

## ***Joint UNHCR-IOM Press Release***

### **Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela during COVID-19 crisis: as needs soar more inclusive measures and aid are essential**

With the Coronavirus pandemic testing health care systems around the world, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and IOM, the International Organization for Migration, are calling attention to the challenges facing refugees and migrants from Venezuela.

“At a time when the world’s attention is focused on COVID-19, and as governments and populations, particularly health workers, heroically come together to combat this virus, we should not lose sight of the needs of the millions of Venezuelan refugees and migrants,” said Eduardo Stein, joint UNHCR-IOM Special Representative for refugees and migrants from Venezuela.

“COVID-19 has brought many aspects of life to a standstill – but the humanitarian implications of this crisis have not ceased and our concerted action remains more necessary than ever. We are urging the international community to boost its support for humanitarian, protection and integration programmes, on which the lives and welfare of millions of people depend, including host communities.”

The current global public health emergency has compounded an already desperate situation for many refugees and migrants from Venezuela, and their hosts. Funding to support them is urgently needed.

Many depend on insufficient daily wages to cover basic needs such as shelter, food and healthcare; others have no roof over their heads. With growing fear and social unrest, Venezuelan refugees and migrants are also at risk of being stigmatized.

Governments in the region have been leading and coordinating the response to ensure those leaving Venezuela can access rights and documentation. But as national capacities become stretched to a breaking point, the wellbeing and safety of Venezuelans and their host communities is at risk.

Millions of refugees and migrants, and the communities hosting them, continue to need urgent support, particularly as the economic impact of the Coronavirus pandemic begins to be felt across Latin America and the Caribbean.

The coordination of the humanitarian response for refugees and migrants from Venezuela is conducted through a Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform (Response for Venezuelans-R4V), complemented by eight national or sub-regional platforms. Platforms are operating through a sector approach with the participation of 137 partners. In addition, WHO-PAHO leads the health-related aspects of the COVID-19 response.

The Regional Platform has activated a critical revision of all operations in the region to prioritize essential protection and life-saving actions and promote the inclusion of refugees and migrants in

national programmes. In close coordination with WHO-PAHO, the R4V is also collaborating with national and local authorities to address the new challenges and deliver basic support to Venezuelan refugees and migrants, as well as to host communities.

While maintaining physical distancing measures, partners are implementing a number of prevention and response activities in the main locations where refugees and migrants from Venezuela are hosted. These activities ensure people can adequately access information, clean water, soap and appropriate waste disposal. Organizations are working around the clock to find innovative ways to continue supporting the most vulnerable individuals in the current context while also supporting national authorities to set up observation and isolation spaces for potential positive COVID-19 cases.

So far, the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) launched in November 2019 to respond to the most urgent needs of refugees and migrants from Venezuela in 17 countries, as well as the local communities hosting them, has received only three per cent of the requested funds, which could put at stake the continuity of lifesaving programmes throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

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