

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN
THE REGION

198,600

PEOPLE REACHED WITH SOME
FORM OF ASSISTANCE*

5,300



FUNDING SITUATION**

-%

FUNDED: -

REQUIREMENT: 14.8 M

Situation

The Government of Costa Rica responded to COVID-19 with an emergency declaration on 16 March, and several measures, including movement restrictions and closing of national borders, which restrict entry to nationals and residents. An additional decree prohibits legal status holders from re-entering the country if they depart between 25 March and 12 April, and they lose their status if entering irregularly. The border rejections and subsequent responses may place refugees and migrants from Venezuela at risk. The Migration Authority provided a two-month extension of documentation for persons of concern and an online process for new work permits; In addition, no new asylum claims are being formalized (resulting in a nearly 7-month wait for documentation), and no new interviews are being conducted (increasing the backlog of cases pending adjudication to 25,913 as of 31 Mar 2020). Those awaiting documentation do not have access to healthcare services, beyond life-saving emergencies or COVID-19; regular medical attention is a key need, particularly for those in high-risk categories. Social distancing protocols and other restrictions have resulted in many refugees and migrants from Venezuela losing their jobs, affecting their livelihoods and ability to meet basic needs. As a result, food security and housing / shelter needs are growing rapidly by the day.

In Mexico, travel restrictions related to COVID-19 have caused the number of people trying to apply for asylum at Mexican airports to drop, including nationals of Venezuela. A decrease of arrivals from refugees and migrants from Venezuela was noticed at the airports, however, accurate figures regarding arrivals are not available.

The Government of Panama declared a State of National Emergency to face the risk caused by COVID-19, taking a series of protection measures for all people in the country, including the closure of all borders, schools, stores, and imposing a curfew among other measures. This situation placed several operational challenges and has affected the implementation of all activities planned for this period. Asylum authorities are still working with reduced staffing while interviews are rescheduled. No new applications are being received, but those who six months term for applying is about to expire, are being listed by the ONPAR so their application will be formalized when possible. The National Immigration Service has taken measures in response to COVID-19, suspending attention to the public and all migratory procedures. Regarding to the documentation of residence permits (permanent, provisional and in process), there is an extension of their validity until the first week of April. Regarding work permits, the Ministry of Labor has taken similar measures, extending the validity of the cards until April 30th.

Response

COSTA RICA

Most R4V partners implemented strict teleworking policies due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are adapting some activities to social distancing protocols for example by providing services online and telephone. Virtual meetings with several stakeholders have been organized for requesting additional funding to enhance response mechanisms to better protect vulnerable Venezuelans. Advocacy actions are ongoing for promoting inclusion of venezuelans among governmental responses.

As part of the strategic partnership between one of the partners and the Costa Rican Social Security entity to provide 6,000 asylum-seekers with health insurance in 2020, more than 4,000 persons have met the criteria for insurance coverage. In March, 287 of these were from Venezuelan. Despite processing challenges caused by COVID-19 and subsequent related protocols, partners continues to remotely process 500 individuals per week and adapted inclusion criteria to ensure those in high -risk categories are included in the program.

R4V partners implemented CBI throughout March, adopting strict distribution procedures to reduce the risk of transmission. Concerning basic needs and essential services, 138 venezuelans were provided with some form of food assistance and 56 venezuelans received NFI.



PEOPLE REACHED*



Education

185

Food
Security

50



Health

423



Integration

2,955



Protection

1,093



Shelter

5



CBI

602

On health related services, one of the partners ensured that 19 venezuelans could benefit with eye exams and new glasses due to the “Oftalmology workshop”. During March 59 individuals were provided with psychosocial support.

In March, 236 Venezuelans received information and/or legal assistance including documentation, access to asylum, access to rights and, legal residence. One of the partners supported 178 people to regularized in Costa Rica.

As result of one of a partnership with Universidad Latina on entrepreneurs, one of the partners assisted 15 venezuelans on the implementation of their projects A refugee workshop was organizing for training the lawyers in order to better support the protection response in Costa Rica. A massive campaign of food collection for vulnerable Venezuelans was initiated to support this population during the COVID-19 emergency

PANAMA

In March operational changes took place as result of the measures taken by the Panama Government to confront COVID-19. To ensure continuity of activities during the quarantine, partners came along with some innovative means and strategic ideas to keep serving the population; virtual sessions, WhatsApp groups, conference calls and updated information platforms were put in place.

To respond to the emergency, government has launched “Panama Solidario Plan”. This inclusive public policy contemplates the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all legally residing in Panama through cash delivery, vouchers for the purchase of food and medicine, and food bags. R4V partners will be supporting the implementation of this plan. All partners had ensured that reliable information regarding mobility, social policies to be implemented and financial remedies are being shared publicly. Help.org page was updated with accurate information regarding service provision, official information regarding mitigation and response decision.

In order to reduce risks of Gender based Violence, one of the partners continues coordinating gatherings with a community entity integrated by women from different nationalities, including Venezuelans. During reporting periods, this partner provided support services to 79 Venezuelan women.

In terms on economic inclusion during the contingency, partners are providing virtual courses through the Coursera Platform. A partner has provided Economic Inclusion services to 5 (4 women and 1 men) Venezuelans. Another partner started an entrepreneurship training addressed to Venezuelan entrepreneurs in Panamá Oeste, for 44 refugees and migrants.

Partners are developing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Programs, which was highlighted as one of the gaps due to the increasing anxiety and stress among the people of concern as consequence of the limited opportunities to find livelihoods during the emergency. So far, 7 (5 women and 2 men) Venezuelans has benefitted from this service.

Cash-based intervention continues in Panama. A total of 136 Venezuelan (70 women and 66 men) were given multipurpose cash for ensuring access to shelter, food and some civil rights. Another partner provided 96 Food Coupons, reaching 344 beneficiaries (165 women, 102 men, and 144 children); 10 Health Assistance Kits, reaching 10 beneficiaries (7 women, 3 children); and, 17 financial assistance to cover rent, reaching 57 beneficiaries (20 women, 14 men, 23 children). An anti-xenophobia campaign was conducted in social networks (#SomosLoMismo) and reached 239,000 people with messages.

MEXICO

Partners delivered Cash in the form of e-wallets for food assistance, multi-purpose cash grants (MPG), and additional top-ups for 47 individuals in March. Ten persons in Nuevo Laredo, five in Mexico City, one in Toluca and Queretaro respectively, received e-wallets for food assistance. Additionally, 30 e-wallet holders in Mexico City, Queretaro and Puebla received top-ups for the month.

Medical assistance was provided to eight Venezuelans in Mexico City, Querétaro and Playa del Carmen. Shelter Casa del Migrante Nazareth received supplies to start a medical consultancy which is expected to assist at least 50 Venezuelans. As of March, 12 Venezuelan refugees submitted their naturalization process before the Ministry of Foreign to obtain the Mexican citizenship. Due to the COVID-19 measures put in place in Mexico (as of 20 March), other cases already in the pipeline were put on hold until normal activities are resumed.