

CHILE NEWSLETTER

In the first weeks of 2021, more than 4,500 persons crossed from Bolivia to Colchane, the first town in the Chilean border, with no more than 1,600 habitants and some 4,500 meters of altitude. Many of them are on the streets without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. In order to detect the more urgent needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, UNHCR and partners' coordinate the humanitarian response.



AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

RESPONSE TO REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CRISIS IN NORTH OF CHILE

They have been walking miles for days. They are refugees and migrants who fled Venezuela. Many of them are worried about their new destination and ask themselves: What will it be like? Will we be welcome? What if we have to leave again?

What challenges will we have to face? Will we be able to have a new home, jobs, schools, friends? Their feet are sore, but also their souls as they are looking for a better future.

The Chilean borders have been closed for months and this situation has increased the desperation of refugees and migrants who want to enter the country. According to official data by Chilean authorities, in the first weeks of 2021, some 4,500 people crossed from Pisiga (Bolivian border) to Colchane in Chile through non-authorized border points. This represents already 73 per cent of the total of irregular entries registered in 2020 at the Chilean- Bolivian border, with Colchane becoming the first entry point of refugees and migrants arriving in Chile, many of them subjects of smuggling networks. Colchane is just 3,1 km away from Pisiga, at the Bolivian side of the border. This is a small town in the province of Tamarugal (Tarapacá Region) with no more than 1,600 habitants and some 4,500 meters of altitude, which at night and during winter, temperatures drop well below zero.

As of 12 January, the Chilean Government modified Decree 265 which was published in August 2019 and allowed the Military Forces to act in activities related with racketeering, drug smuggling. The modification authorized the armed forces to control all entries through unauthorized border points in the regions of Arica, Parinacota, Tarapacá and Antofagasta.

This situation unleashed an unprecedented border crisis in the country, with the Ministers of Interior, Defense and Foreign Affairs days after visiting the north of the country and launching the *Colchane Plan*, aiming at better controlling borders, humanitarian measures and investments in the area. The Plan started on 10 February with the administrative expulsion of more than 130 foreigners who entered irregularly the country.

Against this backdrop, refugees and migrants have become increasingly more vulnerable. They arrive with visible signs of dehydration and malnutrition, which shows the difficulty of the journey and the poor conditions in which they left their country of origin.

Fernando, one of the persons who recently arrived in Chile, told UNHCR his story. With his family he crossed the continent from Aragua (central region in Venezuela) to Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, ending their journey in Bolivia one month and twelve days later. "We arrived in Chile two months ago hoping to be safe. We have many mixed feelings because Venezuelans are not used to migrate. We went out seeking refuge but for those of us who do not have relatives in Chile, it is more difficult. Also, if you do not have the legal documentation you cannot claim many of your rights. But still, I think it was the best decision we could make".



More than 9.552 persons had received humanitarian assistance in the north of Chile in 2020.

Emily Fernandez arrived almost two years ago in Antofagasta, in the North of Chile. “In Venezuela I am a civil engineer. I had my house, my stability and I left the country with just a suitcase and a “wrinkled” heart because I could no longer feed my daughter. Giving her one meal a day was a luxury. So, I left my whole family, our life, our memories and took the decision to go and give her a better life. In Peru, I regularized my migratory situation. When I arrived in Chile I was pregnant, here I had my baby. I had pre-eclampsia and I was hospitalized for 10 days. Thanks to the Chilean health system I am alive”, she explained.

WHAT IS UNHCR DOING?

UNHCR in Chile has been closely following up on the developments in the North of the country to respond on a timely manner to refugees and migrants’ needs in the area. In the Tarapacá region, this is conducted with UNHCR’s partners in the field (FASIC and INDH with legal assistance) and through missions and always in close coordination with authorities, as UNHCR does not have a direct presence in the region.

In coordination with the Municipalities of Colchane, Huara and Iquique, last December, UNHCR provided some 1355 food boxes and hygiene kits, most of which have already been distributed among refugees and migrants. The municipality of Colchane is already in need of additional support to cope with refugees and migrants’ needs arriving in the region. However, UNHCR budget in Chile is extremely limited to respond to this situation.

Moreover, UNHCR is also working with partners to inform refugees and migrants about the risks of irregularly crossing borders and to provide assistance and protection whenever cases present themselves before UNHCR and partners.

In coordination with national and local authorities, partners and other UN agencies such as IOM and UNICEF, UNHCR is complementing the national response with much-needed food and hygiene kits, housing support, basic medical attention and cash

assistance in various locations across the country. Several petitions from different governmental institutions have come forward to UNHCR and other UN agencies over the last months, and they are expected to continue to increase as central government resources are not responding to the needs of the local authorities. UNHCR is closely coordinating its response with the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office and the MFA to avoid duplications and direct resources where they are mostly needed.



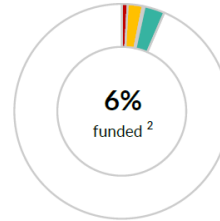
Based on the different needs assessments carried out by UNHCR and its partners and a secondary data review carried out in the framework of the 2021 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (RMRP) planning process, UNHCR has prioritised the following aspects for its work in Chile:

- Enhance the **provision of information** regarding rights and duties of refugees and migrants using two-way communication channels, social media and other innovative programs together with partners to ensure participation of refugees and migrants and that their diverse needs are taken into consideration throughout the programing cycle.
- Scale up **emergency assistance** in border areas and other urban areas, while providing targeted assistance. In this regard, an eventual set up of UNHCR presence in the Tarapacá Region (Iquique) becomes essential, so as to more fluidly interact and coordinate actions with local authorities and react to refugees and migrants’ needs in a timely manner along with other actors working on the field.

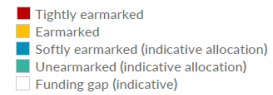
- Maintain and increase alliances with the private and public sector to promote labour inclusion and local integration.
- Provide **protection services**, including psychosocial assistance, counselling and referrals. Strengthen community-based mechanisms and work with specialized networks that can provide specialized services and information to LGBTIQ+ people (and people living with HIV/AIDS).

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FUNDING (AS OF 09 FEBRUARY 2021)

USD 38.9 M**requested** for the UNHCR operation MCO Argentina (incl. Chile).**ARGENTINA MCO**

as of 9 February 2021



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Special thanks to major donors who have provided funds for the Argentina Regional Office and at the regional and global level in 2021:

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