million** are required by UNHCR for the operation in the sub-region (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay) in 2020, and it has **only covered 29 per cent** of the funds required for its operational needs. **Current funds to continue cash-based interventions are enough until end-July. Funding is urgently needed to cover the most pressing humanitarian needs during the winter** (shelter, food, hygiene kits, winter clothing and blankets) for the most vulnerable asylum seekers, refugees, mainly **Venezuelans displaced**. 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), **34 per cent has been already funded or pledged**, thanks to the generous and timely contributions of donors.

Situational highlights

- **As of 25 May, Argentina reports 55,343 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1,184 deaths.**
- **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.
- **On 26 June, President Alberto Fernandez announced that from July 1 to 17 a quasi-total quarantine will be implemented in the Buenos Aires greater area, as daily highs of confirmed cases over the last two weeks peaked in the capital city.** With almost 100 days of lockdown, the pandemic's economic shock is high, with the IMF already predicting the country's economy to slump 9.9 per cent in 2020. Argentina was facing a third year of recession in 2020 even before the coronavirus hit.
- **Mindful of the COVID-19 outbreak that broke out in Bolivia last week and at the express request of the Governor of Salta, Argentinian President Alberto Fernández decided to close the border in Salvador Mazza on 23 June**, which was the only place of communication that remained open with Bolivia. At the same time, the Argentinian government decided to reinforce the controls of the Armed Forces and the Gendarmerie in that area. In this context, only four land border crossings are now open in Argentina. One of them is the Paso de los Libres with Brazil; two with Chile and one with Uruguay by Fray Bentos. This measure will be maintained throughout the duration of the quarantine and implies that only trucks with necessary merchandise pass under strict sanitary controls. UNHCR and partners continue to monitor the situation in Villazón, Bolivia's border with Argentina, given that a number of Venezuelan families (approximately 25 people) stranded on that border have been identified, pending the reopening of the Argentine border and without basic means to sustain themselves. As of July, UNHCR partners will have in place a person, which will allow for a minimum capacity for cross-border monitoring, diagnosis and coordination of the response with the Assistance and Orientation Point (PAO) in Jujuy (Argentina).
- **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** will be exacerbated by the arrival of 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.

UNHCR's response

- **As of 24 June, UNHCR had provided advice to and referred for further assistance some 709 cases in Argentina, representing 1,494 refugees and migrants, since the set-up of remote assistance, via telephone calls, emails and/or WhatsApp.** Ninety-eight per cent of the cases are Venezuelans, with 78 per cent living in the greater Buenos Aires area. Unmet basic needs related to the payment of accommodations in which they reside informally and access to food, persists as the main specific protection need reported, followed by lack of legal documentation.

- **During the third week of June, UNHCR partners provided with assistance in cash to some new 139 refugees and migrants.** UNHCR continued to provide shelter as well to some other **110** vulnerable refugees and migrants. UNHCR partners also provided advice to some **156** persons, 51 of them who got in touch with partners for the first time during last week.
- **On 17 June, the 2020 winterization campaign was launched in Argentina, which aims to deliver 1,500 coat kits and 3,800 blankets to Venezuelan refugees and migrants that will spend their first winter in Buenos Aires.** The campaign constitutes a joint effort of **four Venezuelan community organizations** who, thanks to their community protection networks, managed to open **30 delivery points** in greater Buenos Aires to decrease and shorten the circulation during quarantine in place in the country. In addition to the kits, UNHCR designed a virtual tool where persons enrolled through a virtual form, being able to select the delivery point closest to their homes. So far, 441 kits have been delivered and work continues for successive deliveries that will last until approximately 7 July.
 
- **On 22 June six families (20 people) who were stranded in the city of Puerto Iguazu (Argentina-Brazil border) were able to move to their final destinations and reunite with their families in Buenos Aires thanks to the efforts of UNHCR and its partners. All 20 people have applied for asylum using the remote procedure recently enabled by National Refugee Commission (CONARE).** Partners in Buenos Aires are already in contact with families to continue the support. UNHCR is aware of at least 23 other people stranded in Foz do Iguazu (Brazil) waiting for to enter Argentine territory.
- **Local authorities in the province of Jujuy in Argentina identified the case of a young man who apparently had walked for four weeks from Buenos Aires to return to Venezuela on foot.** The partners are already in contact to provide guidance and support as appropriate. In the same province, partners have identified cases of Venezuelan families who are stranded in the city of Jujuy receiving assistance and who may require support for family reunification or other humanitarian reasons, either to other destinations in Argentina or other neighboring countries. UNHCR and its partners continue to monitor the situation.
- **In coordination with six different associations of Venezuelans living in Argentina, UNHCR organized four webinars on International Protection principles and access to RSD procedures in Argentina with the participation of 60 Venezuelans.** Most of the participants work as volunteers in this organizations and help Venezuelans arriving in Argentina to access rights, integrate and regularize their migratory situation in the country. According to them, there is a lot of misinformation among the Venezuelans living in Argentina about the RSD procedures and rights and duties of refugees, so they felt that discussing these topics and learning more about refugee rights would better equip them to provide accurate information to members of their communities.
- **On 23 June, UNHCR participated on the National Sponsors Meeting organized by the Argentinean Network for the support of Community Sponsorship of Refugees.** Sponsors from different provinces such as Tucumán, Chubut, Neuquén, Cordoba and Buenos Aires participated, as well as IOM and UNCHR as supporting agencies of the Network. **Challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic for resettled refugees and sponsors were shared, as well as expectations for the arrival of new families in the coming months,** once Argentinean borders reopen, and international flights are available.
- As part of the consultations with donors on the impact of COVID-19 on asylum-seekers, refugees and Venezuelan refugees and migrants, a virtual meeting was organized with the Ambassador of **Austria**. Following consultations with the Ambassador of **Kuwait**, a funding project proposal for UNHCR's activities in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay was also submitted.

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