UPDATE #12 ON UNHCR COVID-19 RESPONSE IN COLOMBIA

CURRENT CONTEXT

The Colombian Ministry of Health confirmed 728,590 cases of COVID-19 as of Tuesday, 15 September, with Bogotá concentrating the highest number (243,456 confirmed cases). A total of 23,288 individuals have died from COVID-19 and 607,978 cases have recovered.

According to Migración Colombia, 103,707 Venezuelans have returned to Venezuela from or through Colombia as of Thursday, 3 September. Between 27 August and 9 September, 690 Venezuelans, including 198 caminantes (people in transit on foot) returned to Venezuela via Arauca, 1,800 via Cúcuta, and 250 via La Guajira.

Migración Colombia released the latest numbers of Venezuelans living in the country as of 30 June 2020: a total of 1,748,716 people including 985,859 in an irregular situation, representing a 1% reduction compared to the previous month. In addition to the 487 Venezuelans currently staying at the Transitory Health Attention Center (CAST in Spanish) at the Tienditas International Bridge near Cúcuta, there are 406 Venezuelans at Hotel Villa Antigua, 426 caminantes in La Parada, Cúcuta and 20 in the Scalabrini shelter.

As per UNHCR and partners’ monitoring, between 260 and 300 Venezuelans are reportedly entering Colombia through informal crossings on a daily basis while Migración Colombia notes a 50% reduction in the number of returns to Venezuela since the end of the national quarantine. On 8 September, the number of Venezuelans stranded at the border dropped to 880 from 1,861 as registered on 31 August.

In Riosucio, Chocó department, UNHCR supported the Mayor’s Office in its COVID-19 response by distributing humanitarian items and cooking kits for 25 internally displaced families from the Las Pavas community. ©Riosucio Mayor’s Office.
As per GIFMM monitoring, between 12 June and 9 September, 579 eviction reports were registered (350 evictions and 229 at risk of eviction) affecting 1,461 Venezuelans, as per the following breakdown: 53.6% females, 43.1% males and 0.9% others (3.6% does not have information disaggregated by gender). Additionally, 1,260 Venezuelans have been identified at risk of eviction.

Violent attacks and massacres continued during the reporting period: according to national media outlets, at least five massacres occurred in this period. On 5 September, three bodies were found in the community of Seguengue (El Tambo, Cauca) whose murder was attributed to FARC-EP dissidents, bringing the number of people killed so far in the area to 53 in 2020. Between September 7 and 8, four massacres took place that left three people dead (two of them Venezuelans) in Simití, southern Bolívar Department; five miners in the community of La Valentina (Zaragoza, Antioquia), three people (two of them Venezuelans) murdered in the urban area of the municipality of Aguachica, Cesar, and three men dead (one of them a minor) in Carmen de Bolívar, Bolívar department. All of these events are allegedly related to the presence of illegal armed actors.

During the reporting period, four new large-group displacements have occurred, mainly due to threats and confrontations between illegal armed actors: In Policarpa, Nariño, 55 families consisting of 160 individuals; in Alto Baudó, Chocó 45 families consisting of 141 individuals; in Cáceres, Antioquia, 180 families consisting of 561 individuals, and in Tarazá, Antioquia, 28 families consisting of 109 individuals were displaced. In addition, two new confinements occurred due to clashes between illegal armed groups and other armed actors within the framework of the armed conflict. In Bojayá, Chocó, 229 families consisting of 1,200 individuals and in Alto Baudó, Chocó 653 families consisting of 2,942 individuals.

UNHCR'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN THE PAST 2 WEEKS

Health and hygiene/prevention measures
25 cases in Arauca and 77 cases in Cúcuta received sexual and reproductive health services through UNHCR’s partner, Profamilia. As part of the World Sexual and Reproductive Health Day, 14 families (56 persons) participated in educational activities with 10 cases being referred to Aids Healthcare Foundation International as they requested access to syphilis and HIV testing and counseling; 109 persons were assisted at the Support Space in Catambuco, Pasto (Nariño) with specialized health services such as HIV and COVID-19 testing as well as general medical attention and family planning.

UNHCR delivered two Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) to the Health Secretary of Cali that will be used in two health centres in vulnerable areas of the city. In addition, UNHCR distributed hygiene kits to 300 Venezuelan and returnee families located in the informal settlement Brisas del Norte, Riohacha (La Guajira).

On 9 September, a Mobile Health Unit was inaugurated in the department of Atlántico, providing general medicine, psychology, gynecology, laboratory tests and ultrasound services to Venezuelan and Colombians. Operated by the Colombian Red Cross, it will also provide disease prevention and health promotion services as well as orientation and assistance to refugees and migrants. The Unit was donated by the Siemens Foundation, and additional funds were raised through the Valientes Gestantes line of the Somos Panas Colombia anti-xenophobia campaign to support the functioning of the Unit.

Protection
UNHCR and partner Alianza para la Solidaridad trained 55 public officials from the Local Ombudsman’s Office, the Secretaries of Health and public schools from the southern Cauca region on Law 1448 (the Victims and Land Restitution Law) and on the international protection legal framework. UNHCR continues to provide protection trainings to staff of partners and State institutions: 17 members of partner NGOs were trained on PRIMES, UNHCR’s registration, identity management and case management tool, as well as Security Council Resolution 1612 in Cauca and Nariño, and 24 government staff on the Atlantic Coast were trained on international refugee law and national measures.

UNHCR co-hosted a workshop with UN Women on Gender and SGBV issues for 8 staff of Carlosama municipality, Nariño; and co-led a workshop with ICRC, Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF in Spanish) and Pasto
Municipality on protection routes for unaccompanied and separated children. In Arauca, four separated youth and 11 unaccompanied children were identified by partner APOYAR and referred to ICBF. In Cúcuta, 42 children at risk were identified of whom 19 correspond to children at risk of not attending school, one teenage pregnancy, 11 separated children and 11 unaccompanied children. From 16 March to 4 September, UNHCR registered 4,076 children at risk and 218 cases of separated or unaccompanied children.

As part of the 16th Annual Book Festival in Cúcuta, UNHCR and its partners carried out 10 workshops for children and adolescents on the topic of resilience, the festival’s theme, and on other subjects such as protection and local integration. UNHCR facilitated a training session on gender issues with 12 female community leaders.

15 cases of SGBV were assisted through the Centro de Primera Acogida in Arauca and 7 cases (16 persons) through UNHCR’s safe houses in Cúcuta; 31 individual cases received psychosocial assistance, legal advice, nutritional orientation and referrals through La Casa que Abraza in Cúcuta. From 16 March to 4 September, UNHCR registered 2,264 cases of women at risk and 282 cases of SGBV (Venezuelans and Colombians). On 26 August, UNHCR participated in the second round of intersectoral dialogue with women-led civil society organizations organized by the Office of the Presidential Advisor on Women’s Equality, the Delegate of the Ombudsperson’s Office for Women and Gender Issues and UN Women as part of the High-Level Coordination Group for the GBV Response During COVID-19. In order to complement efforts, the UNHCR-led Somos Panas Colombia antixenophobia campaign providing information about telephone hotlines via social media to assist SGBV survivors in Norte de Santander.

UNHCR launched the radio program El Parlante (The Speaker), consisting of eight episodes covering various protection topics such as fighting xenophobia, activation of protection routes and COVID-19 prevention measures, broadcasted via three local radio stations in Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario as well as on social media. In Norte de Santander, information on how to access rights and services was published as part of the joint project with #EstoyEnLaFrontera. Colombian returnees who lived abroad for at least three years and have returned are encouraged through the #HazteVisible campaign to enroll in the Unique Registry of Returnees.

CBI and Livelihoods
153 families were assisted with CBI in Cali through partner Save the Children, including 1 case of forced eviction, 75 families in Cúcuta through implementing partner CORPRODINCO and 84 families through implementing partner DRC in Barranquilla. In addition, 580 interviews were carried out as part of the post distribution monitoring.

UNHCR with partner Minuto de Dios continued implementation of the livelihoods project Transformar para Crear (Transforming To Create) in Cúcuta, with strategies to foster economic stability and social inclusion of 115 IDP, refugee and host community families.

Shelter, NFIs and WASH
UNHCR is preparing to admit 12 new families to the Integrated Assistance Center in Maicao (CAI in Spanish) adopting bio-safety protocols as defined and validated by local authorities in an initial pilot phase. 200 persons continue to be sheltered there since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Cali, UNHCR assisted 28 families with core-relief items (CRI) in coordination with the Venezuelan organization COLVENZ. In Barranquilla and the Atlantic coast, UNHCR donated 327 hygiene kits and 800 surgery masks to community-based Venezuelan organizations.

FUNDING NEEDS
Under its revised Coronavirus Emergency Appeal, UNHCR is appealing for USD 745 million globally, including USD 17.3 million in Colombia. UNHCR’s Global Appeal is now funded at 60%, with USD 442.6 million in contributions received. Overall, UNHCR Colombia is currently funded at 49%.

UNHCR’s response in Colombia is possible thanks to the contribution of private donors and:

- Austria, BabyBjörn AB, Canada, Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), Chanel Foundation, Denmark, Estonia, European Union, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, KOICA, Latter-day Saints Charities,
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