

# Southern Cone

November - December 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. Socio-economic recovery projects started to be implemented.

## KEY INDICATORS

**119,967**

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

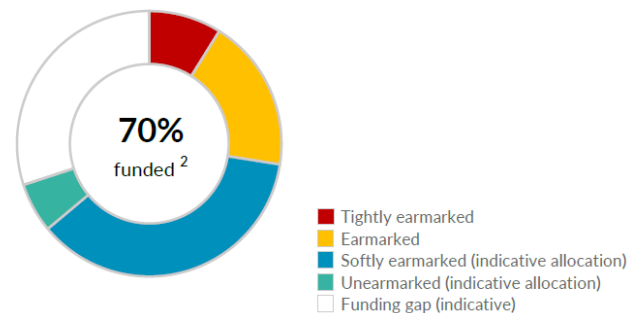
**48,681**

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

## FUNDING (AS OF 30 DECEMBER 2020)

**USD 25.6 million**

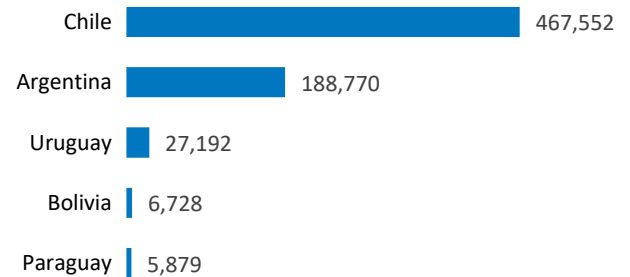
requested for the Argentina Regional Office



Refugee families receive Christmas gifts in Arica, Chile ©UNHCR

## 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, as many continue without means to reengage in income and livelihoods activities and reunite with their families, if on the move. Many continue to lack shelter, food and money to pay for their basic needs. As of end of December, the countries covered by the Southern Cone Regional Office counted with 2.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19. In **Argentina, President Alberto Fernández has expressed “concern” over a new surge of cases in the country by the end of December and called on citizens, especially young people, to observe preventive measures against the virus.** As of 25 December, Argentina introduced tighter restrictions on travelers entering the country, limiting entry to a nationals and residents, imposing strict testing and quarantine restrictions on most of these travelers and suspending the pilot test for tourism from neighbouring countries. **Uruguay, nine months after recording its first coronavirus case is seeing its “first wave” of infections, threatening to undo the hard-fought gains made throughout the pandemic.** Uruguay has increased its alert to orange from yellow amid exponential growth in daily cases since November. **Chile reported Latin America's first detected case of the new virus strain on 28 December.** Health authorities responded to the news by announcing that from 31 December, everyone arriving in Chile would have to spend 10 days in quarantine. The country had only reopened its borders in November for the first time in eight months. **Last week of December 2020, Argentina (with Russian Sputnik V vaccine) and Chile (with Pfizer/BioNTech) began COVID-19 related vaccinations. Bolivia will receive 3.6 million doses of a vaccine for free through the WHO's COVAX initiative,** the government announced on 15 December and plans to begin vaccination against the coronavirus this January when the first batch of 6,000 vaccines arrives (Sputnik V), following the acquisition of 5.2 million doses that was announced on 30 December. **Paraguayan government announced on 13 December that vaccination against COVID-19 will begin in the second quarter of 2021, based on negotiations with the WHO COVAX initiative.**

**UNHCR is advocating for the equitable inclusion of all persons of concern in the Southern Cone countries, drive on par with nationals and in line with COVAX allocation principles.**



UNHCR marked its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in December with images of #refugees projected on buildings in Buenos Aires © UNHCR

## Achievements



### PROTECTION

#### Achievements and Impact

- In November and December, **UNHCR provided advice to and referred for further assistance** some **2,406 refugees and migrants** in **Argentina** remotely. Majority of the cases were Venezuelans, most of them living in the greater Buenos Aires area. In **Chile, 268 persons of concern (PoCs) to UNHCR received direct counselling by UNHCR and partners** in Arica, Antofagasta and Santiago, most of them Venezuelans who contacted UNHCR by phone and email after irregularly entering in Chile (most of them from Bolivia). In **Bolivia** some **1,615 refugees and migrants** from Venezuela received advice and protection services, while in **Uruguay**, UNHCR's partners provided remote **advice to 85 Venezuelans**.
- **A reunification of a Venezuelan family (two persons) in Uruguay**, who were waiting to be reunited since April 2020, **was accomplished, thanks to UNHCR and partners' interventions** in Argentina and Uruguay. This is the second family reunification registered in Uruguay, after the declaration of border closure measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic in both countries.
- During November and December—in the framework of an inter-agency initiative— **a UNHCR team visited the locations of Huara, Colchane and Iquique, in the Tarapacá Region of northern Chile**, to carry out border monitoring and to collect information **to assess the needs of refugees and migrants in border and urban communities, who continued entering through irregular border crossing points coming from Bolivia**, so as to define efficient and timely strategies to respond to their situation. UNHCR also distributed humanitarian assistance to the families in need. Municipalities report that they do not have sufficient resources to provide adequate basic assistance, in particular food, shelter and health support. **Similar missions took place in November by UNHCR partners on the Bolivian side of the border to assess the situation**. Bolivia's land borders remain closed, with no established protection safeguards or the possibility of requesting asylum at the border.
- 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. **In Argentina, UNHCR's Attention and Orientation Point (PAO) of La Quiaca**, whose team still works remotely, **families received legal guidance to file their asylum applications online, humanitarian assistance for accommodation and food during the quarantine in this border town**.
- **On 20 November, the official launch of the "U-Report - Uniendo Voces" tool was done in Bolivia**, with a soccer tournament organized in La Paz by partners and UNHCR. The launch event was co-organized by UNHCR and UNICEF and was broadcasted live via Facebook. **In its first version the "U-Report Uniendo Voces" -available on Facebook and WhatsApp-** developed by several agencies under the leadership of UNICEF, **the contents** accessed by PoCs who interact in the tool (U-Reporters) are about **general information on Bolivia and how to apply for asylum**. In the future, information will be



Venezuelan families (caminantes) in northern Chile being assisted by UNHCR staff @UNHCR

expanded to other topics such as immigration regularization, access to education and health, and SGBV related services.

- **Argentina's National Refugee Commission (CONARE) held two regular plenary meetings**, evaluating 107 cases of asylum claims, **recognizing 24 cases as refugees**, and recommending four others for humanitarian reasons. The nationalities of the recognized cases are from Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Ghana, Senegal, Syria, Turkey and Yemen. Cases of Venezuelan nationals remain pending (more than 3,000). **In Uruguay, the National Refugee Commission (CORE) met with the remote participation of UNHCR**. Some 49 cases were raised for consideration by the CORE, of which **21 cases (31 Venezuelans) were recognized as refugees**.

### 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 (involving mainly Cuban and Venezuelan nationals)**.
- **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. **UNHCR remains concerned on a possible collapse of local towns capacities (accommodation, health services, etc) along the Southern Cone borders as irregular entries continue. Increasing trend of entries of Venezuelan families in Desaguadero, Bolivia coming from Peru through unauthorized border crossing points continued**, as well as **further crossings through the Pisiga - Colchane border**, towards Chile, and **through La Quiaca-Villazón** (border between Argentina and Bolivia), towards Argentina despite land borders remaining still closed due to COVID-19 measures. **Persons, including pregnant women and children, needed proper shelter, food, hygiene kits, health services, information, and psychosocial support**, among others. It should be noted that on 11 November, several Venezuelans who seek to enter Chile legally, by virtue of the Democratic Responsibility Visa (VRD), denounced through social networks that they received an email from the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in which they were informed that due to the health crisis and the borders closure reported on 16 March, which "has therefore exceeded the deadline for the completion of the administrative process", their request for VRD was rejected (**UNHCR estimates it affects approximately some 91,000 cases**). The MFA Direction of Consular Affairs detailed that the MFA would resume the processing of visas on 23 November, **taking care of with 30 visas a day and prioritizing family reunification requests**.



### EDUCATION

#### Achievements and Impact

- In **Bolivia**, UNHCR and its partners continued to implement the initiative of **mobile friendly spaces for 547 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 neither 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.

- In **Chile**, UNHCR procured and distributed some **730 tablets**, cases and headsets to support refugees and migrant children's education in the country.

#### 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 **649 persons** in November and December. In **Chile**, **226 Venezuelan refugees and migrants** 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 **2,214 PoCs** received **psychosocial support**.

#### 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).
- In **northwest Argentina**, concerning protections risks in terms of access to health have also been identified as **La Quiaca's hospital has almost reached its limits in terms of capacity with currently 120 beds occupied with COVID-19 patients**. Consequently, health authorities and professionals have become reluctant towards guaranteeing effective access to foreigners as the province has a local restrictive legislation on this matter (Law 6116)



### 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 1,815 refugees and migrants**, in the framework of their continuous arrival from Bolivia and holiday season's events.

#### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Based on the latest round of the High Frequency Survey, in **Argentina** some **73 percent of the interviewees confirmed**

*In coordination with the Antofagasta municipality in Chile, UNHCR delivered emergency kits to support refugee and migrant families who have just arrived in the country in vulnerable conditions. © UNHCR/2020*

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 **Argentina**, UNHCR continued to provide shelter to **63 vulnerable refugees and migrants**, who had no housing and/or that were on transit coming from other countries and were to complete mandatory quarantine before reaching other destinations in Argentina. In **Bolivia**, partner agencies provided shelter to some **95 refugees and migrants** and some other **543** received **hygiene kits and cleaning supplies**. In **Arica and Santiago, Chile**, **1,105 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 **77 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 March 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



*Rolando, Venezuelan, is one of the beneficiaries of the UNHCR and IFRC Cash Program. The assistance allowed Rolando to visit doctors and undergo examinations./ @UNHCR*

- In **Argentina**, UNHCR partners provided **multipurpose cash assistance (CBI)** to some **1,690 refugees and migrants** to cover for their most basic needs. In **Uruguay**, UNHCR's partner provided **cash** assistance to **132 Venezuelan refugees and migrants** to cover for their shelter and documentation needs. In **Paraguay**, UNHCR's partner provided also **cash assistance to 67 Venezuelans** to support their basic needs. In **Chile**, UNHCR partners provided **e-vouchers** to some **1,984 refugees and migrants** to cover for their most basic needs.
- In **Argentina**, based on the MoU, signed in June 2020 between the Ministry of Social Development (MDS), the National Refugee Commission (CONARE) and UNHCR, and taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic that has worsened the

economic conditions of PoCs, **channels for emergency employment, as well as professional training and reskilling, have been prioritized. A pilot project on advanced comprehensive People's Home Care is now being implemented in cooperation with the MDS and the National University of San Martín (UNSAM).** The project addresses the problem of the professionalization of people care workers, who are currently placed in the informal sector. The 6-weeks online course was delivered already to over 240 PoCs throughout the country, who get a diploma recognized nationwide. The UNSAM has agreed to release the full copyright to UNHCR, so that the training content will be replicated in the future. The pilot represents a special chapter of the MDS national program *Economía del Cuidado*, executed through major universities.

- **UNHCR scaled up the pilot project PotenciAr in Argentina, implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development (MDS).** Some other 25 refugees and migrants were added to the previous cohort of 90 and provided them with tools to start up and/or expand small businesses. **The pilot impacted on the livelihoods of approximately 345 asylum-seekers and refugees in a timespan of two months (November-December 2020).** An agreement has already been reached with the governmental counterpart for the replication of the project in 2021 with a contribution from the state budget.

#### 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 were not able to be provided with needed CBI support due to lack of funds.**
- In Argentina, despite the fact that 65 percent of the **people surveyed on financial education** (quick survey of 100 people) already had access to a bank account, it was identified that those **people who did not have a bank account did not have the necessary information to open them.**



#### DURABLE SOLUTIONS

#### Achievements and Impact

- **The Cities of Solidarity initiative keeps on expanding in Argentina.** The municipalities of Salta (24 November) and Cordoba (16 December) formally joined through the signing of MoUs.
- In **Argentina**, within the framework of the Cities of Solidarity Initiative, **UNHCR is supporting local governments with the elaboration of tools for the planning of policies, programs and services, which can support the socio-economic integration of PoCs.** Such tools include PoCs socio-economic profiles and labor insertion strategies at the local level. The above is implemented in coordination with the National Commission for Refugees (CONARE for its acronym in Spanish), a recognized research center on population studies (CENEP), linked to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, and the private



*Cities of Solidarity signature ceremony with the Municipality of Córdoba, Argentina © UNHCR/2020*

sector. The PoCs socio-economic profiles will review all aspects and challenges that might contribute to or hinder their inclusion in the job market. They will be carried out in those provinces and municipalities where there is a major concentration of PoCs and are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of their socio-economic integration prospects in the cities of La Matanza, Mar del Plata, Pilar and Quilmes, as a pilot to be replicated in other areas in 2021.

- In **Chile**, within the frame of **Cities of Solidarity**, UNHCR conducted a webinar on best practices and social inclusion jointly with **Arzobispado de Santiago and Valparaíso Municipality**. The webinar intends to share best practices in social inclusion of PoCs and promote a linkage between civil society and municipalities towards fostering a welcoming environment for PoCs.
- On 26 November, UNHCR launched **#DeCorazón (from the heart) campaign in Chile, an unprecedented initiative to connect refugees, migrants and Chileans through an online platform created to share knowledge, interest and talents**. The campaign will aim to create a virtual community, where people can break down prejudices and begin to look at each other as equals and members of a same community. Visitors to the platform will be able to find different free courses offered by refugees and migrants in Chile, as a way to positively impact their communities and retribute the good reception that Chileans has given to them.
- UNHCR met with **90 private companies to advocate for the labor insertion of asylum-seekers and refugees in Uruguay**. UNHCR presented the socio-economic profile of this population and the existing opportunities to match offer and demand. False myths on PoCs employability were discussed, as well as best practices for social corporate responsibility. A positive response was received so that a number of steps are going to be taken in 2021 to consolidate commitments. In this regard, **a MoU was signed with DERES in Uruguay, a network of more than 100 private enterprises, with the mission of contributing to a sustainable human development and social growth with equality**. DERES will be UNHCR's right arm in the promotion of the program *Talent without Borders* in Uruguay.

#### 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, as well as with civil society organizations, the Academia and the private sector.
- 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

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