

AMERICAS POPULATION MOVEMENT EMERGENCY APPEAL MDR42004

Update of activities related to COVID19

OVERVIEW

The Americas' response to the COVID-19 crisis must encompass everyone, including those forced to flee and leave their homes and countries of origin.

The crisis that is being experienced globally, is also affecting countries in the Americas, where cases have been confirmed in 47 countries and territories in the Region. Other countries in the Region have carried out tests of suspected cases, and governments are allocating funds to slow down the outbreak.¹ Furthermore, governments across the Region have taken restrictive measures on domestic travel,² as well as international travel between countries, border closures and preventive curfews.

The potential impact that the global spread of coronavirus could have on refugees and vulnerable migrants, as well as on internally displaced persons (IDPs), may further affect this populations. At this time, we must pay more attention to how the pandemic could affect displaced and marginalized populations, and work collectively to find solutions to contain the outbreak and ensure the dignity and protection of migrants.

The biggest challenge for an effective response to Coronavirus lies on public health systems being weak or overwhelmed, as a result of the emergency or other situations prior to the current outbreak. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of March 10, 2020, more than 100 countries have confirmed the local transmission of COVID-19. Of these, 34 countries have refugee populations of more than 20,000 people, who are currently not affected by the virus.³ In those contexts, prevention, preparation, and communication are essential. This is because migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons often find themselves in places that are overcrowded or where public health and other services are already overwhelmed or under-resourced.

Refugees and migrants in the Region are especially vulnerable to coronavirus and other diseases due to high geographic mobility, instability, informal or precarious income,⁴ overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and lack of access to decent health care or vaccination programmes, among others.

Furthermore, considering the border closure measures that many countries are taking to prevent the outbreak of the virus, it is expected that people in vulnerable situations will be especially affected. This includes migrants, who often travel by informal roads, facing associated difficulties, risks and protection issues. Others will express the will to return to their homes and countries of origin. In host countries, where there are already feelings of xenophobia and discrimination towards people under situations of human mobility, an increase in these episodes and in the exclusion of the population is

¹ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

² <https://www.iata.org/en/programs/safety/health/diseases/government-measures-related-to-coronavirus/?search=&country=GY&ordering=Relevance>

³ <https://www.acnur.org/noticias/press/2020/3/5e67ca8d4/la-agencia-de-la-onu-para-los-refugiados-aumenta-las-medidas-de-preparacion.html>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-51924224>

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expected with the spread of the virus. Indeed, refugees and migrants are often the first to be stigmatized and, eventually, unfairly blamed for the spread of diseases.

For example, in the case of Venezuelan migrants, Joel Millman, spokesperson for the International Organization for Migration, states that migrants will be greatly affected by the closure of the land border with Colombia, a measure taken by that government this week in response to COVID-19. This statement also applies to all border situations.⁵

In this changing context, it is important that, while heeding security and protection measures, people in vulnerable situations continue being supported, so as to ensure their rights and protect their dignity. Red Cross actions will be reduced. The following is an *update* on the activities and measures taken by countries and National Societies within the framework of the Regional Emergency Appeal on Population Movement operation.

RESPONSE

ARGENTINA In accordance with the latest recommendations made by the authorities, and the recent issuing of Decree 260/2020, which expands the health emergency declared in Law No. 27.541,⁶ and considering the decision of the health authority to suspend the entry of foreign persons into the territory, causing a complete closure of the borders, the Argentine Red Cross has activated a **Contingency Plan for the human mobility response.**⁷

The Argentine Red Cross' humanitarian response at the border, which depends on the entry of migrants and refugees into the territory, will be affected while the measures are in force (considering that the number of applicants will inevitably decline, as they cannot enter the country). This includes any intervention involving food, temporary shelter, delivery of NFIs, and humanitarian transport. The Argentine Red Cross is committed to:

- Frequently visit border crossings in order to monitor the protection needs of migrants and refugees who have been denied access to the territory;
- Strengthen ties and maintain close communications with immigration authorities and security personnel at the crossings, ensuring advocacy and protection;
- Use all the tools at our disposal to notify, inform and communicate this to migrants who are destined for the different crossings, in order to mitigate risk of rejections at the border and stranding situations.

With the aim of guaranteeing the safety of volunteers and the rest of the citizenship in general, without neglecting the fundamental needs of migrant populations, virtual means are enabled to respond to queries and reschedule and/or set dates for personal interviews after March 31.

⁵ <https://news.un.org/es/story/2020/03/1471372>

⁶ <https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/suplementos/2020031401NS.pdf>

⁷ Source: Argentine Red Cross "National Human Mobility Programme Contingency Plan: COVID-19 Pandemic."

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These means for care, consultation and monitoring of the migrant population are:

- **Email address:** migraciones@cruzroja.org.ar
- **WhatsApp:** +54 9 11 5753-2615
- **Hotline:** +54 9 11 3190-9827

Specifically, for the lines of action relating to emergency situations and extreme need, the following is guaranteed:

- Advice, documentation inquiries, protection situations, among other levels of access to information, which may be consulted to obtain immediate response on our virtual channels;
- Individuals who have a need for shelter (considering that the demand will decrease, since the need is mainly related to the population that has just arrived in Argentina) will be able to consult virtually and schedule interviews on specific days and times, following recommended guidelines;
- For the Restoring Family Links (RFL) programme, specific needs related to "Search Requests" will be handled online, and the interviews for completing forms will be conducted by telephone and will be signed by the Argentine Red Cross staff member who followed up on the call; if an extremely urgent need to use our connectivity services arises, the procedure, day, time and branch/Headquarters must be coordinated through virtual channels.

It should be added that Decree 297/2020 on "Preventive and compulsory social isolation" has provided for the mandatory quarantine in the entire national territory from 21/03/2020 to 31/03/2020; Red Cross staff being exempt from said measure.

BRAZIL Brazil has also closed its borders and taken other restrictive measures backed by Law No. 13.979 of February 6, 2020, which defines the actions that will be taken to face the public health emergency resulting from coronavirus.⁸

The border situation is very worrisome, especially in the State of Roraima, which is the main entry point for thousands of Venezuelans since 2015.

Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the operation that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent maintains, with support from the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC), in the states of Roraima and Amazonas, the construction of Water services in Boa Vista has suffered delays, as recent government measures place limits on "non-essential" economic activities in the State of Roraima.

Likewise, Restoring Family Links (RFL) activities are being adapted according to the continuity plan that the ICRC has prepared in Boa Vista. Services will decrease, both due to the closure of the border and the protection measures that the ICRC and state security forces are taking. Considering that RFL activities are essential in these times, the ICRC will continue to offer services in Boa Vista shelters (with additional protection measures).

⁸ <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/es/>

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On the other hand, in Manaus, First Aid services are working, but several purchases of materials have not been achieved due to the isolation that people have had to submit to. There is a risk that the ICRC will temporarily suspend RFL services.

Finally, the ICRC is in the process of acquiring 350 hygiene kits to distribute to migrants, but the local shortage of materials has delayed the process.

CHILE On March 18, 2020, the Chilean government decreed a state of Constitutional Exception for Catastrophe throughout the entire territory. Furthermore, the country's borders have been closed, allowing only nationals and residents to enter. To date, no official information has been collected on Chile's migrant population, however, it is cause for concern, among all the vulnerabilities that already affected people in situations of human mobility prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, as well as in the other countries of the Region, that the limitations may have serious impacts in the areas of mobility within the country or, in cases of return, resulting in informal crossings, given the current restrictions and the potential implementation of city or region closures in the short term.

The response plan proposed by the IFRC Country Office with the Chilean Red Cross to provide continuity to their operation is detailed below.⁹

Cities of intervention

- Santiago
- Antofagasta
- Iquique
- Arica

Activities that will continue

- Prevention activities with the development of material, implementation of the communication and awareness strategy on self-care regarding COVID-19;
- Distribution of humanitarian aid, in particular, the distribution of kits (food, coats, hygiene) to women, men, boys and girls with due precautions and protection.

Temporarily suspended activities

- Restoring Family Links (RFL);
- Psychosocial Support;
- Training;
- Hydration and safe water.

⁹ Source: IFRC Chile Office – Chilean Red Cross “Contingency Plan - Population Mobility Project.”

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GUYANA The Guyana Red Cross Society will continue, within this framework, to **promote hygiene** and **distribute hygiene items**, in close coordination with the Ministry of Health in Georgetown. Furthermore, it plans to increase support for the migrant population, but also for the host community, especially in health prevention issues.

ECUADOR Ecuador, in line with many of the countries of the region, declared a state of exception in the country,¹⁰ which includes the closure of borders, curfews and restrictions on movements. These measures have had a very strong impact, especially within the migrant population on the northern and southern borders, and in particular with the closure of the Binational Border Assistance Centre (CEBAF). Many people find themselves in situations of vulnerability due to the lack of shelter, access to health, food security and protection in general.

Within this framework, the Ecuadorian Red Cross has drawn up guidelines for Human Mobility actions.¹¹ Almost all activities in support of migrants were suspended. Volunteers will not be mobilized and the hired humanitarian staff who can provide answers will do so based on the context, both national and in each province – city.

The distribution of **nutritional kits continues on the northern and southern borders**, due to the extreme situation of vulnerability that their closure is generating, and the distribution of kits continues in shelters, soup kitchens or other spaces where needs are identified.

Also, work is underway to activate **telephone lines** to provide information to the entire population, including people on the move.

Fixed service points have been closed and mobile care will be guaranteed, with all safety measures, for the care of specific vulnerable cases. Additionally, the Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) Programme is suspended.

PANAMA On March 17, 2020 the borders with Costa Rica were closed, and the border with Colombia was closed on March 16, 2020, including maritime areas. Due to the suspension of the agreement with Costa Rica, and in view of the Panamanian authorities' notification that there is no possibility of containing the migratory flow of the 2,600 people from outside the region who remain at the border on 24 March, the Directorate-General for Migration together with the Ministry of Health, have decided to define a specific entry process for these migrants.

In this sense, the Panamanian Red Cross team, in coordination with the IFRC, maintains their actions as follows.

¹⁰<https://www.presidencia.gob.ec/el-presidente-lenin-moreno-decreta-estado-de-exencion-para-evitar-la-propagacion-del-covid-19/>

¹¹ Source: Ecuadorian Red Cross "Human Mobility Action Guidelines -March 17, 2020."

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Activities that will continue

- Primary health services with a team of doctors, nurses and breastfeeding technicians for the migrant population in La Peñita, Darién;
- Safe water distribution, sanitation and hygiene promotion with key messages to the population, and reinforcing messages on handwashing;
- Distribution of hygiene kits, baby kits and recreational materials.

Temporarily suspended activities

- Restoring Family Links (RFL);
- Psychosocial Support;
- Training.

PERU In Peru, Supreme Decree No. 044-2020-PCM declares a State of National Emergency with closure of borders and movement restrictions.¹² The “State of Emergency” is a constitutional mechanism that restricts some constitutional freedoms such as the right to free transit, assembly and the inviolability of domicile, placing the national police and armed forces in charge of public safety.

In light of this situation, the IFRC Country Cluster Support Teams office in Lima prepared a plan to ensure a response to the needs of migrants in the country.¹³

Situation of the Migration Programme activities

Since February, work has been done on the preparation and dissemination of communication pieces focused on preventing contagion through handwashing, which have been disseminated by the National Societies of the Andean region, as well as by Movement partners in Peru.

Taking into account the state of COVID-19’s propagation, the decision was made to suspend mobile clinic days and social inclusion activities from the first week of March. In the short term, these included a Regional Social Circus Meeting and Training Workshops for the artistic organizations which we have been working with.

Subsequently, as a consequence of the declaration of a State of Emergency, attention was suspended at the Tumbes CEBAF, given the absence of migratory/refugee or transit flow on this point. In the case of the Lima fixed post, the eventual demand was being referred to the Polyclinic of the Peruvian Red

¹² <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/pcm/normas-legales/462244-046-2020-pcm>

¹³ Source: IFRC Country Cluster Support Teams in Lima, Program Office - “*Migration and social inclusion programme in Peru. Situational status of Pandemic COVID-19 - March 18, 2020.*”

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Cross' Lima Branch; however, it operated until March 18, due to the lack of conditions to provide services and the provisions of the Supreme Decree, which states that only category III (emergency) health centres will be operated.

Care in the Lima and Tumbes CEBAF fixed posts will continue to be suspended as long as the state of emergency lasts, while the community and social inclusion sessions will be so until a new risk assessment determines the relevance of their implementation.

Situation of the Migration Programme activities

While the Migration and Social Inclusion Programme has suspended activities, the programming team has been working on the adaptation of the intervention strategy, especially considering that the great majority of migrants and refugees in Peru are in urban areas and work in the informal sector, which implies their exclusion from public social protection measures announced by the Peruvian Government.¹⁴ The alternatives that are being worked on include:

- One-time Cash Transfer to up to 400 vulnerable migrant and refugee families that cannot be covered by other government support. To be applied in the City of Lima;
- Delivery of Hygiene Kits for vulnerable migrant families in the city of Lima;
- Remote emotional support care for humanitarian organizations. Continuity is given to leadership in the line of self-care for interveners;
- Implementation of a WhatsApp Business line for the dissemination of information about COVID 19; this information will be provided by health professionals and will support line 113 managed by Peru. Furthermore, it is planned to continue operating this line to provide health guidance to the community in the future, and to guide/accompany the Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) Programme; the link to connect to this line is: <https://bit.ly/LineaCROjaPe>
- Dissemination of messages to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through Movement and External Partners social network accounts. You can access some messages in the following link: https://ifrcorgmy.sharepoint.com/:f/g/personal/daniel_rejas_ifrc_org/Eo1l87PBJbpErGr_BWiNjkOBIRvsDp0VCZo3crD1ybe_6Q?e=9GuQ7H

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO The Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross will continue to work on behalf of people on the move. Particularly, actions will be focused on activating the "**mobile health clinic**", providing communication messages about the risks to migrant and host communities. Furthermore, the National Society is planning to activate a **virtual line** to meet the information needs of migrants and the community. **Surveys and monitoring** will be carried out to assess the needs and vulnerabilities of migrant communities affected by COVID19. The **distribution of hygiene kits** and the **Cash and Voucher Assistance Programme** will also continue. On the other hand, xenophobia awareness activities will be suspended.

¹⁴ <https://elperuano.pe/noticia-gobierno-otorgara-un-bono-s-380-a-cada-familia-vulnerable-93123.aspx>

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URUGUAY The Uruguayan Government declared a state of national health emergency on March 13, 2020, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. On Tuesday, March 17, the Government decided to completely shut down the land, river and air borders with Argentina. Uruguayan citizens and residents are exempted, as well as transportation of merchandise to Argentina and the entrance of humanitarian aid.¹⁵

Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on our operation in Uruguay, the Uruguayan Red Cross will continue the following activities:

- The Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) Programme remains active, using protection mechanisms;
- The Uruguayan Red Cross will continue to offer supper to migrants with daily delivery of food, with only one person per family attending, thus avoiding a concentration of people at headquarters;
- A health vulnerability assessment is also being implemented;
- Informative materials;
- Delivery of personal hygiene kits to reinforce handwashing;
- Preparation of a contingency plan in coordination with the State.

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¹⁵ https://medios.presidencia.gub.uy/legal/2020/decretos/03/cons_min_18.pdf