In November alone, the Americas reported more than six million new cases of COVID-19, according to PAHO/WHO, which represented a 30 per cent increase on October’s new case numbers. New daily cases have reached record highs in the United States (which has seen a total of 14.5 million cases) and Canada (with 410,000 total cases). In Central America, health authorities in Honduras (which has seen 111,000 cases) and Belize (with 7,600 total cases) are closely monitoring the situation in the wake of Hurricanes Eta and Iota, Panama (with 175,000 cases) has, for the past couple of weeks, reported an increase in the number of cases nationwide, with the indigenous region of Guna Yala seeing the steepest rise in cases. In South America, Brazil (with 6.57 million total cases) has seen an increase in case numbers in several states, even as the number of new infections has been falling in Argentina (with 1.45 million total cases) since early November. In the Caribbean, local outbreaks have been reported in eastern and central provinces of Cuba (with a total of 8,800 cases). Brazil and Colombia (with 1.36 million cases) both extended the closure of their land borders, while Venezuela announced restrictions would be lifted for the entire month of December. Countries throughout the region continue to facilitate refugees’ and migrants’ access to protection and regular stays. By the end of November, Colombia had received 15,479 applications for its new PEP VI stay permit, which allows Venezuelans who entered the country regularly before 31 August 2020 to regularize their status. Costa Rica created a new special category of stay permit, based on humanitarian grounds, aimed at Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, and Cubans who had had their asylum claim denied. In late November, Guyana resumed its paper-based registration, which had been on hold since March. Mexico made progress, legislatively, with the publishing of a reform that brings the Refugee and Migration Laws into alignment with the General Law on the Rights of Children.

As the coronavirus pandemic drags on, a lethal mix of confinement, deepening poverty and economic duress is unleashing a renewed wave of violence that is hitting refugee, displaced and stateless women and girls particularly hard. The UNHCR-led Global Protection Cluster, a network of UN agencies and NGOs providing protection to people affected by humanitarian crises, reported increases in gender-based violence in at least 27 countries. The sale or exchange of sex as an economic coping mechanism was also reported in at least 20 countries. Incidents of gender-based violence against Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia have increased by 40 per cent over the first three quarters of the year, compared to the same period last year. Calls to domestic violence hotlines in Colombia have also increased by 153 per cent.

As borders remain closed across the region, people are crossing via informal routes, where illegal armed groups and smuggling and trafficking networks operate. Rapid field assessments suggest that some 500-700 people are exiting Venezuela daily. UNHCR is warning of unprecedented levels of trauma and despair among newly arrived refugees and migrants from Venezuela, many of whom are arriving in desperate conditions into host communities hard hit by the pandemic. Those fleeing include unaccompanied children and adolescents who have either left or been separated from their families and require specialized care and protection arrangements.

The pandemic and recent natural disasters in the north of Central America have worsened the plight of women in countries already beset by weak institutional support, obstacles to accessing resources and services, economic challenges, isolation, and economic dependence. The countries of the north of Central America registered 1,709 femicides from January – September, 2020. The situation in collective sites sheltering those uprooted by the recent hurricanes, Eta and Iota, is also particularly dire.

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.
Forced back home by the pandemic, Venezuelan grandmother sees no choice but to flee once again.

When Rosalba* decided to flee her native Venezuela, she never imagined she would end up facing so many hardships abroad that returning home would eventually come to seem like her only viable option. But three years after the 48-year old grandmother and her family left the bustling Venezuelan port city of Maracaibo, seeking safety in neighbouring Colombia, the coronavirus pandemic made it impossible for them to make ends meet. With the spectre of hunger and imminent eviction looming large, they took the wrenching decision to make the risky trip back home. With Latin America hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, and lockdown and other restrictions taking a terrible economic and social toll throughout the region, tens of thousands of the estimated 5.4 million Venezuelans refugees and migrants living abroad have taken the drastic step of returning home over the past months. Driven by many of the same factors that pushed Rosalba and her family to leave – penury and potential eviction – many have made the dangerous journey by whatever means possible, by bus, hitchhiking or even by foot, from as far away as Ecuador or Peru. The already difficult trip has been made that much harder by pandemic-related border closures that have forced many to resort to clandestine crossings that put them at even greater risk. But like Rosalba, many of those who returned home during the pandemic have packed their bags and left once again amid the continued deterioration of conditions inside Venezuela. Click HERE to read the webstory, by Ríohacha PI Angela Méndez-Treviño.

Stories from the field

Coordination and Response to date

At the Third Annual Meeting of the MIRPS, six Central American nations and Mexico reviewed progress and set new priorities to address forced displacement in the region. During the high-level segment on 8 December, MIRPS states adopted a political declaration reaffirming their commitment to addressing forced displacement. The Pro-tempore Presidency was officially handed over to Guatemala. The technical segment of their third annual meeting – which included the participation of local authorities, the IDP working group, civil society and the private sector, as well as the Support Platform – served to take stock of the progress that has been made, despite the challenges stemming from COVID-19 and the recent spate of natural disasters. They also presented their quantified priorities for 2021, consolidated into concrete concept notes that will be reviewed by the Support Platform to assess possible means of cooperation. Consult the MIRPS annual report 2020 and the press release HERE.
RMRP

Launched on 10 December, the Regional Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela for 2021 includes requirements amounting to USD 1.44 billion to support some 3.3 million people across 17 countries. As a result of the cooperation among 158 organizations, the RMRP is the geographically largest response plan in the world. Taking into account the severity of the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic in Latin America and its dire impact on refugees and migrants, the 2021 RMRP focuses on facilitating social and economic integration (which accounts for 18 per cent of the total budget, or USD 263 million). The launch event included the participation of UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi, IOM Director General, Antonio Vitorino, and UNHCR-IOM Joint Special Representative for refugees and migrants from Venezuela, Eduardo Stein. Canada’s Minister of International Development, Karina Gould, announced that the next international donor conference in support to Venezuelan refugees and migrants is to be held in 2021. Click here to read the press release US$1.44 billion needed to support refugees and migrants from Venezuela amid COVID-19.

Don’t miss...

READ HERE THE STORY ELVIA, A VENEZUELAN UN VOLUNTEER WHO DRAWS ON HER OWN EXPERIENCE TO ASSIST VENEZUELAN REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

CAMPAIGN RELEASE “Doy la cara”

Gabriel and hundreds of thousands of people forced to flee Central America cannot show their faces, but through yours, the world can learn their stories.

Funding the response

UNHCR AMERICAS - Funding Update

THE AMERICAS as of 15 December 2020

$ 611.8 million

UNHCR’s financial requirements 2020

64% funded

Notes:
1. The financial requirements for 2020 are for the operations in English, Brazil, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.
2. The indicator funding gap of $232,616,925 representing 38% of the financial requirements.

$ 745.1 million

UNHCR’s financial requirements 2020

64% funded

Notes:
1. The financial requirements of the Coronavirus Emergency include requirements in Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Qatar, Russia, Germany, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mali and Zimbabwe.
2. The percentage funded (64%) and total funding amount ($611,800,740) is indicative based on the methodology described above. This leaves an indicative funding gap of $232,616,925 representing 38% of the financial requirements.

Thanks to donors in 2020:

And to our private donors:

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