

# Rapid Livelihoods Assessment: Socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 emergency on Venezuelan refugees and migrants and Colombian IDPs in Antioquia and Chocó Departments



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# Rapid livelihoods assessment: Socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 emergency on Venezuelan refugees and migrants and Colombian IDPs in Antioquia and Chocó Departments

## Summary

Since 1997, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has worked to strengthen the asylum procedure for persons in need of international protection, contribute to the prevention of forced displacement and find durable solutions to allow displaced people to rebuild their lives. A durable solution is that which succeeds in putting an end to the cycle of displacement and allows displaced persons to resume normal lives in a safe environment.

Within this framework, the UNHCR Sub-office of Antioquia-Chocó, with field offices in Medellín, Apartadó (Department of Antioquia) and Quibdó (Department of Chocó), implements a wide range of activities to protect displaced persons and help them to achieve durable solutions.

The Sub-office has developed a protection and local integration strategy to attend to the needs of beneficiaries to promote their integration in their host communities in the departments of Antioquia and Chocó.



Photo 1: © UNHCR/Courtesy of Yexica Marcano, Graduation Model participant

Additionally, UNHCR has been implementing a livelihoods and economic inclusion strategy whose objective is to allow refugees, migrants and internally displaced people to become self-reliant in safe and dignified conditions. This livelihoods and economic inclusion Sub-office strategy has the following objectives:

1. Generate specific and differential livelihoods interventions for beneficiaries according to their level of vulnerability.
2. Include beneficiaries in existing public and private services and programs, with an emphasis on socio-economic programs and employment.

The current global health emergency due to the new coronavirus (COVID-19) is having a negative impact on the livelihoods of Venezuelan refugees and migrants and internally displaced persons, creating the need for UNHCR to design a strategy to contribute to the

early recovery of the population in the region. Accordingly, a rapid livelihoods assessment was carried out to:

1. Highlight the impact of the mandatory preventative isolation measures adopted by the Colombian Government on the livelihoods of UNHCR beneficiaries located in the Departments of Antioquia and Chocó.
2. Establish a strategy for the early recovery of livelihoods of UNHCR beneficiaries based on the results of the assessment.

## Key findings

The rapid livelihoods assessment on Venezuelan refugees and migrants and internally displaced people in the context of COVID-19 resulted in the following findings:

 <p><b>Needs</b></p> <p>The three main needs perceived by households are <b>nutrition (95%)</b>, <b>housing assistance (67%)</b> and <b>assistance in covering basic services</b>, water and electricity (67%).</p>	 <p><b>How needs are being met</b></p> <p>Households meet their basic needs through the <b>support of NGOs/humanitarian agencies/State Institutions /the private sector (40%)</b>, through <b>income from formal or informal work (31%)</b> and through the <b>support of relatives/friends/religious institutions (21%)</b>.</p>
 <p><b>Negative coping mechanisms</b></p> <p>For households to meet their basic needs during the COVID-19 health emergency, they resort to <b>reducing the quality or quantity of meals (11%)</b>, <b>not paying the rent in order to meet other needs (10%)</b> and <b>begging (4%)</b>.</p>	 <p><b>Remunerated activities</b></p> <p>Heads of households cannot go out to work due to the mandatory preventative isolation measures issued by the government (67%) <b>normally work from their homes</b>, teleworking (10%), <b>rotate members of the household to go out to work according</b> to the last digit of their ID (7%) were fired (4%) and <b>sell their productive assets (2%)</b>.</p>

 <p><b>Income and expenses</b> The <b>average weekly income</b> of households is <b>\$61,317 COP</b> while the <b>average weekly expenses</b> of households is <b>\$175,317 COP</b>. There is an evident <b>deficit</b> of <b>\$114,000 COP</b> for households to cover their weekly expenses.<sup>1</sup></p>	 <p><b>Savings and financial services</b> <b>49%</b> of households <b>used the savings they had</b>, while only <b>4%</b> of households <b>were able to save small amounts of money since the beginning of the health emergency</b>. The <b>household debt rate is 40%</b>, which is <b>15</b> percentage points higher than the before the health emergency.</p>
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## Recommendations

- Apply a multisectoral analysis (health, education, gender-based violence, etc.) of the specific protection needs generated by COVID-19 among refugees, migrants and internally displaced people in order to design a comprehensive response to their needs. This is based on the UNHCR strategy of protection and local integration in the sub region of Antioquia and Chocó adapted to the new social and economic dynamics of the localities.
- Develop a market and labor demand analysis in order to identify new labor opportunities and market niches generated in the new economic context of the localities.
- Strengthen the livelihoods and economic inclusion strategy of the UNHCR Antioquia-Chocó Sub-office in order to initiate the process of early recovery of beneficiaries' livelihoods.

## Early recovery strategy

### Stabilize livelihoods through the generation of additional income and the creation of emergency employment:

- Expand the implementation of the Graduation Model<sup>2</sup> to the greatest number of families in conditions of poverty and extreme poverty in order to offer a comprehensive response in early recovery (cash transfers, protection, livelihoods and economic inclusion, community participation).

<sup>1</sup> The amounts are equivalent to 15.13 USD, 43.89 USD and 28.84 USD, according to the UN Operational Rates of Exchange in May 2020: <https://treasury.un.org/operationalrates/OperationalRates.php>

<sup>2</sup> The Graduation Model is a sequential multisectoral intervention that supports the poorest and most vulnerable households in gathering assets (human, social, productive and financial) to improve their socio-economic conditions, improve their resilience and strengthen their economic independence, within a specific period of time.



Photo 2: ©UNHCR/Comfenalco Antioquia, Beneficiaries of market-based training processes.

- Extend the delivery of emergency multi-purpose cash transfers, which have no restrictions on their use, so that families are not obligated to sell their productive assets.
- Reinforce the components of cash transfers for livelihoods purposes (seed capital, productive reactivation subsidies, training subsidies, cash to contribute to wage-earning employment access, etc.) so that families may adapt to the new market dynamics and maintain their sources of generating income.

- Include beneficiaries in potential market niches (supply of goods and services); production of medical supplies (hospital linen, face masks, etc.) and supplies for shelters (blankets, sheets, etc.); production of protective and hygienic equipment such as face masks, disinfectant gel, cleaning products, etc.; assistance and front line services such as cleaning, commerce, call centers, etc.; and home delivery services.

### **Support the post-crisis socio-economic recovery through the sustainable reintegration of those internally displaced and refugees returning to their labor activities:**

- Strengthen the skills and capacities of beneficiaries through complimentary trainings in order to improve their employability in formal work or other wage-earning opportunities based on the needs of the markets.
- Design vocational courses in the areas of Technology, Connectivity, Digital Innovation where research shows an increase in potential jobs the new market dynamics post-COVID-19.
- Strengthen the capacity of the refugees, migrants and internally displaced people so they may better deal with future shocks through educational processes in personal and business finances.
- Promote the participation of beneficiaries in the "Coursera for Refugees<sup>3</sup>" program currently operating in the sub region of Antioquia and Chocó.

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<sup>3</sup> The "Coursera for Refugees" (<https://www.coursera.org/>) initiative aims to provide nonprofit organizations serving refugees with free access to Coursera courses, a recommended course list specifically for refugees, administrative features & support to effectively utilize Coursera, and a custom portal to connect with other nonprofits serving refugees.



Photo 3 © UNHCR/A. Hurtado. Graduation Model participant

- Create virtual training processes jointly with direct and strategic partners (for example, the National Training Service (SENA in Spanish), Family Compensation Fund Comfenalco Antioquia, etc.).
- Provide subsidies to supplement Internet and Wi-Fi access to improve digital literacy so beneficiary households can participate in different virtual activities and business trainings

### **Support the analysis and programming of livelihoods in contexts of conflict and disaster:**

- Application of the rapid livelihoods assessment tool in October and December of 2020 to evaluate the progress of the early recovery of livelihoods process, collect, and analyze data to plan for the 2021.

### **Promote the inclusion of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in national projects to strengthen livelihoods for vulnerable populations:**

- Mapping of existing services with national entities signing Letters of Understanding with national entities to support the State's capacity in matters of early recovery of livelihoods to benefit both displaced persons and host communities.