

CHILE NEWSLETTER

This winter, the refugee and migrant families will not only have to face the cold, rain, and low temperatures, but they will also have to protect themselves from COVID-19 in conditions of extreme vulnerability, often without access to housing, blankets, winter clothes, medicines or fuel to heat their homes.



Santiago, Chile. Venezuelan Family supported by UNHCR and World Vision through e-vouchers that enables them to buy in stores and supermarkets. ©ACNUR/Cristian Campos. May,2020.

SOLIDARITY MUST CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19 and winter: the double challenge faced by refugees in Chile

The emergency caused by COVID-19 has **exacerbated the difficult situation** in which many refugee and migrant families live in Chile. In addition to the already existing challenges related to integrating in a new country, the effects of the pandemic have further restricted the possibilities of

accessing and maintaining employment and, consequently, of ensuring daily meals or even a home. Lack of food has forced many to resort to begging or hawking, which exposes refugees and host communities to a higher risk of contagion.

Additionally, with the **impending change of seasons**, UNHCR is bracing for a deepening of the crisis in Chile and exponentially growing needs for basic assistance, housing, and targeted interventions to protect refugees and migrants against freezing temperatures and increasing vulnerabilities.

Increased instances of xenophobic acts are being recorded, as misinformation regarding refugees and migrants as carriers of the virus, of exacerbating the spread of the virus and saturating public health services is being spread.

In this sense, UNHCR calls on all States, partner agencies, members of civil society, faith-based groups and the business community to exercise leadership in rejecting discrimination against refugees and migrants and instead recognize the many contributions that they are making, especially in the context of the national response to the crisis. For example, Venezuelan medical staff have stepped up, with more than 600 individuals offering their services in aid of public health staff following Chile's call for support in the context of the *Yo Sirvo a Mi País* campaign.

While UNHCR and its partners have accelerated their response and forged relationships with new partners, the gap between the current response and the needs continues to increase, as the crisis in Chile deepens.

UNHCR IN ACTION

UNHCR has been complementing the national COVID-19 response and is expanding the provision of emergency assistance (housing, food, blankets, winter and hygiene kits), access to critical medical care and addressing key protection concerns (access and extension of documentation, labour rights, prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence)

In total, **11,158 persons** were assisted by UNHCR between January and March 2020, including in the areas of legal assistance (1,232), psycho-social support (5,851), shelter (628), food (1,724), non-food items (427), livelihoods (1,296).

Also, during April 2020, UNHCR **directly assisted 198 people** over the phone and online with protection and documentation-related queries and support. Additionally, through an instant messaging service called MIGRAPP, the Jesuit Migrant Service, with UNHCR support, attended to more than 1,900 refugees and migrants (April 2020). The service offers

legal counselling, guidance, and advice with regards to regularization, education and employment.

Recently UNHCR and its partner World Vision International launched a cashed-based intervention (CBI) program to **aid 560 households**. The assistance is delivered through a **virtual multi-purpose voucher** that enables refugee and migrant families to buy in local stores and supermarkets. This innovative method gives the families the opportunity to define what their most urgent needs are and choose the products they want to buy. As the southern hemisphere is entering the winter period, additional vouchers will be distributed as part of a **winterization**



Santiago, Chile. Venezuelan mother and daughter assisted by UNHCR and IFRC with a monthly food box. © IRFC. April, 2020

effort, for assisting refugees and migrants through the purchase of blankets, winter clothes, fuel, and hot meals.

Regarding prevention of COVID-19, influenza, and other diseases, UNHCR and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) signed an agreement to **address essential healthcare for refugee** and migrants living in Chile. The joint agreement includes the launch of community awareness and prevention campaigns, as well as free medical attention by health professionals to foreigners in vulnerable conditions.

In terms of **shelter**, UNHCR and its partners has continued providing a range of housing assistance, including specialized shelters for particularly vulnerable individuals (including female and single-headed households), emergency shelters, transit shelters and assistance for rental subsidy. Shelter beneficiaries have been also provided with food, hygiene kits and psycho-social support.

In terms of **external relations and outreach**, UNHCR is developing a guide for journalists on how to cover news related to COVID-19 and migrations, in order to prevent stigmatization of refugees and migrants in the media, with a view to improving the overall protection environment in Chile. Also, in April 2020, UNHCR and its partner World Vision International organized an **Instagram Live session**, in which around 40 refugees and migrants participated. The audience had the possibility to make questions regarding the access to services and legal orientation, in frame of COVID-19.

Finally, UNHCR has been continually providing accessible information on preventing COVID-19 to refugees as well as continuing services remotely and maintaining helplines, as well as information on the movement restrictions through the online **HELP platform**. Online consultations more than doubled on this platform from March to April. All information is distributed to refugees and migrants via email, Whatsapp, as well as over the phone

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

UNHCR and its partner FASIC are working together with Chilean and Venezuelan human rights NGOs on the establishment of a **national network of LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants**. The network would seek to contribute to the improvement of existing protection measures and tools in place for LGBTIQ+ refugees and migrants, gather and document protection needs and response, establish a referral procedure to encourage greater peer support. The network is expected to be launched in June 2020.

In addition, FASIC (with the support of UNHCR) provides emergency assistance, orientation, and guidance to the LGTBIQ+ migrants and refugees that are living in vulnerability.



Santiago, Chile. Valentina Rangel is an empowered Venezuelan transgender woman who has started a new life in Chile. She is an activist for the rights of LGBTIQ+ people in the country. ©ACNUR/Hugo Fuentes. 2020.

CITIES OF SOLIDARITY

UNHCR in Chile has been **strengthening its engagement with municipalities and local authorities**. On the frontlines of the response to COVID-19, municipalities have had to find housing solutions, address urgent humanitarian needs of their residents (in particular the homeless, the elderly, refugees and migrants), ensure adherence to quarantine measures and maintain public services.



Arica, Chile. Asylum-seeking family assisted by UNHCR and its partner agency FASIC. ©ACNUR/Santiago Escobar.

UNHCR has an established **partnership with the municipality of Santiago** (where approximately 119,000 Venezuelans live) which consists on financing food boxes and other non-food items, to be distributed by the Municipality to the refugees and migrants in vulnerable conditions. Also, the agency is **exploring partnerships with the municipalities of Estación Central** (15,000 Venezuelans) **and La Pintana** (500 Venezuelans). Refugee and migrant residents of the three municipalities have been hit hard by the pandemic and are struggling to address their needs.

In **Antofagasta**, UNHCR and IOM have established a coordination mechanism, bringing together local authorities, NGOs and refugee representatives to coordinate the COVID-19 response. Also, in Valparaíso, efforts to develop a joint workplan focusing on economic inclusion and identifying new ways of working, given quarantine and other precautionary measures, are underway.

Finally, UNHCR and municipalities are looking to reinforce distribution of humanitarian aid (Estación Central, Iquique, Arica, Antofagasta and others), expanding housing solutions and supporting municipal initiatives- such as La Pintana's efforts to provide temporary employment to 450 persons affected by a sudden loss of income; to assist the municipality with waste management, reforestation of public spaces, communal gardens and care of the elderly.

DONORS

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