



“ The vast majority of the world’s refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries. The **international community must do more to support host governments with access to the vaccines**. Global and equitable access is what will **ultimately protect lives and stem the pandemic** ”

Filippo Grandi

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

You can read the press release on one of the first countries to start COVID-19 vaccination for refugees [HERE](#).



Situational Highlights

According to **WHO/PAHO**, the COVID-19 pandemic swept through every country in the Americas in 2020, infecting more than 35 million people across the region and causing some 850,000 deaths. Health systems throughout the region struggled to manage the outbreak on account of limited supplies, space, and staff. **Brazil and Colombia** are now reporting the highest numbers of new cases, with a particularly worrisome rise in infections in Brazil’s south-eastern regions. The situation in the northern Brazilian border state of Amazonas is also of serious concern and is limiting humanitarian operations there to lifesaving activities.

Although several countries had reported a decline in cases at the end of 2020, in January, infections spiked across the region, accounting for 51 per cent of all new cases globally and 45 per cent of all new deaths. Tighter restrictions were reintroduced in several countries, including Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Brazil, Peru, Chile, and Uruguay. Colombia announced that its land borders will remain closed until March.

In **Central America**, **Panama** and **Belize** are seeing a rise in COVID-19 infections. Meanwhile, **Honduras**, **El Salvador**, **Guatemala**, and **Nicaragua** were reporting relatively low COVID numbers overall. However, these trends should be

taken with a pinch of salt, as Hurricanes Eta and Iota may have impacted national monitoring systems. Additionally, the storms displaced many residents from the affected regions. Despite pandemic-related restrictions, countries throughout the region are facilitating refugees’ and migrants’ access to protection and regular stays. By the end of 2020, **Mexico** registered a 40 per cent increase in asylum applications – with a total of 41,303 claims filed – as COVID-19 restrictions and the impact of the two devastating storms exacerbated the habitual drivers of displacement in the north of Central America. The same confluence of factors led to a large

mixed movement of an estimated 8,000 Hondurans in mid-January. From 15 October to 28 December, **Colombia** registered 18,252 applications for the Special Stay Permit, or PEP, from Venezuelans who had entered the country regularly prior to 31 August, 2020. Introduced in 2017, the PEP allows Venezuelans to work, study, and access healthcare for up to two years. The Peruvian Commission for Refugees extended the asylum-seeker document and work permit until 30 June.



Challenges

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is continuously advocating at the country, regional and global levels for refugees and the other people we protect to be included in national social protection strategies. UNHCR is calling for the equitable inclusion of refugees, and internally displaced and stateless populations through the [COVAX Facility](#), a global initiative that brings together governments and manufacturers to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines eventually reach those in greatest need. Low- to middle-income countries have been identified as priority countries for support. UNHCR is also working with international partners to ensure that ‘leaving no one behind’ and ‘equitable access to vaccines’ are not just phrases, but actual practices.



Ensuring that refugees are included in the vaccine rollout is key to ending the pandemic. Excluding refugees, other displaced people or non-nationals from vaccination plans carries the risk of prolonging transmission within these groups, with spill over into national populations.

There are tangible protection risks associated with excluding refugees, including potentially dire consequences to their health, access to services, work, education, and livelihoods, as well as freedom of movement and freedom from discrimination.

While UNHCR is not procuring vaccinations – that remains governments’ responsibility – the agency is supporting refugee host countries with other COVID-preparedness and response initiatives. Those initiatives include critical health, sanitation, hygiene, and logistical support, as well as the provision of personal protective equipment.

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 October, 2020.



UPDATES FROM COUNTRIES

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

- 

Argentina: UNHCR scaled up the Potenciar in Argentina pilot project, which is being implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development, or MSD. Another 25 people of concern to UNHCR joined the previous cohort of 90 who were already taking part in the project – which aims to give them the tools they need to start up and/or expand small businesses. In just the months of November and December of last year, the pilot program had a positive impact on the livelihoods of approximately 345 individuals. The involvement of the MDS not only guarantees technical assistance at no cost but also ensures government involvement in finding durable solutions for refugees and migrants. An agreement has already been reached to repeat the project in 2021, with a contribution from the state budget.
- 

Brazil: During the reporting period, UNHCR Brazil and partners in the northern city of Boa Vista registered 1,538 people in UNHCR’s centralized, web-based case management software, proGres v4. In Boa Vista, UNHCR’s teams at the Documentation and Interiorization Centre provided assistance with the pre-documentation of 537 asylum-seekers, as well as 162 refugees who had already been recognized by the Brazilian government. UNHCR’s teams at the Manaus Bus Station and Documentation and Interiorization Centre provided pre-documentation assistance to 1,247 asylum seekers and 350 refugees who had already been recognized by the Brazilian government.
- 

Colombia: The Refugee and Migrant Centre in Riohacha reopened on 22 December, with the admittance of six Venezuelan families made up of 23 individuals – half of them children and adolescents. The families remained in isolation two weeks, and will then spend an additional four weeks in the Centre, where they are to receive assistance and orientation. They will also participate in community activities aimed at facilitating their adaptation to their host country.
- 

Costa Rica: As part of the “16 days of Activism to eradicate violence against women” initiative that ran from 25 November to 10 December, UNHCR worked with UNPFA to empower 21 refugee women via six virtual sessions on art. A publication called [Mujeres Espiral](#), which includes poems and other pieces written by participants in the initiative, resulted from the discussions. Additionally, a pilot plan was developed to help give refugee men – all of them community leaders – a better understanding of gender-based violence and their role in preventing it.
- 

Mexico: In 2020, UNHCR’s helplines responded to 59,627 requests for information. The national Helpdesk, located in Mexico City, responded to 9,217 inquires, providing guidance and support to people of concern from across the country. The number of visits to UNHCR Mexico’s help site in 2020 rose by 169 per cent compared to 2019. The most-visited page was one entitled [“How to apply for asylum in Mexico.”](#)
- 

North of Central America: In El Salvador, UNHCR and partner World Vision renovated the Las Rosas Shelter, which will now have capacity for up to 54 children and adolescents. In Guatemala, UNHCR is expanding access to safe water and sanitation for people in mixed movements by installing water filters and providing soap to communities on the main routes in the north-eastern Izabal department. In Honduras, UNHCR worked in cooperation with 16 partners to deliver assistance to 5,506 people in 28 shelters. The assistance included the provision of protective equipment such as masks, gowns, and gloves, as well as hygiene kits, food kits and psychosocial support. In Panama, UNHCR and Ecocinema conducted a pilot solidarity-building community cinema project that reached 314 people in seven refugee hosting communities. The project’s workshops and film screenings were conducted in strict accordance with national health protocols.
- 

Ecuador: Throughout December, masks and gel were distributed to 3,000 caminantes, or Venezuelan refugees and migrants walking southwards, from the Colombian border. Vulnerable refugee families in the northern regions of Ibarra and Santo Domingo were provided with food kits, while in the southern city of Huaquillas, on the border with Peru, those in high-risk groups – including the elderly and those with disabilities - were provided with hygiene kits. Since the start of the pandemic, the Office in Ecuador has distributed around 12,000 food kits and 12,500 hygiene kits to refugees, asylum seekers and others of concern to the agency.
- 

Venezuela: In the western border state of Apure, UNHCR distributed over 1,000 desks to several schools in the town of Guasualito, that had been the site of a temporary quarantine centre for people returning from abroad. Within the framework of UNHCR and partners’ child protection efforts, a facility formerly used by the Guasualito Boy Scouts was rehabilitated to be used as a safe space for returnees, as well as for recreational activities.

Stories from the field

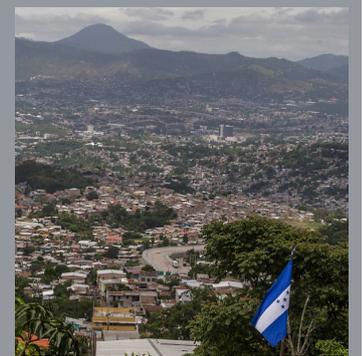
Entire family flees from home to save their lives in Central America

More than 830,000 people have been forced to flee the countries of North Central America. Increasingly, gangs and criminal groups target entire families forcing them to flee together.

It was 4:50 in the morning of a hot Thursday in March in San Pedro Sula, located in northern Honduras, when Ruth Salgado, 19, heard the phrase that changed the life of her and her entire family: **“The mara is coming!”**

Her parents weren’t home and Ruth took over. She took her younger brother in her arms and left the small family house made of zinc sheets and wood to flee with her seven siblings, between one and 16 years old. Ruth’s only thought was saving their lives. Thirty other members of the extended family, who lived in the five houses around Ruth’s family, also fled.

Click [HERE](#) to read the full webstory.



Coordination and Response to date

MIRPS

As the new **MIRPS Pro-tempore Presidency**, the Government of **Guatemala** is leading the elaboration and approval of the MIRPS regional annual plan for 2021. The plan brings continuity to initiatives from 2020 and integrates new strategic lines aimed at responding to forced displacement amid the coronavirus pandemic, natural disasters, and economic challenges. The plan foresees the creation of new working groups in reception and local governance, economic inclusion, and admission of people with international protection needs. It also follows up on the working group on internal displacement, which was created in 2020. Strengthening alliances with civil society, the private sector and the UN system will be key to achieving the goals.



JOINT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The most recent Joint Needs Assessment on the situation and needs of refugees and migrants in the context of COVID-19, and on the prevention and response measures to the health emergency in Colombia, was produced in December by the interagency group for mixed movements in Colombia. According to the survey of over 3,000 households, the three main needs remain food (85 per cent of surveyed households), housing, e.g. rental assistance (68 per cent) and access to employment or sources of income (44 per cent). Additionally, 29 per cent of households expressed a need for access to medical assistance. Learn more through this [LINK](#)



Don't miss...

REFUGIARTE GALLERY TO COMMEMORATE UNHCR 70TH ANNIVERSARY

UNHCR presents the third edition of RefugiArte, an initiative to help raise awareness, through art, about the protection needs of refugees and internally displaced people, as well as to promote inclusion and solidarity.



A new report on the **Emergency Response of Civil Registry and Identification Offices during the COVID-19 Pandemic** was produced in partnership with the OAS and the Civil Registries in the region. The report examines good practices and innovative initiatives aimed at responding to the pandemic that were implemented by Civil Registries in 19 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, all of them members of CLARCIEV, the Latin American and Caribbean Council for Civil Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics. The report is available [HERE](#)



FAMILIES ON THE RUN

In the context of the pandemic, community leaders in areas where UNHCR works in northern Central America reported a spike in persecution, due to the fact that confinement measures have made it easier for gangs to locate those they are targeting. Find more [HERE](#)



Funding the response

Financial Information

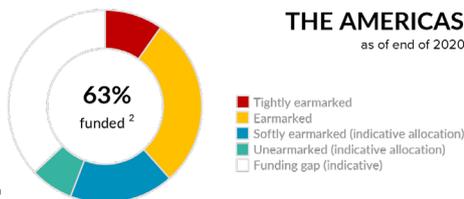
COVID-19 SUPPLEMENTARY APPEAL 2021

To respond to the most pressing needs resulting from the pandemic, UNHCR is appealing for \$455 million in funding for the Americas in 2021. As of January, donors had already pledged \$18 million.

UNHCR AMERICAS Funding Update

\$ 611.8 million

UNHCR's financial requirements 2020¹



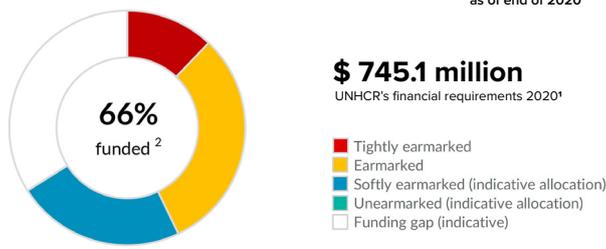
Notes:
 1. The financial requirements for The Americas are for the operations in Belize, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America and Venezuela.
 2. The percentage funded (63%) and total funding amount (\$385,343,413) are indicative based on the methodology described above. This leaves an indicative funding gap of \$226,494,960 representing 37% 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.

CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY as of end of 2020

\$ 745.1 million

UNHCR's financial requirements 2020¹



Notes:
 1. The financial requirements of the Coronavirus Emergency include requirements in Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Bangladesh, Belize, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Malaysia and Zimbabwe.
 2. The percentage funded (66%) and total funding amount (\$492,090,328) are indicative based on the methodology described above. This leaves an indicative funding gap of \$253,039,172 representing 34% of the financial requirements.

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:

BabyBjorn AB | España con ACNUR | Fondation Chanel | FUNDAÇÃO ITAÚ PARA EDUCAÇÃO E CULTURA | Fundación ACNUR Comité Argentino | ITAU UNIBANCO | Latter-day Saints Charities | Major League Baseball Players Trust (MLBPT) | Private donors Australia | Private donor Brazil | Private donors China | Private donors France | Private donors Germany | Private donors Italy | Private donors Japan | Private donors Lebanon | Private donors Mexico | Private donors Spain | Private donors Republic of Korea | Private donors United Kingdom | Private donors USA | UNO-Fluechtlingshilfe | UNILEVER | USA for UNHCR