

## UNHCR EXTERNAL UPDATE ON COVID-19 IN COLOMBIA - #3



*In Medellín, four large sports complexes have so far been transformed into emergency shelters. They are managed by the Major's Office and provide support to a total of 630 Venezuelans and Colombians that need a place to stay during the COVID-19 emergency to follow quarantine measures. UNHCR Medellín is coordinating the response with IOM, IRC and other key partners to provide technical support and hygiene products, strengthen protection mechanisms and accompany this population.*

### CURRENT CONTEXT RELATED TO COVID-19 AND GOVERNMENT MEASURES

On 9 April, the Colombian Ministry of Health confirmed 2,223 cases of COVID-19, in 24 of the country's 32 departments, with Bogotá concentrating the highest number of people infected with 1,029 confirmed cases. A total of 69 individuals have died from COVID-19 and 174 have recovered. So far, one confirmed case, which resulted in the patient's death, was reported among Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

#### Government of Colombia measures related to COVID-19:

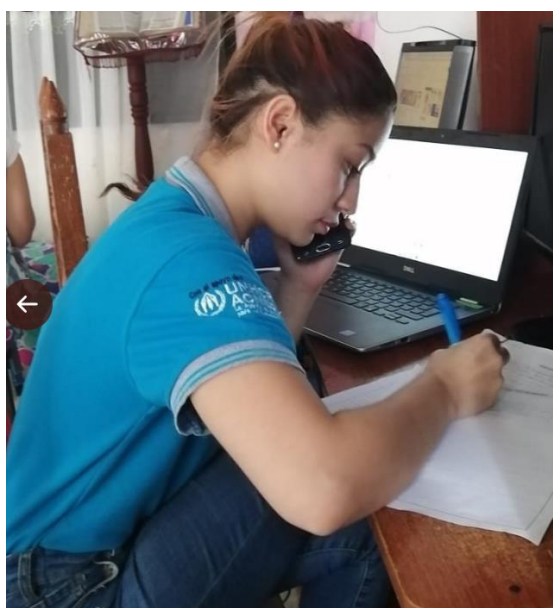
On 6 April, President Duque announced the prolongation of the obligatory COVID-19 quarantine until 27 April 2020, and that public

schools and universities would remain closed until 31 May.

Essential staff of UN organizations and humanitarian partners directly involved in the COVID-19 response are authorized to continue circulating to provide essential services during the lock-down.

Following demonstrations of Venezuelans in major Colombian cities due to lack of resources to meet basic needs during the quarantine, an appeal for unity and inclusion was launched by President Duque to mayors and governors across the country underlining that responding to the needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants during COVID-19 is a shared responsibility.

Minister of Housing, Jonathan Malagón announced that evictions of Colombian families are prohibited by law during the quarantine and 2 months after it. A freeze in the rental prices for the foreseen period was also declared. Although the measure should also apply to Venezuelans, there have been reports of continued evictions in major cities like Cali, Medellín, and Bogotá.



*Thousands of Venezuelan refugees and migrants require medical services during the COVID emergency. FAMICOVE, a local Venezuelan organization supported by UNHCR provides free medical services via telephone in Medellín.*

Since last week, UNHCR has monitored an increase in the returns of Venezuelans from various places in Colombia but also from Ecuador. All official border crossing points remain closed since 14 March, with the following exceptions at the Simon Bolivar International Bridge: a) entries by medical cases through the humanitarian corridor and b) exits of Venezuelans as part of “the voluntary return” process in coordination with Venezuelan authorities. Since last weekend, an estimated 3,685 persons returned to Venezuela via Cucuta and Arauca, many arriving in buses from Bucaramanga (Santander), Bogota, and Soacha (close to Bogota), including transportation organized by the local authorities, while others arriving on foot.

Due to the national border closure put in place since 17 March up to 30 May and the mandatory

isolation measures, vulnerable Venezuelans including those already living in Colombia, those in transit and the pendular migrants holding Border Mobility Cards, are no longer able to obtain food, medicine or cash in Colombia to support themselves and their families in Venezuela. Given the situation, many Venezuelans continue returning to Venezuela through irregular border crossings, due to the growing lack of food and restrictions on access to health and livelihoods in Colombia.



*In Arauca, UNHCR staff and partners are working with authorities and medical staff to support local capacities in the humanitarian response.*

UNHCR protection monitoring and interviews with persons of concern corroborate media reports of increasing xenophobic behaviors against Venezuelans, as many of them are on the streets despite curfew and quarantine measures because they cannot pay their rent due to loss of livelihoods.

### **Situation of internally displaced persons**

Despite last week’s ELN announcement of a unilateral and temporal ceasefire, illegal armed groups continue to clash in the Chocó department, leading to a new large group displacement in the Bojayá community of more than 190 people last Sunday, with another 570 individuals confined. In the Catatumbo region, a new large group displacement was reported in the municipality of Sardinata.

In the Nariño and on the Pacific coast illegal armed groups are circulating pamphlets on COVID-19 and imposing strict quarantine rules on local communities. The Ombudsperson’s

Office expressed concern over the abuse of the mandatory quarantine by illegal armed groups as a control and war tactic.

## UNHCR'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

### Health and hygiene/prevention measures:

During the last two weeks, UNHCR continued reinforcing and complementing local institutional capacities responding to the COVID-19 situation. In **Arauca**, three air conditioning units were donated to the San Vicente Hospital.



On 3 April, UNHCR staff shift three air conditioning units donated to the San Vicente Hospital in Arauca, contributing to reinforce local capacities in face of the COVID-19 emergency.

In **La Guajira**, a mobile unit for medical follow-up and investigation of COVID-19 cases was activated, dignity kits were delivered to Venezuelan refugees and migrants to support their coping mechanisms to the COVID-19 situation, and 25 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) were provided to the San José Hospital in order to reinforce its emergency response. In **Bucaramanga**, four additional RHUs were installed at Santander University Hospital bringing the total number to seven. In **Cali**, 2 RHUs were provided to the health sector and another 2 to clinics. In **Cucuta**, a total of 111 persons were assisted in general, sexual and reproductive health services at La Margarita Health Centre supported by UNHCR, which has reactivated services to vulnerable population in the border area of Villa del Rosario.

Adding to specific activities developed at local level, in the framework of the anti-xenophobia campaign *Somos Panas Colombia* UNHCR continues to reinforce messages of solidarity and provide information related to health services and other concerns raised by Venezuelan refugees and migrants and host communities during the mandatory isolation period.



*Somos Panas Colombia* continues to disseminate key orientation messages through social media in order to reach out Venezuelan refugees and migrants during the quarantine.

### Protection and Education:

#### World Health Day

On 7 April, during **World Health Day** the *Somos Panas Colombia* campaign scaled up its efforts in social media, seeking to highlight the importance of reducing discrimination during this health crisis. The campaign raises awareness about the solidarity shown by Venezuelan doctors in Colombia, who are supporting their Colombian colleagues in responding to the pandemic.



*Luis*, a Venezuelan doctor working in Medellín, says there are 4 doctors in his family and all of them are proud to be contributing to the Colombian health system.

Between 16 March and 3 April, UNHCR continued **remote registration in PRIMES via telephone**, registering 2,013 receptions equivalent to 6,921 individuals, out of which 70% were women, 29% men, and 1% unspecified. The most common specific needs identified during this reception process were legal and physical protection needs (871), serious medical condition (245), child at risk (238), single parent (155), woman at risk (99), among others.

In **Cúcuta and Bucaramanga**, a total number of 223 cases were assisted via a newly established UNHCR 1-800 Hotline. In **La Guajira**, UNHCR and partners distributed over 300 education materials for children and their families during the quarantine among Venezuelans and host communities. In **Mocoa**, 5 institutional telephone numbers for local Ombudsperson Offices were enabled covering 12 out of 13 municipalities.

### Shelter, NFIs and WASH

In **Arauca**, UNHCR had to suspend the opening of a shelter space for families at risk of living on the streets, due to pull factor concerns raised by the Governor's office. In **La Guajira**, over 500 people continue to be quarantined at the Integrated Assistance Center (CAI) and supported through integrated services. As part of the Government's contingency planning, UNHCR supported the Municipality of Maicao with the design of an emergency shelter to be built within a stadium, with the potential to hold 70 COVID-19 patients. In **Maicao, La Guajira and Mocoa, Putumayo** UNHCR has provided emergency shelter to some Venezuelan refugees and migrants at hotels.

In **Cali**, 500 masks have been provided to the Mayor's Office for further distribution amongst health sector employees, and hygiene kits were provided for 57 families (167 people) in Jamundí. Near the Panamanian border, UNHCR provided 400 hygiene kits and 50 baby kits to the Mayor's Offices of Necoclí, Apartadó, Turbo and Carepa.

### Food Security and Nutrition

In **Cucuta**, UNHCR with support of World Vision, distributed 435 food kits among persons of

concern who were targeted beneficiaries in previous community-based interventions.



*UNHCR Medellín follows-up on critical cases in a shelter managed by the Mayor's Office. Lia, a Venezuelan pregnant woman currently staying at the shelter, used to sell goods in the street and is now out of resources due to quarantine measures.*

### Cash-Based Interventions

In **Arauca**, UNHCR will start cash distribution this week for 200 families through its partner CISP. In **Medellín**, UNHCR is partnering with the Mayor's Office to provide multipurpose cash grants to 400 vulnerable families. In **Bogotá and Soacha**, the first of 700 vulnerable families started receiving cash grants this week. UNHCR is prioritizing cash assistance also in other cities across the country, as an alternative for many who have lost livelihood opportunities during the mandatory isolation and are struggling to meet basic needs.

## UNHCR'S PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PRIORITIES

UNHCR Colombia is currently appealing for USD 5.16 million for the COVID-19 response. Thanks to donor contributions received against the **UNHCR Global Appeal for the COVID-19 response**, UNHCR Colombia has so far received USD 4.5 million which are being used against the activities outlined in the Colombia part of the Global Appeal available [here](#).

## GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT

### UNHCR Key Protection Messages – COVID-19 Crisis

- (1) States can and should ensure access to asylum while also protecting public health.
- (2) Even where a State has closed its borders, reception of asylum seekers and the processing of asylum claims should continue, with priority for the most vulnerable.
- (3) Restrictions on freedom of movement should not be arbitrary nor discriminatory.
- (4) Restrictions on the exercise of rights should be maintained for no longer than necessary.
- (5) Public health and other responses should include refugees, IDPs and other marginalized groups, and address the particular risks affecting them. The full document can be accessed [here](#).

### UN Secretary General's Report on Economic Impact

On 31 March, the UNSG's report **Responding to the Socio-economic Impacts of COVID-19** was published and highlighted priorities including the design of fiscal and monetary policies able to support the direct provision of resources to support workers and households, to provide health and unemployment insurance, to scale up social protection, and to support businesses to prevent bankruptcies and massive job losses. The full report can be found [here](#).

### World Bank Group – First Operations for COVID-19 Emergency Health Support

On 2 April, the WB launched the first group of projects using the dedicated **COVID-19 Fast-Track Facility (FTF)** to support emergency COVID-19 measures and help countries respond to the immediate health consequences of the pandemic. The first group of projects, amounting to USD 1.9 billion, will assist 25 countries and new operations are moving forward in over 65 countries using the fast-track process. The WB anticipates deploying up to USD 160 billion over the next 15 months with an emphasis on policy-based financing and protecting the poorest households, which UNHCR expects will include refugee and internally displaced population. More information can be found [here](#).

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

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