


 REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS  
 IN THE REGION

223,300


 PEOPLE REACHED WITH SOME  
 FORM OF ASSISTANCE\*

8,286



FUNDING SITUATION\*\*

-0%

FUNDED: -

REQUIREMENT: 18.4 M

## Situation

**The Government of Costa Rica (GoCR) has continued to impose travel restrictions and border closure, in response to COVID-19, with measures extended until 15 June.** Entry is permitted only for nationals and residents who must comply with a 14-day mandatory quarantine upon arrival. Foreigners with legal status have no option to re-enter the country, if they depart. Border rejections and subsequent responses may place Venezuelan refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants at risk.

The Immigration Authority has automatically extended the validity of identification documents and work permits for asylum seekers and refugees, and enabled an online work permit application system for asylum seekers. New directives on access to asylum, issued on 24 April, require all asylum seekers to lodge their claims at the border. Those who entered the country prior the 18 March border closure who may submit their application via email showing proof of date of entry to Costa Rica. These new directives might pose additional challenges to asylum seekers, and further extend the waiting times and the backlog of cases (25,913 as of 1 April 2020). Those awaiting documentation do not have access to healthcare services, beyond life-saving emergencies or COVID-19 treatment; regular medical attention is a paramount, particularly for those in at-risk groups.

Social distancing protocols and public health restrictions have resulted in many Venezuelans losing their jobs, affecting their livelihoods and ability to meet their basic needs. As a result, requests for food security and shelter are growing rapidly. Refugees, asylum seekers report that they are unable to access the GoCR's national assistance program "Bono Proteger" providing unemployment and under-employment cash assistance. Advocacy efforts continue for the inclusion of these groups in the COVID-19 relief programs.

**In Mexico, airports and borders have remained open with a significant reduction in transit due to other countries' travel restrictions.** As of 30 April 2020, Ministry of Health has confirmed the number of COVID-19 cases as 19,224, with a death toll of 1,859. Immigration authorities, as of 26 April, began releasing the population from detention centers, in efforts to reduce spread of the virus. On 30 April, Ministry of Foreign Affairs released an agreement extending the suspension of several activities due to COVID-19, including the reception of naturalization processes until May 30th. Similarly, the suspension of Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures has severely affected Venezuelan asylum-seekers waiting for a RSD decision, delaying the possibility of obtaining migratory documentation (permanent residency permits). As a result of COVID-19 and the measures in place to prevent the spread, there has been increase in Venezuelans requesting assistance, mainly in Mexico City and Monterrey.

**The Government of Panama has extended the general curfew, prohibited power cuts, and businesses remain closed as the State of Emergency continues.** Over the month of April, cases of COVID-19 infections have continued to increase from 1,317 to 6,532, and death toll from 32 to 188. Evictions are prohibited during the state of emergency and a complaints mechanism has been established for families forced to vacate their homes. The National Immigration Service has extended the validity of residence permits until 15 May and the Ministry of Labor has extended the validity of the work permits until 30 May. Likewise, validity of asylum seekers IDs has been extended to mid-May for all the documents that expired in March and April. The suspension of all international flights has been extended for 30 days from 22 April. Humanitarian flights and those necessary for the transport of products and public health supplies are excepted. A group of 320 Venezuelan people have reported being stranded in Panama due to air restrictions. They requested support to return to Venezuela on humanitarian flights.

The Venezuelan population is affected due to the restrictions. Overall, the need for food, health and safe housing are significantly increasing and the Government's "Plan Panamá Solidario" is based on the discretion of people in charge in the distribution zones, although some asylum seekers, refugees and migrants have reported receiving food bags and vouchers. Over than 91,000 employment contracts were suspended, with the authorization of the temporary suspension of employment contracts automatically extended for another 30 days. Home delivery workers have announced work stoppage demanding better pay and working conditions. Many Venezuelan population is working under this modality.

## Response

### Costa Rica

Most R4V partners implemented teleworking and are adapting to observe the social distancing protocols due to COVID-19 implementing some activities via telephone and online platforms. 500 asylum seekers per week are processed remotely and adapted inclusion criteria to ensure all high-risk categories are included in the program. For the month of April 2020, 512 Venezuelans were processed; 404 individuals that were newly registered while 108 individuals from the existing record underwent verification interview. Of the 512 individuals processed, 58.9% (302 individuals) were identified to have various specific needs, and referrals for assistance were made to 44 individuals for food assistance, psycho-social assistance, livelihoods and legal aid. In April, 316 Venezuelans received medical insurance and 91 Venezuelan family groups received CBI. Humanitarian food assistance has been distributed to 582 people and an additional 202 people received NFIs. Psychosocial support was available to 88 people during April. Information and/or legal assistance documentation, access to asylum, access to rights and legal residence was provided to 51 Venezuelans and support to regularize 139 people. Further 37 Venezuelan businessmen received assistance from CBI (microcredit). The concerns and queries of Venezuelans on immigration, legal and labor issues continue to be addressed through different platforms: telephone (75) and email (81) and Facebook (3) on immigration, legal and labor issues and psychological assistance.

### Mexico

Partners delivered 184 new e-wallets for food security to Venezuelans who lost their job during the COVID-19 emergency. 323 asylum seekers from Venezuela benefited from CBI to meet their basic needs and 319 Venezuelans received sectoral top-ups addressing some protection related risks identified (including Contingency top-up for COVID-19). Sixteen people in four cities in the country was benefited from medical treatment for chronic conditions. An anti-xenophobia campaign to prevent discrimination against migrants due to COVID-19 was launched and reached over 476,294 people. Over 2,560 COVID-19 prevention leaflets were delivered to children in shelters. Partners held two online courses were held on seeking jobs during COVID-19 and starting formally or informally opening a business from home.

### Panama

Partners have continued to adapt their services to teleworking restrictions, using digital and technological communication strategies. Information dissemination on services including GBV and housing and legal counselling on rights and access to asylum was provided to 172 migrants and refugees. The need for food and safe housing has increased significantly due to the economic downturn. In the provinces of Panama and Panama Oeste partners address the needs of most vulnerable, providing 155 food coupons and reaching 565 migrants (206 women, 137 men and 222 children) and short-term shelter to 54 migrants and refugees, allowing them to cover their basic needs including food, medicine and hygiene items and abide by quarantine measures. Partners have carried out economic inclusion activities, including access for refugees to the Coursera platform and virtual sessions with messages that promote a culture of peace during the pandemic, reaching 29 young people.

To support integration and peaceful coexistence, a digital platform for online soccer training for families of asylum seekers and refugees and Panamanians was launched. The initiative provides access to sports training and advices to girls, boys, adolescents and their families, in the safety of their homes.

Partners have adapted the CBI process in the context of COVID-19 and a total of 106 Venezuelans were supported (65 women and 41 men). In addition, one partner delivered multipurpose cash to meet basic needs and to access rights to an additional 11 people (5 men, 6 women). Delivery of hygiene items, including masks and antibacterial gels and soaps continues to be distributed.

A social networks campaign, #SomosLoMismo, reached 43,000 people with anti-xenophobia messages about the importance of not spreading stigma and to show solidarity and empathy with the situation of migrants and refugees in the context of the pandemic. More information at [www.somoslomismo.com](http://www.somoslomismo.com).



PEOPLE REACHED\*



Education

379



Food Security

2,217



Health

138



Integration

1,342



Protection

2,448



Shelter

17



CBI

1,076