

Access for refugees and migrants from Venezuela to COVID-19 Vaccines in RMRP countries

Background

As noted in the 2021 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), the COVID-19 pandemic has been causing tremendous suffering for refugees, migrants and host communities alike, many of whom will likely grapple with the long-term damages of the pandemic for years to come. In many countries of the region, the situation is compounded by increasing poverty rates and growing food insecurity, as documented in numerous assessments conducted by National Platforms and their partners across the region and reflected in the different sectorial chapters of the RMRP 2021. There are currently more than 4,6 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela hosted in 17 countries of the region and the RMRP represents the geographically biggest emergency response plan in the world.

Since its establishment in 2018, the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform (also known as Response for Venezuelans, “R4V”) has acted as an inclusive and accountable forum that steers and monitors the operational response under the RMRP. Drawing on experiences from other mixed refugee-migrant situations around the world, and pursuant to the directions of the UN Secretary-General, it is convened by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and brings together the 159 appealing organizations of the RMRP, in addition to host governments and the donor community.

The Regional Platform covers interventions across 17 countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region and combines the responsibilities and expertise of United Nations (UN) agencies, international and national NGOs, civil society and faith-based organizations and the Red Cross Movement, to ensure robust humanitarian, protection and integration responses to the growing needs of refugees and migrants from Venezuela, as well as of affected host communities.

Building on the above, the Regional Platform is committed to advocate and engage with host governments for inclusive and equitable access for refugees and migrants to testing, tracing and treatment, to share information on responsible behaviours, including physical distancing, and to promote inclusion of refugees and migrants into national and local social welfare and protection mechanisms, as well as in vaccination programmes.

Key messages by the Regional Platform R4V:

The partners of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) recognize the laudable efforts and the support that governments and communities have extended to refugees and migrants from Venezuela, while dealing with challenges to their own economies and societies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By advocating for the measures mentioned in this document, R4V partners join efforts expressed in other multilateral fora, notably the Executive Committee of the UN Secretary-General, which called for the support of the Regional Platform in strengthening advocacy efforts to ensure systematic access to the COVID-19 vaccine for all, as well as in regularizing the status of Venezuelan refugees and migrants. In this context, R4V actors also reiterate their joint commitment to the promotion and protection of the human rights of refugees and migrants, including their access to health services.

Based on the principle that vaccination for all is a shared public health concern (“*nobody is safe until everyone is safe*”) and in order to promote a comprehensive response that answers to the multi-faceted challenges of the pandemic, the Regional Platform and its partners call on all host governments and communities to:

1. Ensure the systematic and full inclusion of all persons in a country’s territory, including refugees and migrants in their national COVID-19 vaccination plans, irrespective of their nationality and legal status.
2. Consider refugees and migrants for the COVID-19 vaccinations in accordance with the priority groups identified by national and local health authorities in their distribution plans.
3. Pay particular attention to populations with a significantly elevated risk of being infected, in line the WHO SAGE values framework for the allocation and prioritization of COVID-19 vaccination, taking into account the specific needs of refugees and migrants who are in vulnerable situations, including those in an irregular situation.
4. Take steps to ensure the systematic inclusion of refugees and migrants in information campaigns about the vaccines, aiming to provide full access to information on vaccination plans, roll out calendars and medical questions and ensure that they will be able to access vaccination programmes without fear of negative consequences on their continued stay on national territory

The R4V members stand ready to support governments, in particular health authorities, to ensure that any immunization rolled-out for COVID-19 includes refugees and migrants from Venezuela in a fair and equitable manner.

Moreover, R4V members stand ready to assist governments, wherever feasible and with the assistance of the international community in the facilitation of vaccination campaigns that include all refugees and migrants, notably through:

- registration and regularization efforts of previously undocumented refugees and migrants, and the provision of documentation confirming vaccinations, while ensuring confidentiality and protection of refugees’ and migrants’ personal data in line with applicable standards.
- communication and information-sharing materials, complaint and feedback mechanisms, and channels to disseminate guidance and information of the vaccination used, the modalities and other aspects relating to the COVID-19 vaccination, including to ensure broader humanitarian access.
- additional logistical and infrastructure support, based on country requirements, to ensure that all refugees and migrants can benefit from vaccination exercises.