

Southern Cone

August 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**, especially during the winter, (shelter, food, hygiene kits, clothes and cash-based interventions).

KEY INDICATORS

65,711

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

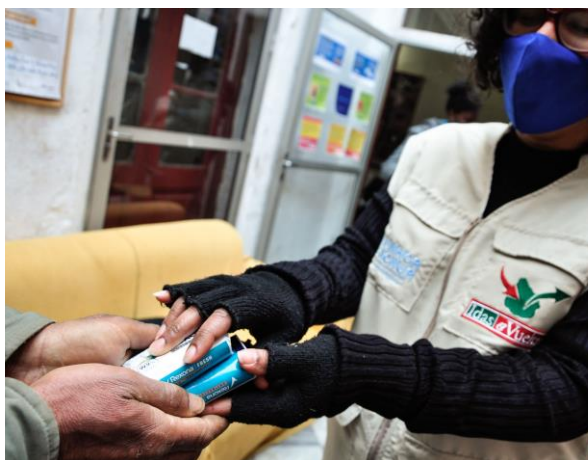
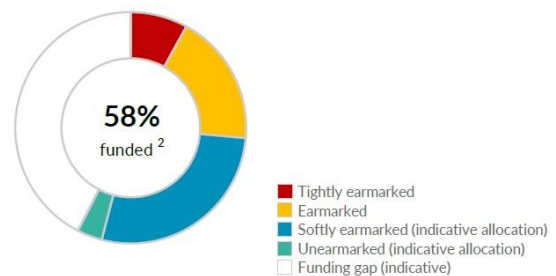
8,715

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

FUNDING (AS OF 22 SEPTEMBER 2020)

USD 25.6 million

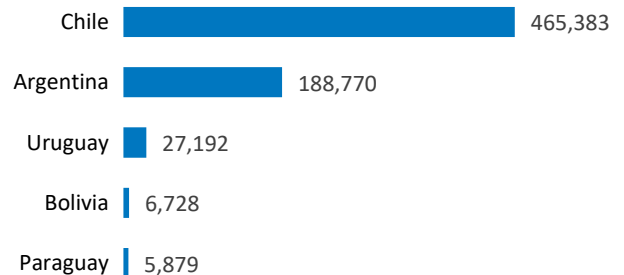
requested for the Argentina Multi-Country Office



Delivery of UNILVER soaps in Chuy, Uruguay to refugees © UNHCR

POPULATION OF CONCERN *

693,952



* According to information provided by government authorities, as of June 2020, with exception of Chile (December 2019). 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 after more than five months of COVID-19 related lockdowns 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. In **Argentina** self-isolation measures continued during the month, with some further relaxations, in spite of cases growing in Buenos Aires province, Jujuy (north) and Córdoba (center). In **Chile**, due to the overall slowing of infections in the Region Metropolitana, quarantine measures were eased in some parts of Santiago while the region of Antofagasta remains under strict quarantine measures, as well as Arica. In **Bolivia**, local authorities made the decision to suspend the total quarantine confirmed from 16 to 23 August, due to the protests caused by social conflict and blockages of essential roads that were causing shortages of food and products in the cities of La Paz and El Alto. In the metropolitan area of Asuncion in **Paraguay**, quarantine was reinstated from 23 August until 6 September as there was an increase of infections and deaths from coronavirus with worrying figures since the beginning of August. **Border closures were maintained in the five countries but attempts to cross borders using irregular routes were reported. Humanitarian exception for the entry of persons in need of international protection have been granted on a case by case basis in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay which constitutes a sub-regional good practice. UNHCR is ready to start the implementation of the priority projects for socio-economic recovery in the sub-region, including projects being implemented by Venezuelan refugee and migrant organizations. As part of the inclusion efforts, UNHCR signed cooperation agreement with new municipalities in Argentina and Chile relaunching the network of cities of solidarity.**

As of end of August, the countries covered by the Southern Cone Office counted with almost 1 million confirmed cases of COVID-19.



Venezuelan refugee family in La Paz, Bolivia during a NFI distribution © UNHCR

Achievements



PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- In August, **UNHCR provided advice to and referred for further assistance** some **1,037 refugees and migrants** in **Argentina** remotely. Majority of the cases were Venezuelans, most of them living in the greater Buenos Aires area. In **Chile, 136 new Venezuelan cases received direct counselling by UNHCR** in Arica, Antofagasta and Santiago. Additionally, 17 new Colombian cases, and 10 from other nationalities. In La Paz, **Bolivia** some **488 refugees and migrants** received advice and protection services, most of them Venezuelans. In **Uruguay**, UNHCR's partners provided remote **advice to 266 refugees and migrants**, of which 95 were Venezuelans, 117 were Cubans and 54 were from other nationalities.
- **UNHCR and partners ensured support for some Venezuelan families who were stranded in Villazón, Bolivia (border with Argentina)**, so that they could meet their basic needs and prevent situations of irregular crossings in a border closure context. UNHCR and its partners also monitored the situation on the Pisiga (Bolivia) - Colchane (Chile) border, since the partners in Pisiga had identified over the last weeks groups of Venezuelans arriving in Pisiga from Oruro (Bolivia) and crossing irregularly to Chile.
- **UNHCR and partners assisted five Venezuelans (including three children) to access Paraguay from Bolivia and assisted them to formalize their asylum applications with Paraguayan National Refugee Commission (CONARE)**. The persons complied with the necessary isolation period and were put in contact with the UNHCR partner to receive assistance once they arrived in Asunción.
- **UNHCR offices in Arica, Chile and in Tacna, Peru have remained in close contact regarding irregular border crossings and transits among this border**. According to the Chilean border police, there has been an increase in people self-declaring as having crossed the border irregularly in 2020.
- In **Uruguay, 40 people applied for asylum in August before the authorities**, with the support of UNHCR's partners: 24 of them did it in border points, while other 16 people requested refugee status remotely. Thanks to UNHCR's technical assistance to asylum authorities in the country, some **30 Venezuelan asylum-seekers were recognized as refugees** in the country during August. In **Argentina**, some **13 persons were recognized as refugees**. **UNHCR submitted to Argentina's National Refugee Commission (CONARE) a proposal to be submitted to National Migration Directorate (DNM) on the evaluation of specific situations and criteria for the request for exceptions for entering Argentine territory for people with international protection needs and / or humanitarian situations and / or family reunification purposes**.
- **UNHCR carried out remote training on Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse- Sexual Harassment (PSEA-SH) for partner agencies Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay**. Some 36 staff from partner agencies participated. Next steps on the

implementation of PSEA strategy aim for the development of feedback and response mechanisms and communication campaign to raise awareness on the issue.

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's 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.



EDUCATION

Achievements and Impact

- In **Bolivia**, UNHCR and its partners continued the initiative to organize **mobile friendly spaces for 206 children** (Aula Móvil) to the accommodations where UNHCR is providing shelter to Venezuelan families, providing 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.



Mobile friendly spaces for children in La Paz, Bolivia / @UNHCR

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 **151 persons** in August. In **Chile**, **103 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 **315** refugees and migrant benefitted from the **distribution of food in shelters** where they are being hosted during the quarantine period. In **Uruguay**, partners gave cash assistance for food to **17 refugees and migrants**. In Arica and Antofagasta, **Chile**, UNHCR and partners distributed **food boxes for 45 refugees and migrants and 238 families**.

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**.

**SHELTER AND NFIS****Achievements and Impact**

- In **Bolivia**, UNHCR's partner distributed **80,0640 soaps donated by UNILEVER**.
- In **Argentina** UNHCR continued to provide shelter to **76 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 **113 refugees and migrants**.

- In **Chile**, UNHCR distributed **emergency assistance (hygiene kits, winter clothes) for 116 refugees and migrants in Santiago de Chile**, and for **109 refugees and migrants in Arica**, and supported **26 families with rent payments**. In **Bolivia**, **60** refugees and migrants benefitted from the **distribution of hygiene kits and cleaning supplies in shelters** where they are being hosted during the quarantine period.
- In **Argentina**, a set of **48 Refugee Housing Units (RHU) were received in August** and donated to the government (national, province of Buenos Aires and local government of Buenos Aires) in its efforts to deal with the pandemic. The RHU modular design of the structures can be altered to suit different requirements and has proven suitable as temporary health infrastructure in various contexts.



UNHCR Refugee Housing Units (RHU) arriving in Buenos Aires © UNHCR/2020

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**.



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE

Achievements and Impact

- In **Argentina**, UNHCR partners provided **multipurpose cash assistance (CBI)** to some new **777 refugees and migrants** to cover for their most basic needs. In **Arica, Chile**, UNHCR used digitally administered voucher to distribute **cash assistance**, to **34 refugee and migrant families**. As part of its winterization campaign, UNHCR and its partners **supported 648 families (2,472 persons) through cash vouchers**, covering a substantial part of the country. UNHCR also began the distribution of cash for medical interventions in Arica benefiting 45 persons. In **Uruguay**, UNHCR's partner provided **cash** assistance to **72 refugees and migrants** (37 Venezuelans) to cover for their food and shelter needs. In **Paraguay**, UNHCR's partner provided also **cash assistance to 12 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

- In **Argentina**, **UNHCR together with the Banco Ciudad, and the Directorate of Collectivities of the Buenos Aires City Government, organized a virtual workshop on financial education for refugee and migrant community leaders.** The initiative represents a step forward in the effective collaboration between the



mentioned actors that has taken place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and led to the opening of more than 130 bank accounts to enable refugees and migrants living in precarious economic conditions to receive cash assistance. This initiative aims to promote local integration, addressing information gaps and other obstacles in the access to banking and financial services.

- **UNHCR organized a three-day training workshop on the job matching database linked to the Talent without Borders initiative in Argentina.**

The workshop, delivered in collaboration with AMIA, a national association that counts with established ties with major companies, aimed at UNHCR's

operational partners as future users and brokers of the tool. The database was created with the purpose of generating a match between offer and demand in the local labor market, involving the private sector in the search for solutions related to refugees and migrants livelihoods. The initiative is based on the idea of horizontally integrating all partners, who until now not been involved in the use of the database, to expand job placement opportunities for refugees and migrants.

- **The Mayor of Santiago de Chile signed a *Cities of Solidarity* agreement with UNHCR, highlighting the city's commitment to greater social inclusion of refugees and migrants** – amid COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the capital hard. With more than 119,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants residing in Santiago, the city's commitment represents a major milestone. In **Argentina**, the **Municipality of Quilmes** in the Buenos Aires province, where a high concentration of Venezuelans lives, also signed **a *Cities of Solidarity* agreement**. More than 1,000 Venezuelans settled in Quilmes over the last year and a half.
- In **Chile**, UNHCR organized an **entrepreneurship training targeting refugee and migrant women in Concepción**. In the context of a project entitled "Hope without borders", the project seeks to support more than 150 refugee and migrant women to facilitate their inclusion in the labour market through (micro) entrepreneurship.

- In **Uruguay**, UNHCR and its partners cooperated with the National Institute of Employment and Professional Training (INEFOP) to facilitate **access to digital courses for strengthening knowledge and skills for job searches**.
- **UNHCR has already launched seven socio-economic recovery projects in Argentina and Uruguay, out of 20 projects previously identified in sectors of the economy that are still active in the sub-region**, despite the negative effects of social measures for containment of the pandemic. UNHCR has prioritized protected labor insertion channels, including employment and self-employment, to remove existing barriers to local integration and provide a rapid response in the context of the health, economic and social crisis. The projects include actions aimed at intensive training, professional reconversion, internships in companies and social cooperatives, agreements with the private sector for the recruitment of refugees and qualified migrants. The projects aim for their inclusion with decent jobs in the formal economy, with a gender focus and opportunities for young people.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Some 13 projects aiming at the socio-economic recovery of refugees and migrants in the sub-region remain unfunded (USD 3 million).

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 UNICEF, IOM, ILO 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 programmes with broadly earmarked and unearmarked funds in 2020

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External Relations

CONTACTS

José Manuel Cáceres, Regional Reporting Officer, Regional Office for Southern Latin America, caceres@unhcr.org, Tel: +54 11 4014-1600

Analía Kim, Assistant Communications/PI Officer, Regional Office for Southern Latin America, kiman@unhcr.org, Tel: +54 11 4014-1600

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