

## UPDATE ON UNHCR COVID-19 RESPONSE IN COLOMBIA - #6



*UNHCR in La Guajira distributed hygiene kits in Brisas del Norte, Riohacha. This community is home to over 1000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants and Colombian returnees and needs more support to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.  
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### CURRENT CONTEXT RELATED TO COVID-19 AND GOVERNMENT MEASURES

The Colombian Ministry of Health confirmed **12,930 cases of COVID-19** as of Wednesday, 13 May, in all of the country's 32 departments, with Bogota concentrating the highest number of people infected (4,685 confirmed cases). In Colombia, a total of 509 individuals have died from COVID-19 and 3,133 cases have recovered. So far, 84 confirmed cases, which resulted in 4 deaths, were reported among Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

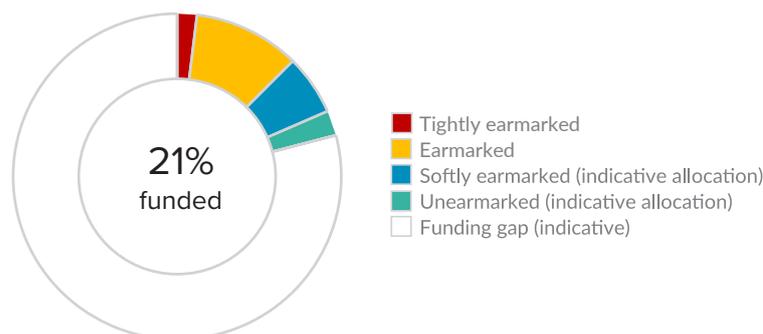
#### Government of Colombia Measures Related to COVID-19

On 5 May, President Duque announced a further extension of the mandatory quarantine until 25 May. Exceptions include manufacturing industries such as furniture and the automotive sector which

resumed their activities on 11 May. Children between 6 and 17 years old are now permitted to go outside three times a week for half an hour accompanied by an adult.

On 29 April, Migración Colombia (MC) issued a [statement](#) on "voluntary returns" stating that "Venezuelan citizens who will be caught violating the mandatory preventive isolation without any authorization will be subject to administrative and penal sanctions". The statement also mentioned MC's coordination role between the local and departmental authorities and the Venezuelan authorities in facilitating the daily returns of around 300 people. In an attempt to control return movements and discourage people returning on foot, Migración Colombia specified that

**\$83.9 million**  
 UNHCR's financial requirements 2020



“Venezuelan citizens who are starting their voluntary return process towards Venezuela without any form of coordination with the municipal authorities will be subject to administrative sanctions, which may include deportation or expulsion”. According to Migración Colombia, [an estimated total of 25,000 Venezuelans have returned to Venezuela](#) since the COVID-19 outbreak. UNHCR is neither promoting nor facilitating returns to Venezuela at this stage, principally due to health risks related to COVID-19. Nonetheless, UNHCR through the anti-xenophobia campaign *Somos Panas Colombia* provides information to Venezuelans who are considering returning, in coordination with the Government of Colombia and GIFMM members to allow Venezuelans to make an informed decision and avoid protection risks. UNHCR is concerned about protection risks including becoming prey to human trafficking as they try to find ways to return to Venezuela.

Public pressure on local authorities related to the often precarious conditions in which returns are organized increased following an accident on 28 April involving a bus transporting 36 Venezuelans, including 12 children. The accident, presumably caused by the driver falling asleep, resulted in the death of a Venezuelan and a Colombian passenger and occurred in Cerrito, Valle del Cauca.

#### Analysis of the Current Context

Community blockades continued in Arauca seeking to pressure for government distribution of food aid, with one neighborhood closed off for 4 days. In La Guajira, Venezuelans gathered outside Migración Colombia offices asking for support to return, particularly in the light of the recent opening of the Paraguachon crossing point. On 1 May, Venezuelans trying to cross from Ecuador to Colombia at the Rumichaca International Bridge in Nariño were met with teargas by the police.

Concerns have been raised over the pull factor effect for Venezuelans returning from Chile and Peru at the border with Ecuador following the organization of bus transportation to Cucuta and Arauca by the local authorities during the previous weeks.

GIFMM members in coordination with local authorities provided support to Venezuelans gathered at the Ipiales Bus Terminal with food, hygiene kits, health services and water and sanitation services. In addition, discussions are taking place with the Mayor's Office to use hotels as temporary accommodation for refugees and migrants most in need, in consultation with host communities. Likewise, refugees and migrants are being supported with the following services: general medicine, mental health, sexual and reproductive health and legal orientation.

UNHCR conducted a field mission to Soledad, Atlántico Department, to verify the living conditions of two improvised shelters accommodating 77 Venezuelans of whom 15 have tested COVID-19 positive, and only 2 had been placed in isolation. Nutrition, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, cash for shelter and isolation spaces for positive cases were identified as the main concerns. The mission was accompanied by a delegate of the District Health Secretary who confirmed that periodic follow-ups are being carried out to verify health conditions of the referred persons. A database of persons in both locations was shared with UNHCR to customize possible response actions. Several GIFMM partners confirmed their readiness to contribute to the response.

Manifestations of xenophobia: A video posted by a Colombian doctor who was aggressed during a blockade on April 30 in Bogota by allegedly Venezuelan demonstrators triggered a wave of

xenophobic comments on social media. Words like *venecos* (a derogatory term) and *Venezolanos* trended on Twitter.

UNHCR in Arauca, together with the local Ombudsperson's Office (*Personeria*) identified 29 families at risk of eviction or already evicted and observed that the implementation of the [decree banning eviction](#) is not always being respected.

In GIFMM's [Rapid Needs Assessment](#) published on 6 May, half of all households reported problems self-isolating, and among those, 21% reported that they perceive they are at risk of eviction. Among all the households included in the assessment, 53% reported access to housing, including rental support, as their main need, making it the second most urgent need overall. In some cities, the number of Venezuelans sleeping rough has increased, leaving them at a higher risk of contracting the COVID-19 as well as facing protection risks.

A total of 340 people were displaced in the community of Santa Ana near the urban area of Guapi (Cauca) due to a generalized fear of illegal armed groups (rather than direct threats or attacks). This occurred following the 30 April ELN cessation of unilateral ceasefire sources after the community heard detonations of explosives in their territory, and because the ELN has declared any person who leaves the area to be military objective. The community attributed the explosions to the confrontations between the ELN and the FARC-EP. In addition, confrontations between FARC-EP dissidents led to community confinement in the rural areas of the municipality of Jamundi (Cauca) where FARC-EP dissidents are imposing strict rules to indigenous communities under the pretext of COVID-19 rules.

Approximately 300 people in Buenaventura (Valle de Cauca) are reported to have left the rural area of Lopez de Micay due to situations of confinement which started on 22 April and resulted in 2 deaths on 24 April; UNHCR is also monitoring an intra-urban displacement in Buenaventura following confrontations between various illegal armed groups in an area which registered an increase of 43% in homicides, 40% in gender-based violence, and 5 forced disappearances of young adults.

UNHCR continues to closely monitor the arrival of people affected by displacement and/or confinement situations to Cali as previously reported in municipalities on the Pacific Coast of Valle del Cauca and Cauca. As of 6 May, confinement was registered in Lopez de Micay of 150 people from 3 communities, in Litoral del San Juan of 2,664 people from 25 communities, and in a rural area of Buenaventura of 84 people belonging to 16 families (located in Valledupar and Bajo Calima). In Cauca Department, situations of displacement were registered in Guapi (47 families, 216 people), in Argelia, (5 communities and 25 families) and Tambo (40 families and 100 people affected).

## UNHCR'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

### Health and hygiene/prevention measures

UNHCR, in coordination with the local GIFMM, delivered 100 gallons of liquid soap and 500 liters of antiseptic soap to the District Health Program in Santa Marta. In Medellin, UNHCR led the GIFMM health workgroup response in 2 temporary shelters set up by the Mayor's Office with capacity for 430 people. The primary health work plan includes triage upon entry into the shelter (taking temperature and checking for COVID-19 symptoms, etc.) and the set-up of isolation units respecting the health guidelines.



*In Santa Marta, UNHCR donated 100 gallons of liquid soap and 500 litres of antiseptic soap to the District Health Program. ©UNHCR/Ricardo, O.*

In the hospital and the Health Institute of Ipiales, 5 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) have been set up to strengthen the testing capacity for COVID-19 at the hospital in Ipiales. In Apartadó (Antioquia), UNHCR donated and supported the installation of 2 RHUs at the Antonio Roldan Hospital.

In Arauca, UNHCR renovated the 3rd floor of the

local hospital to accommodate 21 rooms with capacity for 40 people. In Pasto, 1000 surgical garments, 300 N95 face masks, 288 fabric facemasks, and 288 antibacterial gels were delivered to the Departmental Health Institute (IDS) for further distribution in health facilities in Nariño. In Putumayo, UNHCR distributed hygiene kits with the support of the Colombian Red Cross. At the Las Margaritas primary health care facility in Villa del Rosario (Norte de Santander), between 4 and 9 May, a total of 440 refugees and migrants were assisted with prenatal care, sexual and reproductive health and psychosocial services.

In La Guajira, UNHCR Shelter and WASH teams completed the designs of an emergency addition to the public hospital in Maicao. If the government decides to allocate resources to this project, the municipality of Maicao – which hosts over 55,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants – will be able to assist 100 additional patients each month during the pandemic. Moreover, UNHCR has already increased capacity of the current hospital in Maicao with 23 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) and is in the process of purchasing necessary equipment, which will allow the hospital to assist 66 more people at a time. UNHCR in Riohacha has also purchased equipment for the public hospitals in the municipalities of Riohacha and San Juan, which host over 55,000 and 15,000 refugees and migrants, respectively.

### Protection

Between 16 March and 12 May, UNHCR remotely registered 8,199 families consisting of 31,538 individuals in PRIMES (72% female) via UNHCR’s telephone reception points nationwide. The locations with the highest number of calls registered were Bogota (25%), La Guajira (18%), Norte de Santander (16%), and Antioquia (13%). 61% of calls were related to humanitarian assistance queries, followed by legal issues (15%), health (7%) and documentation (6%).

UNHCR conducted a protection monitoring exercise via telephone in Norte de Santander during which a total of 378 interviews were carried out of which 94% of the people interviewed were Venezuelan: 76% have been in Colombia for more than a year; 7% are homeless or in a situation of homelessness; 60% are at risk of eviction; 68% have an irregular migratory status; 25% have a

Special Stay Permit (PEP) and; 2% are asylum seekers. Moreover, 2.4% of those interviewed expressed their intention to return to Venezuela due to the uncertainty of the quarantine, but not because they believed the situation in Venezuela has changed.

In collaboration with UNAIDS, UNHCR produced an [informational video](#) on the protection needs of people with HIV within the context of COVID-19. A new [pamphlet](#) containing information on UNHCR helplines and call centers was distributed on various social media platforms.



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An updated version of the phone numbers for UNHCR’s Information and Orientation Centres was published by Somos Panas Colombia.

As part of the *Somos Panas Colombia* campaign, UNHCR mobilized Colombian influencers like [Daniel Samper](#), [Amalia Andrade](#), [Roberto Cardona](#) and [Mariana Gonzales](#) to disseminate messages combatting xenophobia and promoting unity.



In Tumaco, Nariño, 400 pieces of Personal Protective Equipment were delivered to territorial organizations, Afro and indigenous populations, and leaders of the Nariño-Venezuela Brothers Without Borders Network to continue their work on behalf of refugees and migrants. ©UNHCR/James, R.

### Food Security and Nutrition

UNHCR continues to support the government and local authorities with the distribution of food kits in various locations throughout the country.

UNHCR in Barranquilla offered logistical support to the Governor of Atlántico with the distribution of 2,000 food kits in the southern municipalities of Suana and Campolacruz.

### Cash-Based Interventions

In the month of April, emergency cash-based assistance was provided to 144 Venezuelan individuals in Antioquia, 127 Venezuelan individuals in Norte de Santander, and 111 Venezuelan families in Bogota and Soacha. In addition, through a pilot project, 18 Venezuelan households with irregular migratory status and who cannot access formal banking mechanisms have benefited from emergency cash assistance in Medellin, Apartado and Quibdo through a mobile money platform. UNHCR Medellin intends to extend the pilot to another 300 households within the coming weeks.

### Shelter, NFIs and WASH

In Pasto, UNHCR and other GIFMM members provided in-kind and technical support to two shelters identified by the Mayor's Office which will host mainly Haitians travelling in mixed migration movements and up to 120 Venezuelans. UNHCR also donated toys and other recreational items for children spending the quarantine in the Ventana de Luz shelter and the Nubes Verdes shelter (Ipiates). In Necoclí (Antioquia), UNHCR provided 1 RHU and 2 family tents for the Temporary Preventive Isolation Zone which offers shelter to a group of 295 people of different nationalities travelling in mixed migration movements during the COVID-19 quarantine. In Riohacha and Maicao, 176 Venezuelans continue to be assisted through the hotel network. This response is part of an inter-agency effort looking to address the immediate needs of the Venezuelan refugees and migrants, involving WFP (food), Malteser International (Health screening), Save the Children (CBI) and UNHCR (shelter and registration). Almost 50% of beneficiaries are children.

### FUNDING NEEDS

On 11 May, UNHCR published its revised [Coronavirus Emergency Appeal](#). Globally, UNHCR is now appealing for USD 745 million, including USD 17.3 million in Colombia.

## GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT

On 7 May, the first [revision to the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan](#) was launched, with briefings from UNHCR, OCHA, WHO, WFP and Oxfam principals, seeking USD 6.7 billion through December 2020. The revised GHRP includes the revised COVID-19 appeal from Colombia.

UNHCR joined WHO and other key agencies in drafting the [IASC Interim Guidance on Public Health and Social Measures for COVID-19 Preparedness and Response in Low Capacity and Humanitarian Settings](#).

Together with several organizations, UNHCR developed the [IASC Interim Technical Note on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\) during COVID-19 Response](#).

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

Austria, Canada, Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), Chanel Foundation, Denmark, European Union, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Republic of Korea, KOICA, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UN Human Security Trust Fund (UN HSTF), UN Peacebuilding Fund, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States of America.



*In Tumaco, Nariño, 400 pieces of Personal Protective Equipment were delivered to territorial organizations, Afro and indigenous populations, and leaders of the Nariño-Venezuela Brothers Without Borders Network to continue their work on behalf of refugees and migrants. ©UNHCR/James, R.*