



International
Labour
Organization

Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean

ILO RESPONSE COVID-19 UPDATE

July 2020



CURRENT SITUATION

Since 2015, approximately 5.1 million refugees and migrants have left Venezuela due to the worsening social, economic, human rights and political situation in the country. The humanitarian emergency resulted in an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants into neighbouring states and beyond. This represents the largest displacement of a population in the modern history of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Neighbouring countries have so far shown great solidarity, providing over 2.5 million incoming Venezuelans with temporary residence permits and access to the labour market. However, their capacity to respond to such an inflow of people is limited, and both institutions and local communities have been put under enormous strain. In 2020, these challenges have been further exacerbated by the outbreak of COVID-19 and the measures taken by governments to prevent the spread of the virus, such as social distancing and lockdowns.

The dramatic impact on employment and incomes has put host countries' labour market institutions and social protection systems to the test, as well as challenged their capacity to maintain previous levels of solidarity. In economies characterized by high levels of informality, Venezuelan refugees and migrants find themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation: the loss of livelihoods, in the absence of sufficient savings or access to social protection services, has generated an increase in poverty and marginalization. Venezuelan refugees and migrant workers, as well as national workers, might be facing many of the same challenges when it comes to providing for themselves and their families. On the other hand, precarious legal status and mobility restrictions - along with stress related to forced displacement - constitute an additional burden for Venezuelan refugees and workers abroad.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, refugee workers were already likely to earn less than their national peers, making them move vulnerable to income loss, the rising price of daily commodities and unforeseen health costs. Without necessary livelihoods and access to services, Venezuelan refugees and migrants find themselves unable to comply with health and hygiene rules. Episodes of discrimination, xenophobia and stigmatization against Venezuelan refugees and migrants (including related to fears of the spreading of the virus) have also increased, further reducing the capacity for communities to integrate. Furthermore, the crisis could contribute to the development of known drivers of conflict such as grievances, discrimination and mistrust as well as a sense of injustice over access to health services, decent jobs and livelihoods, risking socio-economic development, social cohesion and peace across the region.



Source: RMRP 2020 For Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, p. 8

THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

At the request of the UN Secretary General, the [Inter-Agency Regional Coordination Platform \(R4V\)](#) was established in April 2018, under the coordination of UNHCR and IOM. The ILO, through its Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean in Lima, Peru, is working closely with both agencies, to coordinate RV4 interventions in the **Socio Economic and Cultural Integration** sector. Working with key national and international actors, the ILO has developed an intervention model to address the socio-economic needs of both displaced Venezuelans and host communities.

The [regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan \(RMRP\) May 2020 Revision](#) was developed by 151 organizations as a way of ensuring a region-wide response as well as joint collaboration among governments in the region and the international community, while adjusting to the current context of COVID-19. Developed in line with governments' priorities, the plan addresses the protection, assistance and integration needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the affected states of Latin America and the Caribbean, by complementing and strengthening national and regional responses, in line with the principles of the [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#), the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) and the [Global Compact on Refugees](#).

In addition, affected governments in the region issued the '[Declaration of Quito on human mobility of Venezuelan citizens in the region](#)' and its related [action plan](#) was signed in September 2018 by Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. The Declaration recognizes the importance of ensuring Venezuelans' access to employment opportunities and the role of technical and financial cooperation of specialized international organizations to overcome this crisis. The ILO has been supporting the implementation of the [Road Map](#) of the Quito Process by providing technical assistance to its participating countries, including their labour ministries.



ILO'S COORDINATED RESPONSE STRATEGY

The ILO continues to support governments in their efforts to include migrants and refugees in the COVID-19 response and recovery process to build back better, more inclusive economies and societies, through advocacy and social dialogue with its social partners. The ILO has developed concrete tools and distilled emerging good practices that can help host countries to strengthen labour markets and respond appropriately to this type of crisis situations. ILO's tripartite constituents have adopted the [Guiding principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market](#) in 2016 and the [Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 \(No. 205\)](#), reaffirming the Organization's mandate and commitment to promoting resilience, peace, and social cohesion, while also equipping constituents with the tools to do so.

The ILO's approach focuses on improving the functioning of the labour market and the expansion of decent employment opportunities as key enablers for the transition from humanitarian to development outcomes, especially in protracted crisis situations. The ILO's unique labour market systems assessments are helping inform new policies and programmes in 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica and Argentina, and are being deployed in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and the Dominican Republic. Additionally the ILO is promoting, jointly with UNHCR, access to employment, entrepreneurship and social protection under the Comprehensive Refugee Response Frameworks in Costa Rica, Honduras and Mexico; many beneficiaries of this programme are Venezuelans.

As co-coordinator of the Socioeconomic and Cultural Integration Sector of the R4V Platform, the ILO has been working with UNDP on a Regional Strategy for the socioeconomic integration of Venezuelan refugees and migrants. The strategy has been adapted to respond to the challenges posed by COVID-19, focusing its interventions on refugees and migrants most affected by physical distance measures.

Across the region, the ILO is building the capacity of key stakeholders in destination countries (such as Ministries of Labour, employers and workers' organizations and businesses) to improve the governance and capacity of public policies to respond to the needs of both Venezuelans and host communities in all interventions undertaken in different areas of the world of work, based in tripartite social dialogue. It promotes the observance of the rights of working people and those seeking work, including their right to organize and defend those rights while guaranteeing access to justice system to claim them. Likewise, it includes a rights-based and gender-sensitive approach to address the socio-economic drivers that deepen inequalities between women and men.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ILO is promoting social cohesion in host communities through interventions that ensure the visibility of Venezuelan workers' contribution to the mitigation of COVID-19, with a special focus on the health sector and other essential activities.

The ILO's response strategy is articulated as follows:

CURRENT SITUATION

STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

MIGRATION AND LABOUR POLICIES FRAMEWORKS

- The capacity of public institutions to provide effective protection of labour rights to refugee and migrant workers and guarantee social protection is under substantial strain, in particular due to the effects of COVID-19, highlighting the need for extending social protection to groups who are not covered.
- Support states to adapt legislation, policies and regulations, to enable the socio-economic integration of refugees and migrants and ensure alignment with international labour standards, guidance and good practices, including the [ILO Guiding Principles on the access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market](#).
- Strengthen the capacities of labour ministries, employers' and workers' organizations and other relevant institutions on the relevant international labour standards and good practices and reflected in responses to ensuring decent work for host communities and for refugees and migrants.
- Strengthen the coordination of labour ministries and other key institutions in migration policy (such as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministries of Interior/Home Affairs).
- Support the response of institutions to reduce the risk of child labour, based on the ILO Regional Initiative "[Latin America and Caribbean Free of Child Labour](#)". The Initiative has adapted its work plan to the emergency of COVID-19 in the short and in the medium term.

EMPLOYMENT PERSPECTIVE

- According to a survey conducted in Brazil, Colombia and Peru, employment prospects are uncertain among people over 25 years of age, even though 32% have a higher education and 44% have a secondary education.*
- In the same survey, it was found that, at the time of the survey, 56% of women reported being unemployed, against 47% of men who reported being unemployed.
- In the same countries, it was reported that respectively, 12%, 14% and 18% received a lower pay for their work than had been promised to them.
- The majority of work is in the informal economy, which is characterized by its unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, without access to basic labour rights and minimum wage regulations. The risk of child and forced labour also increases considerably.
- Strengthen public employment services in the areas of employment services, orientation and intermediation and to facilitate the access of refugees and migrants to the programmes and available services.
- Collection and systematization of data on demand for labour and existing skills to facilitate integration in the labour market.
- Promotion of soft-skills training, vocational training programmes and trainings in areas of greater demand in the labour market.

RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION OF PREVIOUS LEARNING

- The majority of Venezuelan refugees and migrants with secondary and university education are underemployed
- The certification of prior learning is expensive and its administrative procedures are long.
- Learning opportunities are disrupted due to the impact of COVID-19 on educational institutions.
- Simplify procedures and requirements for the
- recognition of prior learning for refugees and migrants, in particular for essential workers, such as those in the health sector.
- Establish a regional framework of qualifications based on existing regional agreements.
- Advocate for the positive impact of recognition of prior learning and how it can help the host country to address the labour shortage/skill gaps.
- Promote distance/online learning as an alternative to face to face teaching and practical skills training.

CURRENT SITUATION

STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND VALUE CHAINS

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to loans, as well as programmes and business advisory services and entrepreneurship promotion programmes is limited for refugees and migrants. • Available information is insufficient to establish productive chains with larger companies, in order to safeguard a small and emerging company. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify productive sectors and value chains to target with pilot interventions. • Improve the functioning of high-potential local value chains and market systems in order to create sustainable business opportunities for refugees, migrants, and host communities. • Enhance business development and financial advisory services for the creation and consolidation of companies that allow access for refugees and migrants. • Strengthen policies promoting micro, small and Medium Enterprises. • Implement ILO business methodologies such as Start your Own Business (SYB) and GET AHEAD. |
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SOCIAL PROTECTION

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women work fewer hours due to lack of or difficulty in accessing care services for their children. • Venezuelan refugees and migrants, but also some host community members, face barriers to accessing social protection and health services, primarily because they are often employed in the informal sector. • Due to the interruption of their social security contributions, Venezuelan refugees and migrants, as well as vulnerable host community members risk losing the right to benefits. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote social protection for refugee and migrant workers and their families, based on ILO International Standards. • Extend social protection to refugees and migrants affected by confinement and physical distancing measures, especially those who work in the informal sector and those who are in irregular migratory condition. • Support social protection institutions to analyse barriers and adopt measures and processes to overcome them. • Support stakeholders of the social protection system to extend coverage in a socially and financially sustainable fashion. • Promote the negotiation and signing of agreements to coordinate social security regimes between countries in order to foster more resilient and crisis responsive systems. |
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SOCIAL COHESION AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large numbers of refugees and migrants have fuelled xenophobic attitudes and the proliferation of hostile news articles. These behaviours have increased the risk of social tensions between host and displaced populations and led to several security incidents. • Refugees and migrants' reduced access to health facilities and difficulties in complying with hygiene rules have further exacerbated discrimination and stigmatization. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce conflict prevention and social cohesion in the current context and in the post-pandemic phase, through social dialogue platforms and communication channels, raising awareness on the importance of decent work for refugees, migrants and host communities. • Equip refugees, migrants and host communities with conflict management skills. • Deploy ILO's Jobs for Peace and Resilience (JPR) programme to sustain social cohesion through the creation of businesses and cooperatives, particularly joint ventures between host communities, refugees and migrants among other job creation interventions. • Encourage social cohesion through balanced job generating programmes for refugees migrants, and host community members. |
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A MULTI-PHASED APPROACH

Since the Venezuelan refugee and migrant situation is protracted, the intervention strategy foresees a multi-phased approach. The ILO's mandate, positioned at the core of the humanitarian-development nexus, is consistent with the provision of both immediate livelihood solutions for the affected population and longer-term institutional solutions to ensure sustainable and rights-based public policies.



In the **short term**, ILO is collecting data on existing skills in order to create work profiles of displaced Venezuelans to facilitate labour market inclusion, and develop employment generation strategies in both urban and rural areas. Alliances are being established with the private sector and workers' organizations, to align employment supply and demand. Technical advice is being provided to simplify the procedures for the recognition of prior learning. Efforts are ongoing to strengthen institutional capacities to extend social protection to refugees and migrants. Also, ILO advocates for the inclusion of refugees and migrants in national plans to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, as well as awareness-raising activities to promote social cohesion and prevent xenophobia in the recovery phase.



In the **medium term**, it is necessary to strengthen institutional mechanisms, practices and services offered by labour market (public and private) stakeholders to refugees and migrants, both in urban and rural areas, without displacing local workers. This includes technical assistance to National Employment Systems to update their services and make them more inclusive by introducing new procedures and guidelines. Mechanisms for social dialogue have to be promoted and strengthened in the decision-making processes around the recovery from COVID-19.



In the **long term**, intervention strategies should enhance the national and regional normative frameworks and governance mechanisms on labour migration and forced displacement, while developing institutional capacities of central and local governments to expand labour market access, under decent working conditions, for refugees and migrants and for the communities hosting them.

RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

In order to ensure a response in the shortest time possible, **the ILO committed US\$ 2 million** from its un-earmarked voluntary funds ([Regular Budget Supplementary Account](#)) in 2018 to kick-start seed interventions in Ecuador (Quito and Guayaquil), Colombia (Barranquilla and Cali) and Peru (North of Lima) in 2019. With an additional **US\$ 2 million** in support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and **US\$ 3 million** (€ 2.6 million) from the European Union, the ILO is further providing support for the economic integration and decent work of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Ecuador (Cuenca, Manta and Santo Domingo) and Peru (Lima, Piura, Arequipa and Trujillo), Costa Rica and Mexico.

Beyond this, the ILO estimates **a funding gap of US\$ 8.4 million in voluntary resources** (out of a target total of US\$ 13 million), to cover the implementation of its strategy on the socio-economic integration of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and the Caribbean.

