

Southern Cone

October 2020

The UNHCR Regional 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 durable

solutions and socio-economic inclusion. Since March 2020, the **humanitarian impact of COVID-19** on asylum-seekers, refugees and Venezuelan refugees and migrants (PoCs) has been disproportionate since most of them have lost their jobs and livelihoods.

UNHCR provides **assistance for most pressing needs** (shelter, food, hygiene kits, clothes and cash-based interventions). This humanitarian response was scaled up during the winter. Socioeconomic recovery projects started to be implemented.

KEY INDICATORS

94,369

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

37,806

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

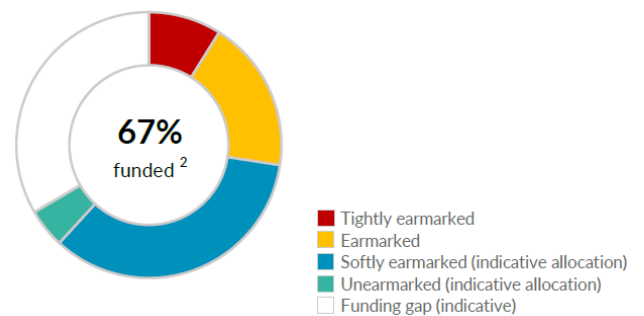


Mobile classroom activities with refugee children in La Paz, Bolivia ©I. Mariño

FUNDING (AS OF 17 NOVEMBER 2020)

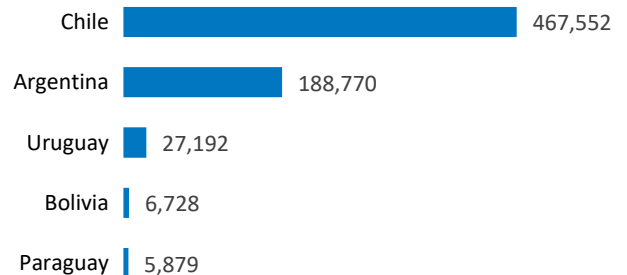
USD 25.6 million

requested for the Argentina Regional Office



POPULATION OF CONCERN (AS OF JUNE 2020)*

696,121



* 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 due to COVID-19 related lockdown measures 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. As of end of October, the countries covered by the Southern Cone Regional Office counted with 1.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19. **Borders in the sub-region began to open partially. In Argentina**, in spite of the spike of cases during October, **the country opened its air borders to receive tourists from neighbouring countries**, which would not need to comply with a mandatory quarantine period upon arrival in the country. **Paraguay ordered the reopening of 13 border points**, including the Asunción International Airport and the ones corresponding to the cities of Encarnación, Ciudad del Este, Mayor Infante Rivarola and Pedro Juan Caballero, among others. **Tourists and non-resident foreigners can enter the country.** Meanwhile, **Uruguay still keeps its borders closed** to most arrivals from foreign countries.

In **Chile, in the northern border regions, the situation of refugees and migrants who enter irregularly continued to be of concern.** By the end of October, around 400 Venezuelans (including 100 children) in Huara, a small town located in the border with Bolivia, in a makeshift settlement and in a situation of extreme vulnerability.



Venezuelan refugees and migrants making their journey by foot in the northern border of Chile © UNHCR

Achievements



PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- In October, **UNHCR provided advice to and referred for further assistance** some **862 refugees and migrants** in **Argentina** remotely. Majority of the cases were Venezuelans, most of them living in the greater Buenos Aires area. In **Chile, 421 persons of concern (PoCs) to UNHCR received direct counselling by UNHCR and partners** in Arica, Antofagasta and Santiago, most of them Venezuelans. In La Paz, **Bolivia** some **598 refugees and migrants** from Venezuela received advice and protection services, while in **Uruguay**, UNHCR's partners provided remote **advice to 83 Venezuelans**.
- **A reunification of a Venezuelan family (7 persons) in Uruguay**, who were waiting to reunited since January 2020, **was accomplished, thanks to UNHCR and partners' interventions** in Argentina and Uruguay.
- **Five Venezuelan families have already been identified since mid-September entering Uruguay through the Paysandú-Colón border in Argentina (25 people, including four children and adolescents)**. All the people filed asylum claims at the border and are being accompanied by a UNHCR partner, who provided emergency humanitarian assistance.
- **UNHCR and 12 of its partners carried out participatory assessments in the 5 countries of the sub-region**, where 343 PoCs shared their vision on risks and protection barriers, coping mechanisms and possible solutions in the context of COVID-19 pandemic through 49 focus groups held in Argentina (14), Bolivia (11), Chile (11), Uruguay (8) and Paraguay (6) and individual interviews in Chile (15). Venezuelans represented 72 percent of the total number of participants, followed by the Cubans (15 per cent). In terms of prioritization, **two axes for future actions were prioritized in all countries: access to legal status and documentation, and the generation of income through employment or self-employment**. Regarding specific issues, in Argentina, Chile and Paraguay, the need to strengthen access to information, while in Bolivia the need to redouble efforts to further protect children and adolescents was highlighted. In the case of Uruguay, access to territory and housing was listed among the top priorities.
- In order to strengthen the teams working at **13 Support Spaces in Chile**, **UNHCR delivered workshops on PSEA and gender analysis**; and one prevention of **human trafficking and smuggling** in coordination with IOM.
- **In Desaguadero, Bolivia, UNHCR partner Bolivian Red Cross resumed its face-to-face work at the Attention and Orientation Point (PAO), as quarantine measures have been eased down in Bolivia**. Red Cross comes to reinforce the work being carried out in the PAO by the Ombudsman's Office and CARITAS, in good coordination with health authorities in the area, as cases of irregular crossings continue on the rise, many of them arriving in poor health conditions. Red Cross will begin to implement protocols to detect possible COVID-19 cases among persons arriving at the PAO.
- **Argentina's National Refugee Commission (CONARE)** met and treated some 146 cases of which **three cases were recognized as refugees** (four people, two Cuban men, a Haitian woman and a Dominican



Remote participatory assessments carried out in Chile / @UNHCR

woman). In **Bolivia**, **CONARE** held an ordinary session where 32 refugee applications were reviewed, and **three cases were recognized** (8 individuals - 6 Venezuelans and one Syrian). In **Uruguay**, the **Refugee Commission (CORE)** met and treated some 25 cases, out of which **15 cases** (28 people- 27 Venezuelan and one Colombian) **were recognized as refugees**. All the meetings counted with UNHCR participation and technical advice.

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 continued on the rise exposing refugees and migrants to increased protection risks** of trafficking, SGBV and exploitation, etc. UNHCR is working with partners to inform about risks and to provide assistance and protection where cases of irregular crossings have approached UNHCR and its partners. **An average of 150 persons crossing the Pisiga (Bolivia) – Colchane (Chile) border on a daily basis was registered during October**. By the end of the month UNHCR partners reported the presence at least some 400 Venezuelans (including some 100 children) staying in Huara, a small town on the border with Bolivia, in a makeshift settlement and in a situation of extreme vulnerability, until sanitary residences were made available for them to remain during quarantine period in the city of Iquique. **Persons, including pregnant women and children, needed proper shelter, food, hygiene kits, health services, information, and psychosocial support**, among others.
- **In Bolivia, UNHCR and partners have identified an increase in Venezuelan unaccompanied or separated children (UASC) and referred cases for their treatment by national and local government entities** dealing with childhood issues. UNHCR has held a meeting already with one of the Children's Ombudsperson's Office involved in the treatment of two cases, providing technical advice, and is preparing specific workshops on the topic for Children's Ombudsperson's Offices to be held in November.
- While some **borders remain partially closed**, UNHCR and its partners **continue monitoring the situation and providing humanitarian assistance** to refugees and migrants stranded at borders. UNHCR is 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 to implement the initiative of **mobile friendly spaces for 315 children** (Aula Móvil) in the accommodations where UNHCR is providing shelter to Venezuelan families, supporting 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.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

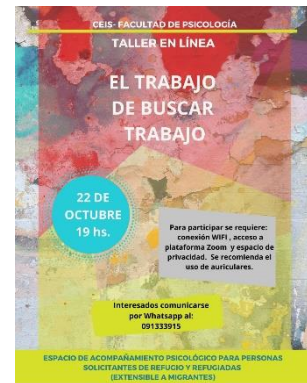
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have been closed and affected the most refugee and migrant children who statistically have less access to technology, internet and materials to follow classes remotely. In Chile, UNHCR is preparing the distribution of tablets for some **500** children to support their access to remote education.



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 **121 persons** in October. In **Chile**, **146 persons** were assisted with medical assistance, at partners' facilities and during home visits held in Arica and Santiago.
- 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. In Chile, some **404 PoCs** received **psychosocial support**.



Ad from UNHCR and partners inviting refugees and migrants to psychosocial support sessions in Uruguay © UNHCR/2020

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 **66** refugees and migrant benefitted from the **distribution of food in shelters** where they are being hosted during the quarantine period. In Arica, Antofagasta and Santiago, **Chile**, UNHCR and partners distributed **food boxes for 722 refugees and migrants**.

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



UNILEVER soaps distribution in Santiago de Chile/ @UNHCR

- In **Chile**, UNHCR received and proceeded to further distribution to PoCs some **197,000 soaps donated by UNILEVER**.
- In **Argentina**, some **16 Refugee Housing Units were delivered** to the Human Rights Secretary of the city of Buenos Aires.
- In **Argentina**, UNHCR continued to provide shelter to **52 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 **65 refugees and migrants** and some other **172 PoCs** received **hygiene kits and cleaning supplies in shelters** where they are being hosted. In **Arica and Santiago, Chile**, **415 persons** received financial assistance to cover **rent payments** or **were hosted in partners' run shelters**. In **Chile**, UNHCR distributed **emergency assistance** (hygiene kits, gas cans, mobile phone SIM cards) for **41 refugees and migrants in Arica**.

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**.
- **The housing situation of refugees and migrants continues to deteriorate in Argentina**. Although the decree that prohibits evictions remains in force until the end of January 2021, different measures of coercion have been reported to UNHCR, used mainly by landlords and managers of informal rentals to force the exit of those who cannot pay for the accommodation. There is also evidence of a differential impact on single men, in a context where the capacities of housing of hostels and official shelters are at their maximum capacity or closed to the entry of new cases, as prevention measures against COVID-19.



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE

Achievements and Impact

- In **Argentina**, UNHCR partners provided **multipurpose cash assistance (CBI)** to some **913 refugees and migrants** to cover for their most basic needs. In **Uruguay**, UNHCR's partner provided **cash assistance to 34 Venezuelan refugees and migrants** to cover for their shelter and documentation needs. In **Paraguay**, UNHCR's partner provided also **cash assistance to 17 Venezuelans** to support their basic needs.
- In **Argentina**, **UNHCR in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development (MDS), is leading the implementation of a pilot project within the national program PotenciAR**, which aims to remove all existing barriers, related to migration status, documentation, number of legal residence years, to allow PoCs achieve solutions for their livelihoods in the economic crisis generated by the prolonged lockdown in the country. The pilot empowers small scale entrepreneurs, providing them with tools to start up and/or expand businesses. **Tools include financing by UNHCR, technical assistance, learning components**

and social support, delivered by experts of the MDS. Nearly **90 individuals, whose proposals have been chosen, are in the process of receiving grants**. Business plans cover a diverse range of productive sectors, still active despite the pandemic containment measures and in accordance with population's profiles.

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

- **UNHCR, in association with Banco Ciudad - the public bank of the City of Buenos Aires, delivered a series of workshops on financial education for PoCs residing in the provinces of Córdoba, Mendoza, the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires and the Province of Salta**. These workshops aimed at promoting the access to banking services and to strategic information and tools for personal and family economic planning. The workshops also included a special section about a microcredit line for entrepreneur women offered by Banco Ciudad. Upon registration to the workshops, a survey on the profile of the attendees was applied to gather data that will be used for future activities in the areas of labor insertion.
- **UNHCR held a remote seminar on financial inclusion of PoCs in Argentina**. Participants included major public and private banks (including Argentina's Central Bank), governmental lending institutions for the popular sectors of the economy and civil society microcredit entities. Best practices were shared contributing to a cross fertilization among organizations and a few actions were identified to lift barriers and exploit existing opportunities for an enhanced access of PoCs to financial services and products.
- **UNHCR led a virtual workshop on lessons learned, challenges and opportunities of the community sponsorship program in Argentina**. The workshop was supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Migration Directorate and the Refugee Commission. The workshop was organized around three topics related to the legal and procedural framework for case selection and admission; the role of sponsors, services providers and communities in the reception and integration phases; and alternative funding sources, including a UNHCR-led pilot project to support sponsorships through private donors of the UNHCR-Argentina Foundation. The Government reaffirmed its commitment to continue strengthening the program by expediting selection procedures and expanding to other nationalities. All actors shared their recommendations to enhance the operations, which will be the starting point for the establishment of a national action plan under the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative (CRISP) for 2020-22.

- **UNHCR, along with partners, facilitated a peer-to-peer exchange of entrepreneurs' in Bolivia.** Six skilled PoCs entrepreneurs from Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and the Ivory Coast shared the challenges they faced when starting their businesses, the strategies applied to overcome them, and the accomplishments achieved along the way. New or potential entrepreneurs, mostly from Venezuela, engaged in a productive discussion aimed at improving their business planning, as well as access to and benefit from credit. The next stage of this activity, to be carried out in cooperation with partners, will promote the creation of a mentorship program between experienced entrepreneurs and asylum-seekers and refugees that look forward to starting up a business



Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- UNHCR has already started the implementation of **seven socio-economic recovery projects in Argentina (2), Bolivia (2) and Uruguay (3)**, in previously identified sectors of the economy that are still active in the sub-region. Some 13 projects aiming at the socio-economic recovery of refugees and migrants in the sub-region remain unfunded (USD 3 million). However, some commitments have been made by donors and more socio-economic recovery projects will start shortly.

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

Argentina | Canada | Denmark | European Union | France | Germany | Ireland | Italy | Japan | Netherlands | Norway | Spain | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America | UN Programme on HIV/AIDS | World Bank | Private donors Argentina | Private donors Australia | Private donors Germany | Private donors Italy | Private donors Japan | Private donors Lebanon | Private donors Republic of Korea | Private donors Spain | Private donors Sweden | Private donors United Kingdom | Private donors USA

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

LINKS

- Website: <https://acnur.org/>
- Twitter: [@ACNURSuramerica](https://twitter.com/ACNURSuramerica)
- Facebook: [/ACNUR](https://www.facebook.com/ACNUR)
- Instagram: [acnur](https://www.instagram.com/acnur)