



“ Even with patchy statistics, there is **evidence** - often anecdotal or from field reports - suggesting that **COVID-19's lockdowns, economic hardship and closed or restricted borders** have **exacerbated** the often-intertwined **problems of trafficking and sexual abuse**. Movement curbs and restricted services may confine victims, **limiting** their ability to **escape or speak out**. Deepening **poverty** forces some to **beg or engage in survival sex** to sustain their families.”

Gillian Triggs

UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection

You can read the full article [HERE](#).



Situational Highlights

The Americas continue to shoulder the world's heaviest burden of COVID-19, with the region accounting for over 38% of the total of new cases reported globally in the past days. However, the region reported a 22% decrease in the number of new deaths over the same period. According to WHO, seven of the 12 countries reporting the highest numbers of new cases are in the Americas: United States of America (with 7 million cases), Brazil (4.7 million), Colombia (806,000), Peru (800,000), Mexico (726,000), Argentina (702,000 cases) and Chile (457,000). The decrease in

the number of deaths in the region was largely driven by a fall in the number of deaths in Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador and Bolivia. In Argentina, the number of new cases has spiraled rapidly, with 40% of tests for the illness coming back positive in recent weeks. Venezuela has reported 71,940 cases and 600 deaths. Panama is reporting more than 110,000 cases, and, with over 3,200 deaths, Guatemala is the country with most coronavirus fatalities in Central America. According to the latest epidemiological update from the Pan American Health Organization,

or PAHO, 60,458 confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been recorded among pregnant women in 14 countries throughout the region. Of those cases, 485 – or a bit under 1% - led to deaths, according to PAHO. Among indigenous populations in nine Latin American countries as well as the United States and Canada, 120,593 confirmed cases and 2,639 deaths were reported as of 26 August. Asylum applications are on the rise in Mexico, with 26,255 claims as of 18 September. Peru, which launched a remote application system last June, has registered

30,280 asylum claims. As of end August, Panama received 600 new asylum applications – down from the previous year. In Uruguay, 91 asylum claims were received from 24 August to 18 September. In Costa Rica, appointments for registering new asylum claims have been pushed back to December, 2020.



Challenges

As several countries are easing mobility restrictions, and borders are progressively reopening, increased movements across borders have been lately reported. Following the opening of borders of Guatemala and El Salvador (18 and 21 September), increasing mixed movements were noted, especially on the route between Izabal (border with Honduras) and Peten (border with Mexico). The Guatemalan Migration Institute informed that in the two days after borders were opened, 4,307 people entered the country. In addition, large groups of people have departed Honduras for the Guatemalan border on 30 September. Further such movements in the near future are likely.

According to Migracion Colombia, 108,058 people returned to Venezuela from or through Colombia as of 20 September. And although the border between Venezuela and Brazil remains closed, 153 Venezuelans exited through the Brazilian border town of Pacaraima between 17 and 23 September, bringing the total of returns there since March to 3,625. Meanwhile, outflows from Venezuela are also on the rise, despite closed borders. According to data gathered by UNHCR and partners in Venezuela, the number of people crossing to Colombia was up sharply, with around 200 people leaving Venezuela as of 22 September. Seventy per cent of those who made the crossing did so on foot. With pandemic-related restrictions on movement lifted in Ecuador, Venezuelans appear to be regarding the Andean nation as an easier place to make a living than neighboring Colombia, where restrictions remain in place. UNHCR is stepping up its presence along both official and non-official border crossings in the region to respond to the needs of those on the move.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had severe ramifications for those forcibly displaced. The economic impact of the outbreak has left many Venezuelans unemployed and homeless, pushing them deeper into poverty – which is, of course, one of the main drivers of sexual exploitation and trafficking. This, coupled with disruptions to schooling, has left children exposed to exploitation and abuse. Many youths have been forced into child labour or childhood sexual exploitation in a bid to help sustain their families. Border restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the virus have also funneled many people desperately seeking safety toward irregular border crossings.

Data from the Colombian government shows that in just the first four months of 2020, authorities had already identified a 20% rise in trafficking involving foreign nationals, compared with the total for the entirety of 2019. In over half of those cases, sexual exploitation was the ultimate goal of the trafficking.

A [study by the World Council of Credit Unions](#) shows that 82% of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the Ecuadorian cities of Quito and Guayaquil, as well as 86% in the Peruvian capita, Lima, do not have access to financial services. This makes it more difficult for them to respond to the economic distress brought on by the pandemic.



UNHCR's response in the Americas



Despite the pandemic-related restrictions, UNHCR is working to provide emergency assistance, including safe shelter spaces and cash-based assistance, as well as to advocate for the inclusion of refugees in national public health responses, social safety nets and emergency assistance plans. Urgent action is required to help the most vulnerable refugees and IDPs, particularly those in countries where they are unable to access state-run social protection schemes. With the coronavirus crisis exacerbating already dire humanitarian needs globally, timely and flexible support from governments, the private sector and individuals remains critical. Click [HERE](#) to see an update on UNHCR's COVID-19 emergency response in the Americas since March, 2020.



(Please note that the list is not exhaustive and mostly reflects the reporting period.)

UPDATES FROM COUNTRIES



Brazil: Twenty-three Venezuelan indigenous refugees and migrants remain isolated in a health centre set up in the Amazonian city of Boa Vista following a COVID-19 testing campaign at an indigenous shelter in the border town of Pacaraima. An additional 85 people were hospitalized in the care area. Since the centre opened, 3,034 patients have received some sort of medical assistance there.



Colombia: UNHCR's Integrated Assistance Centre in the northern border city of Maicao reopened its doors to new entries, following six months of lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following extensive medical exams, 12 vulnerable Venezuelan families were admitted to a centre, which during the lockdown was only serving those families who were already staying there. As an additional preventive measure, the newly admitted families will remain in isolation for 14 days.



Mexico: UNHCR distributed more than 80,000 school kits to children and teens in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools in the states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Veracruz, Oaxaca and Baja California. The donation – which was made in coordination with the national Ministry of Education, the Chiapas Ministry of Education and school principals – is part of a strategy aimed at promoting refugee children's access to education, as well as peaceful coexistence between communities. Read more [HERE](#).



North of Central America: In El Salvador, 1,030 hygiene kits were delivered to the Ministry of Culture for distribution to indigenous people affected by the COVID-19 crisis. In Guatemala, two Refugee Housing Units, or RHUs, were set up in the Las Cruces Health Centre, in the northern Peten region, and the Ayutla Health Centre, in the southwestern town of San Marcos. The RHUs will be used for conducting COVID-19 testing among locals as well as refugees and migrants passing through the areas. In Honduras, UNCHR and partners distributed 500 hygiene kits and 2,448 bars of soap in seven at-risk communities in Tegucigalpa, assisting approximately 3,000 people.



Peru: Since the start of the pandemic, over 32,450 people have been given cash to help them meet basic needs, such as food, housing or medication, through UNHCR's partners, Aldeas Infantiles, Caritas, Encuentros and HIAS. Additionally, over 1,000 refugees and migrants have been provided shelter, and over 168,160 food rations were distributed in 14 UNHCR-supported shelters, hotels and temporary centres in Arequipa, Lima, Tacna and Tumbes.



Southern Cone: As part of the Cities of Solidarity Initiative, UNHCR has organized meetings with officials from 21 cities in Argentina and 9 cities in Uruguay to share information on ongoing activities; discuss common challenges; and identify opportunities to impact in policies and programmes aimed at helping people of concern integrate, socioeconomically, in the wake of the pandemic. The meetings resulted in the creation of two networks to complement efforts and maximize effectiveness.



Trinidad and Tobago: By the end of August, 172 vulnerable individuals were granted cash transfers. Eighty-three percent of applicants reported not being able to meet their basic needs; 78% said that either they or someone in their household had been forced to reduce their food intake; and 39% reported facing eviction or homelessness.



Venezuela: In coordination with partner Fundación Vivienda Popular, UNHCR organized six entrepreneurship workshops in communities in El Junquito, the Capital District, and Petare, Miranda, for more than 100 community members who, having lost their jobs during the national lockdown, have been forced to pivot to running their own small, informal businesses to survive.

Stories from the field

As COVID-19 pandemic roils Latin America, vulnerable Venezuelans face wave of evictions

Lockdown job losses make it impossible for many Venezuelan refugees and migrants to keep a roof over their heads. In Riohacha, a city on Colombia's north-eastern coast, Venezuelan María Fernanda Barrios was able to find a job and, eventually, rented a room. But then came the coronavirus pandemic, which cost her first her job and then her home, forcing María Fernanda, her sister and their five children onto the streets.

"We thought that here, our kids could have a better life, but the pandemic has made everything so difficult," said the 29-year-old domestic worker who fled insecurity and persecution, along with food shortages and rampant inflation, in her native Venezuela. "It's just as hard here as it was there. We find ourselves in the same situation," added the mother of three children, ages two, four and six.

Months-long stay-at-home measures aimed at curbing the coronavirus' spread have taken a particularly hard toll on the around 4.2 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants like María Fernanda who have sought safety throughout the region, and who for the majority manage to eke out a meagre living in the informal economy.

Now deprived of any way of making money, untold numbers of Venezuelan refugees and migrants are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. To read the full story, by Ángela Méndez Trivino in Riohacha, Colombia, and Ilaria Rápido in Quito, Ecuador, click [HERE](#).



Coordination and Response to date

MIRPS

Representatives of several UN member states, international financial institutions, academics and civil society expressed their solidarity with people forced to flee Central America and called for stronger cooperation and broader international backing for a regional framework to address forced displacement in the region during a high-level event on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on 23 September. The event, led by Spain, brought together stakeholders and supporters to discuss the path forward in generating more international support for the MIRPS countries.

Participants reiterated their promise to make a meaningful impact in the lives of those forcibly displaced by violence and persecution, as well as their hosts, and

announced concrete contributions to the MIRPS – with Spain pledging to provide assistance in asylum capacity; Canada offering resettlement support; and the European Union supporting development projects. The Inter-American Development Bank renewed its focus on the countries of origin and transit, and the United States reaffirmed its offer of financial resources. Representatives of academia and civil society reiterated their commitments to give more visibility to forced displacement in Central America. The government of Canada underscored its commitment to supporting Central America and expressed its interest in assuming the next presidency of the MIRPS Support Platform when Spain's tenure comes to an end in 2021. Read High Commissioner Filippo Grandi's speech [here](#).

Coordination and Response to date

Quito Process Meeting

The VI Meeting on Human Mobility and Venezuelan citizens for Latin America and the Caribbean took place on 23 and 24 September and adopted the Quito Declaration (Santiago de Chile chapter). Countries agreed to strengthen the protection of the rights of children; work towards family reunification; strengthen the National Refugee Commissions; reinforce coordination among the regional network of Support Spaces; and promote socio-economic integration. Peru will assume the presidency of the Quito Process as of 27 November. The Quito Process includes the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile,

Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, and Uruguay.

The Group of Friends of the Process, which is composed of Switzerland, the United States, Spain, Germany, Canada and the European Union, will include with new members, including Netherlands, Inter American Development Bank (IADB) and France.

The Declaration of Santiago was signed by 13 member States. To read the declaration click [HERE](#).

Don't miss...

COLOMBIA'S MAYERLÍN VERGARA PÉREZ HAS BEEN AWARDED UNHCR'S 2020 NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD. Maye has spent more than 20 years rescuing sexually exploited and trafficked children, many of them refugees. This year's Nansen Award ceremony is to be held remotely because of the pandemic and will be released on Monday, 5 October.



MEET THE RECENTLY APPOINTED UNHCR GOODWILL AMBASSADOR ALFONSO HERRERA.



DID YOU MISS THE NGO CONSULTATIONS HELD ON 28-29 SEPTEMBER?

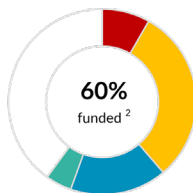
Access [THIS SITE](#) to get all the info.



Funding the response

Financial Information

UNHCR AMERICAS - Funding Update



\$ 611.8 million
UNHCR's financial requirements 2020¹

Notes:
1. The financial requirements for The Americas are for the operations in Belize, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America and Venezuela.
2. The percentage funded (60%) and total funding amount (\$366,954,338) are indicative based on the methodology described above. This leaves an indicative funding gap of \$244,884,035 representing 40% of the financial requirements.

While seeking funds to carry out COVID-19 preventative 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. It is vital that the

international community keep supporting the millions of refugees and internally displaced people already living a precarious existence, for whom already limited self-reliance opportunities are likely to shrink further as a result of the economic impact of the crisis.

THE AMERICAS as of 29 September 2020

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

Total contributed or pledged to the COVID-19 appeal:

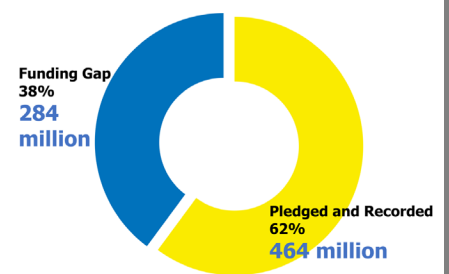
USD 464M

Including:

United States	\$186.3M
Germany	\$62.7M
European Union	\$50.0M
United Kingdom	\$26.9M
Japan	\$23.9M
African Development Bank	\$18.3M
Private donors	\$16.4M
Denmark	\$14.6M
United Nations Foundation	\$10.0M
CERF	\$6.9M
Canada	\$6.4M
Unilever	\$5.9M
Education Cannot Wait	\$4.7M
Qatar Charity	\$3.5M
Spain	\$3.4M
France	\$3.4M
Ireland	\$3.3M
Sweden	\$3.0M
Sony Corporation	\$2.9M
Austria	\$2.5M
Finland	\$2.4M

FUNDING (AS OF 25 SEPTEMBER) USD 745 million

requested for UNHCR's COVID-19 response globally until the end of the year



UNHCR is grateful for the critical and generous support provided by donors to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally, and to the Americas, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funding.

Thanks to donors in 2020:



And to our private donors:

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