

## ARGENTINA – COVID-19

17 July 2020 | Update #16

### 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 37 per cent** of the funds required for its operational needs. **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), **36 per cent has been already funded or pledged**, thanks to the generous and timely contributions of donors.

### Situational highlights

- **As of 17 July, Argentina reports 114,783 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 2,122 deaths.** Argentina has also been selected as a testing ground for a new vaccine against COVID-19.
- **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.
- **Argentina will gradually loosen a lockdown that has lasted nearly four months in and around Buenos Aires, President Alberto Fernandez said on 17 July, after tougher restrictions since the start of July helped slow the spread of new COVID-19 infections.** The gradual return to normal life will happen in several stages, with the first stage lasting until 2 August. In most of Argentina's 23 provinces, except for greater Buenos Aires, community circulation of the virus is very low, and restrictions have generally been loosened in most regions, with more and more activities allowed to restart under specific conditions. Borders remain closed, though a ban on commercial flights is due to expire on 1 September.
- 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.

### UNHCR's response

- **Over the last three weeks, UNHCR partners provided advice to some 504 persons in Argentina**, 321 of them who got in touch with partners for the first time during last week.
- **In Argentina, over the last three weeks, UNHCR partners provided with assistance in cash to some new 602 refugees and migrants.** UNHCR also made a distribution of debit card for **60** refugees and migrants who had recently obtained savings accounts from the Banco Ciudad, providing them for the first time to have access to financial services in the country.
- UNHCR continued to **provide shelter** to some **90-80 vulnerable refugees and migrants in Argentina** over the last three weeks.
- **UNHCR through its partners is following up and helping a Venezuelan man in La Quiaca (border with Bolivia) who has been detained by the police** after being returned from Bolivian territory, with the aim to return to Venezuela.
- **As a result of the national consultation held in Argentina for the preparation of the response for the socio-economic recovery of refugees and migrants in the COVID-19 emergency, a permanent roundtable (MACIRM for the Spanish acronym) has been set up to define both a model of coordination that is widely accepted across the government and line ministries and accountable national policies**, ensuring effective delivery on refugee assistance, social protection and local integration. This mechanism is co-convened by the **Ministry of Social Development** and the **Secretariat for Human Rights** and counts with the participation of the National Commission for Refugees

(CONARE), among other key actors. UNHCR is providing expert assistance on policy and operational matters.

- **UNHCR** will start the implementation of some of the priority projects for the **socio-economic recovery of refugees and migrants** at the end of **August 2020**.
- **As part of the follow-up on the national consultation in Argentina, and the implementation of the response for the socio-economic recovery of refugees and migrants in the COVID-19 crisis, on 9 July, the UNHCR met virtually with representatives of the Bloque Trabajadores Migrantes, an organization dedicated to “popular economy” and integrated by refugees and migrants.** The main objective of the meeting was to define support to “La Tiendita Migrante” an independent project launched in the past two weeks and run by asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants, heavily impacted by the negative economic effects of the lockdown. Persons involved are of Senegalese, Bolivians and Venezuelans.
- **On 2 July, as part of the process of preparation the Regional Protocol for the protection of migrant and refugee children and adolescents a virtual meeting for feedback was held with the government and civil society counterparts that participated in the national consultation process in early 2020.** The meeting was an important opportunity to receive contributions to the document of the regional protocol and to begin working together on the development of a national working table that can outline operational lines of work regarding the protection of migrant and refugee children who are in Argentina.
- **On 2 July, UNHCR participated in a virtual meeting with members of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) to discuss updates on the regional implications of COVID-19 for GRSI engagement activities as well as next steps to support community sponsorship in the months ahead.** Updates about the current situation in Argentina, were shared by IRCC and UNHCR. Participants coincided that while community sponsors have remained actively supporting resettled refugees and preparing for new arrivals, the suspension of travel and the de-prioritization of programming activities by Governments coupled with the effects of the COVID-19 emergency have created uncertainty about the future of the programs. Some preliminary next steps were discussed to ensure that existing gains in community sponsorship are preserved at State and community levels in the coming months, focusing on support for sponsors and refugees. UNHCR will continue to actively co-lead these efforts at the country level.

**Special thanks to major donors who have provided funds for the Argentina Regional Office and at the regional and global level in 2020:**

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