COVID-19 Food Security Update
Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru
(February 2021)

WFP World Food Programme

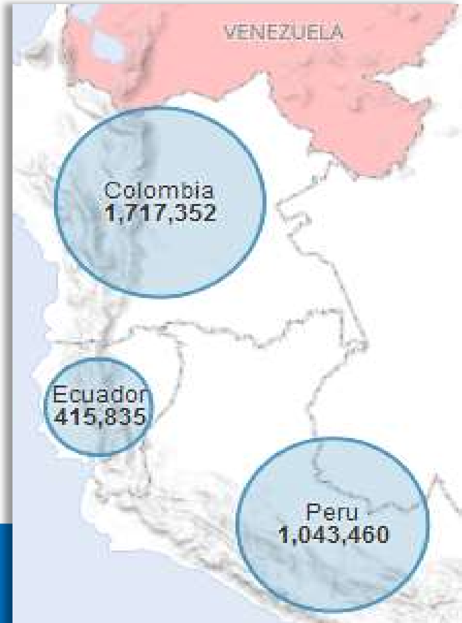
SAVING LIVES CHANGING LIVES

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an unprecedent health and socio-economic emergency that exacerbated existing vulnerabilities among more than three million[1] Venezuelan migrants[2] in Colombia, Peru and Ecuador (Figure 1), fleeing their country following the political and economic crisis.

The barriers to access income-generating activities, the lack of a regular status and the inability to satisfy their essential needs, aggravated by the COVID-19, are only few factors impacting migrants' ability to cope with this emergency and a growing inequality is likely to exacerbate, pushing millions of migrants towards a silent pandemic of poverty and food insecurity.

This report is part of an ongoing study[3] conducted with the objective to monitor trends overtime and assess the impact of COVID-19 on migrants' ability to meet their food and other essential needs.

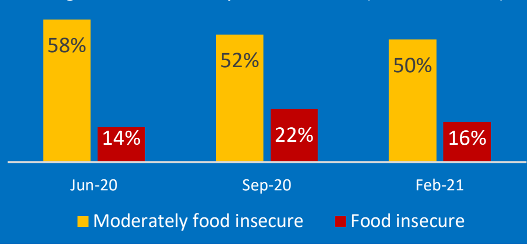


Map 1: Presence of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (Jan-21)

FOOD SECURITY

Despite a slight decrease of severe food insecurity levels compared to September 2020 (-6%), the food security situation continues to be critical, with **2.1 million Venezuelan migrants being moderately/severely food insecure (66%)**.

Figure 1: Food Security situation trend (Jun-20 – Feb-21)



N. FOOD INSECURE	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru
Moderate	877,000 (51%)	191,000 (46%)	527,000 (51%)
Severe	334,000 (19%)	71,000 (17%)	130,000 (13%)

Migrants reported significantly higher levels of food insecurity compared to resident population, as a result of lower levels of food consumption, higher use of food-related coping strategies and less stable income sources.

FOOD CONSUMPTION

A migrant out of four (27%) either consumed only one meal (18%) or spent the previous day without eating (9%) at the time of the interview. This represents an increase compared to the previous round of data collection (22%) and it is more than twice higher (2.25) compared to June 2020 (12%).

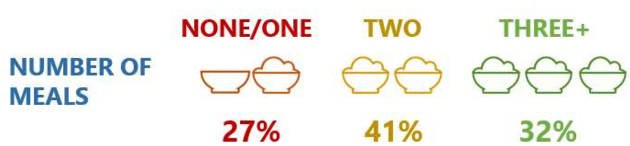
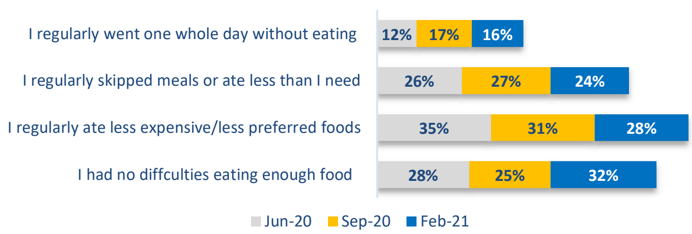


Figure 2: Perceived Food Security situation



Food-related coping strategies remain a common practice among migrants.

Nearly **seven out of ten migrants (68%) are resorting to coping strategies affecting food consumption**.

Figure 2 shows that 40% are still regularly spending whole days without eating or reducing the quantity of food consumed.

Overall, **the number of migrants (68%) having difficulties in food consumption is almost in line with June 2020 (72%)**, meaning that the situation remains critical. This percentage is substantially higher compared to residents (50%). The highest share is found among migrants in Colombia and Ecuador (71%), the lowest in Peru (64%).

At the same time, **the worry about not having enough food to eat also registers an important decrease**, passing from 71% to 61%. The reopening of economic activities and a higher access to income-generating opportunities may partially explain this perception.

---

1 R4V Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela

2 The term "migrant" used in this note includes regular, undocumented, asylum seekers, refugees and in transit migrants. Refer to IOM: https://www.iom.int/migration

3 Information regarding previous rounds of the study is accessible at WFP COVID-19 Information Hub: https://rbp-covid-unwfp.hub.arcgis.com/pages/impact-assessments

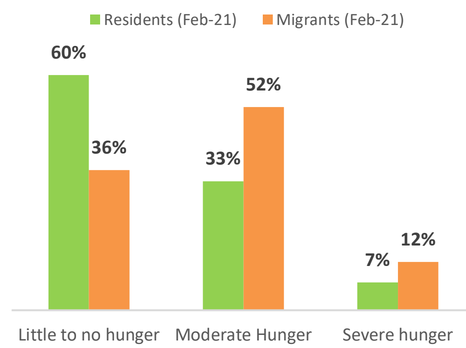
In September 2020 it was also introduced an additional, experience-based indicator, the **Household Hunger Scale**, to corroborate and measure complementary aspects of food insecurity.

Respondents were asked how frequently they had experienced three food insecurity situations over the previous month, namely:

- *Was there ever no food to eat of any kind in the house?*
- *Did they go to sleep at night hungry because there was not enough food?*
- *Did they go a whole day and night without eating anything at all?*

Results show that **12% of migrants are classified in a situation of severe hunger**, with no major differences between countries but slightly lower compared to the previous round (14%). **Migrants show significantly higher levels of moderate and severe hunger compared to residents**, as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: Household Hunger Scale (HHS)

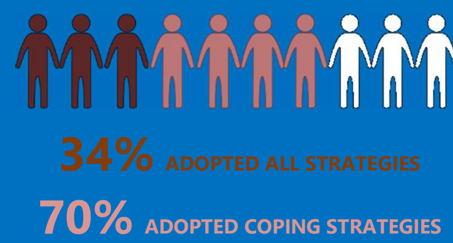


LIVELIHOOD COPING

In a scenario of an acute and prolonged socio-economic crisis that the pandemic is entailing, people are resorting to a variety of coping mechanisms affecting their livelihoods and ability to meet their food and other essential needs.

During the previous month, **7 out of 10 migrants adopted at least one coping strategy**.

They range from **selling assets** (49%) to **borrowing money** (59%) and **accepting informal, low-paid jobs** (48%), with the latter registering the highest increase compared to the previous round (39%), particularly in Ecuador (from 38% to 51%) and Colombia (45%).



"In the long-run, migrants could further exhaust the possibility to adopt coping strategies to limit the consequences of the pandemic and to keep food consumption to an acceptable level".

This suggests that, following the release of lockdown measures and the re-opening of the economy, migrants continue to rely to a greater extent on the informal economy and unsustainable incomes to make their living.

MARKETS

As a result of lower restrictions aimed at stimulating the economy, **people are finding less limitations to access markets**. The share of those facing constraints nearly halved since the beginning of the pandemic, passing from 80% to 47%. Fear to go out due to the disease outbreak, which was reported as the main concern to access markets registered a remarkable decrease, as shown in figure 4, with a similar pattern in the three countries.

Along the same line, **there has been an increase in the number of food shops and markets claimed to be always open**, from 50% to 72%. Similarly, 61% (+10%) claims that food is always available. **The increased food availability is also entailing positive effects on the level of prices**, as a lower share of migrants (66%) reported an increase compared to the start of the pandemic (76%).

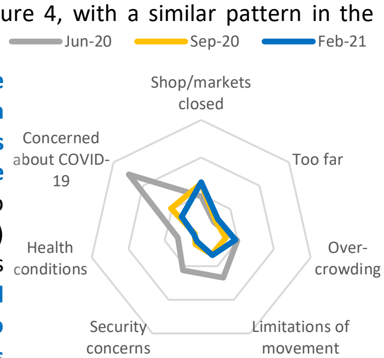
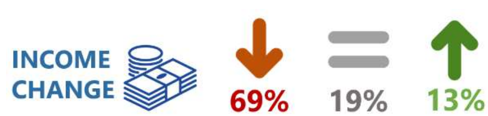


Figure 4: Limitations to access markets

INCOME SOURCES

In line with previous findings, **migrants continue to find their main sources of income in the informal sector** (36%). Only 31% can rely on more stable, formal sources of income. Lifting restrictions certainly entailed a positive effect on access to income-generating opportunities. However, although lower compared to the previous round (27%), **17% remains unemployed**. Remittances flows also register a significative reduction compared to the first round, passing from 11% to 6%. Finally, **a migrant out of ten (10%) continue to rely on assistance** from Government or other humanitarian actors.



INTENTIONS TO MOVE

When asked about their future intentions to migrate, migrants in Ecuador (57%) and Colombia (46%) saw the largest increase, with +15% and +8%, respectively. The situation is nearly stable in Peru, where 54% of migrants (+4%) is willing to stay.

MAIN CONCERNS