

Humanitarian assistance for Venezuelan refugees and migrants during the pandemic: what has changed over time?

This snapshot offers an analysis on how the trends in assistance needed and received among Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia and Peru have changed since the COVID-19 crisis began. It aims to contribute towards a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, as well as advocacy efforts related to the situation of refugees and migrants during the coronavirus pandemic.

Results presented in this snapshot are indicative: sample composition varied somewhat for each month and has not been weighted, and may therefore account for some of the differences in findings. The adaptation of 4Mi data collection to the constraints imposed by COVID-19 has included referrals of respondents by NGOs providing cash-based assistance, which means people receiving assistance are certain to make up a proportion of the sample: the percentage of Venezuelans who are receiving this specific assistance among the general refugee and migrant population is probably lower than in our findings.

Recommendations

- Consider shifting from an acute, sudden, crisis response, to a focus on more protracted needs and adapting protection and assistance services accordingly, including by supporting access to income-generating activities.
- In parallel, support refugees' and migrants' empowerment and self-reliance by advocating for regularization of immigration status, which will improve access to livelihood opportunities and access to public services.
- In the meantime, continue to provide cash assistance to make sure that refugees and migrants can cover their most pressing needs.

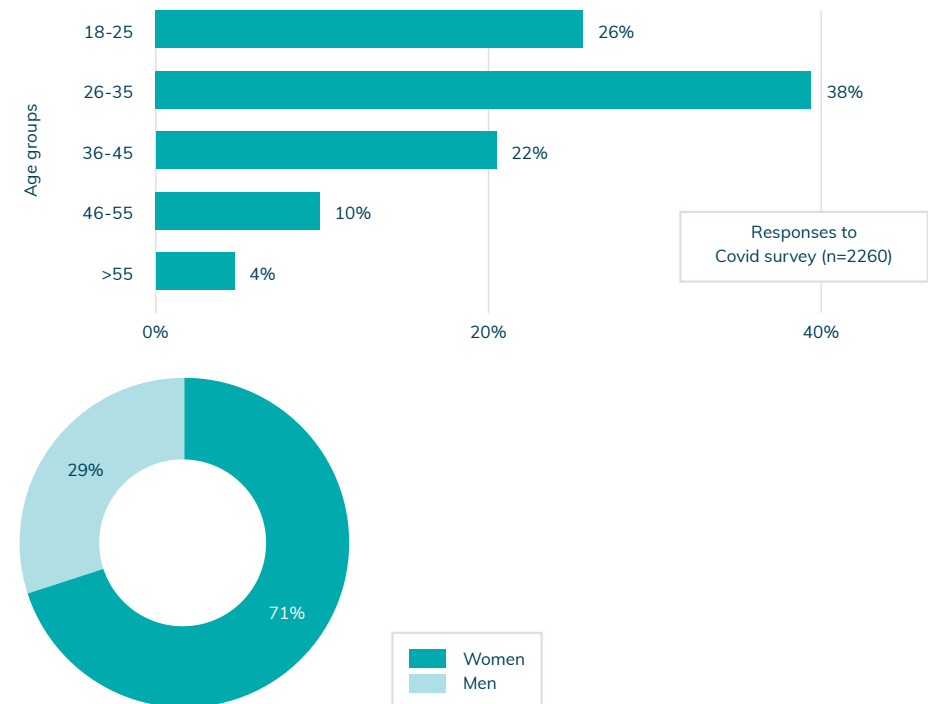
Profiles

This analysis is based on 2260 surveys conducted between 6 April and 30 October 2020. Data collection was mainly carried out remotely by phone, except for one location in Colombia where 4Mi monitors resumed in-person interviews in October.

73% of respondents were interviewed in Colombia and 27% in Peru. 25% of those surveyed in Colombia were in the country's capital Bogotá, 20% in Ipiales, 19% in Riohacha, 13% in Barranquilla, 9% in Cucuta, and the remaining 14% in 16 other cities. 62% of those surveyed in Peru were in Lima, 30% in Arequipa, and the remaining 8% in six other cities. The exact distribution of respondents across locations varied slightly from month to month.

71% of all respondents were women and 29% were men. The proportion of women and men remained the same from April to October 2020. The average age of respondents was 33.

Figure 1. Age range and sex



Prevention measures during the outbreak of COVID-19

Colombia and Peru aimed at containing the spread of COVID-19 by adopting prevention measures, including temporary restrictions to freedom of movement. In both countries, COVID-19 mitigation measures strongly restrained mobility within the country and impacted the economy. Such restrictions were then partially lifted, with different modalities in the two countries. In Colombia, mandatory self-isolation began in March 24 and ended on September 1. In Peru, the government announced the lockdown on 15 March 2020 and extended it through June 30.

As indicated in a previous snapshot¹, the crisis and the measures adopted by national and local authorities to prevent the spread of the pandemic had a strong adverse impact for refugees and migrants, in particular with regard to access to work. As most Venezuelans in both Colombia and Peru work in the informal economy, staying at home in compliance with mandatory self-isolation orders often lead to a loss of income, negatively impacting their living conditions and access to basic services.

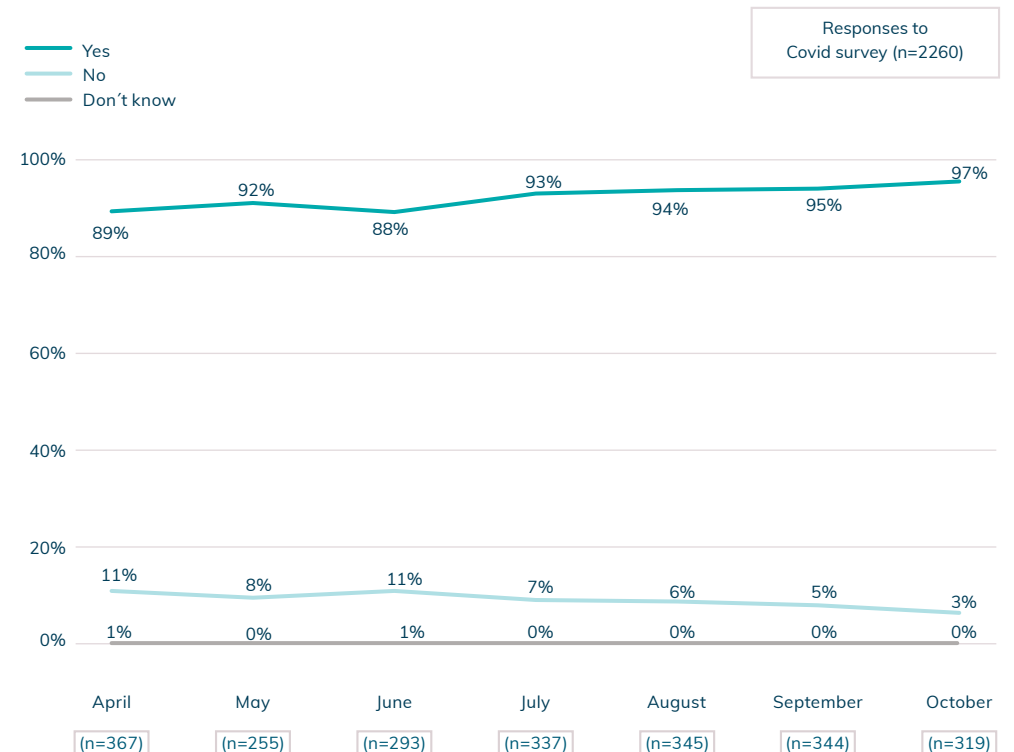
“I came from Venezuela with my family. We used to live in a house here, but we had to leave as we had no money to pay the rent. Now we live all together in one room, in a house with nine more Venezuelan families. Before self-isolation measures were imposed, I worked cleaning homes, but I had to stop; my daughters also lost their jobs; only one of my sons-in-law is working”.

55-year-old woman in Villa del Rosario (Colombia)

92% of respondents reported needing extra help since the pandemic began

In April, shortly after the pandemic reached Latin America, 89% of respondents reported needing extra help. Despite the partial lifting of COVID-related restrictions initiated since July in Peru and September in Colombia, this indicator has remained very high, and even increased, reaching almost the totality of respondents (97%) in October (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Are you in need of extra help since the coronavirus outbreak began?



Differences between the two countries of interview seem to have disappeared over time. In April, 78% of respondents in Peru reported a need of extra help, 11% less than in Colombia. By October, the figure was the same in both countries.

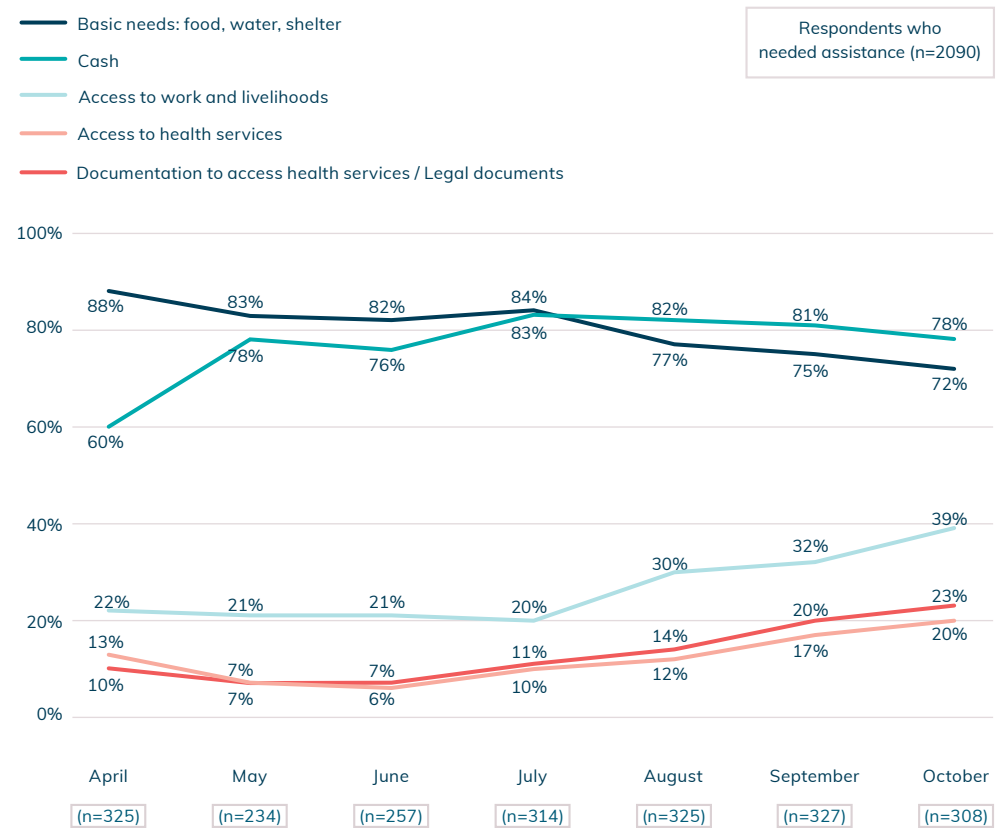
1 MMC (2020) [Impact of COVID-19 on Venezuelan refugees and migrants](#).

Need for cash assistance remains high, while need for livelihoods increases

Respondents were asked what kind of assistance they needed. Analysis of the monthly trend for the different answer options shows that the need for assistance to cover basic relief (food, water, shelter) decreased over time, from being mentioned by 88% of respondents in April to 72% in October. The other types of assistance, on the contrary, show an increasing tendency (see Figure 3). The need for cash assistance, for instance, gradually became as important as basic needs were during the first four months of the pandemic. The need for assistance in accessing work and livelihoods also increased during the last three months of the analyzed dataset, indicating that refugees and migrants would like to go beyond the emergency assistance phase and be able to support themselves, especially as COVID-related restrictions to freedom of movement and economic activities were lifted.

These trends are similar in the two countries of interview, but more pronounced in Peru. While, in Colombia, the proportion of respondents reporting basic needs decreased from 89% in April to 80% in October, in Peru it fell from 84% to 53% during the same period. The need for cash increased from 59% to 72% between April and October in Colombia, and from 64% up to 93% in Peru.

Figure 3. Type of assistance needed



Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.

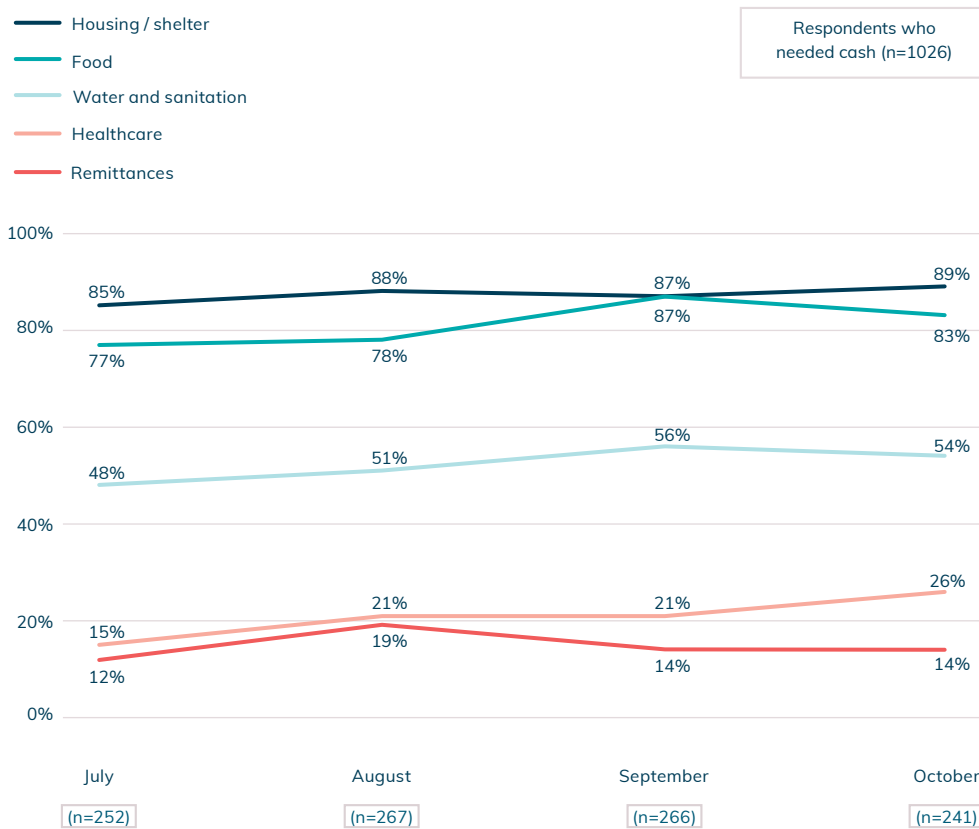
Note: 9 response options were omitted with averages lower than 10%.

“I am worried that we are not paying rent because we do not have money. The little money we have left, we have to stretch it for food”.

41-year-old Venezuelan woman in Cucuta (Colombia)

When asked what they would need cash for, respondents interviewed between July and October consistently indicated paying the rent as the main purpose (see Figure 4). Refugees and migrants in Colombia and Peru have often faced the danger of eviction from their accommodation during the pandemic. Respondents interviewed during those four months also mentioned a need for cash to cover other basic necessities: buying food was the second most frequently mentioned purpose, followed by water and sanitation, and accessing health services. Sending remittances to relatives in Venezuela was the fifth most frequently mentioned purpose for needing cash assistance during this period.

Figure 4. What do you need the cash for?

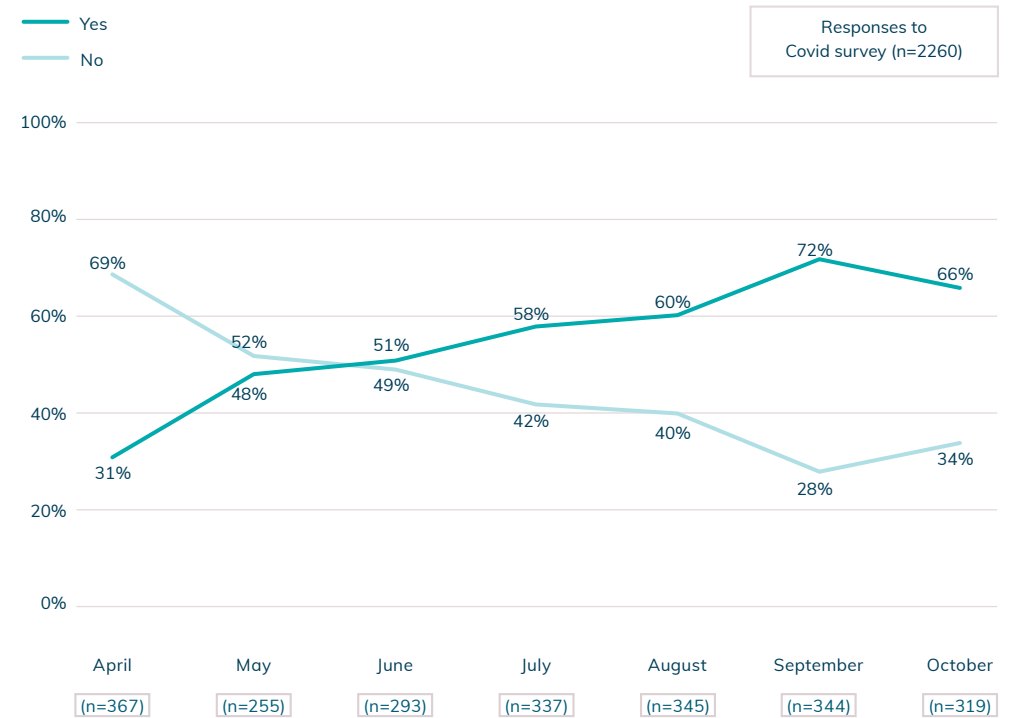


Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.
 Note: 3 response options were omitted with averages less than 11%.

Share of respondents who received additional assistance steadily increased during the pandemic, but gaps persist

Monthly results show a gradual increase in the proportion of respondents who received assistance, from 31% in April 2020 to 66% in October, September seeing the peak, with 72% of respondents having received additional assistance (see Figure 5). However, considerable gaps still remain between the share of respondents who needed additional assistance and those who received it.

Figure 5. Have you received additional assistance since the coronavirus crisis began?



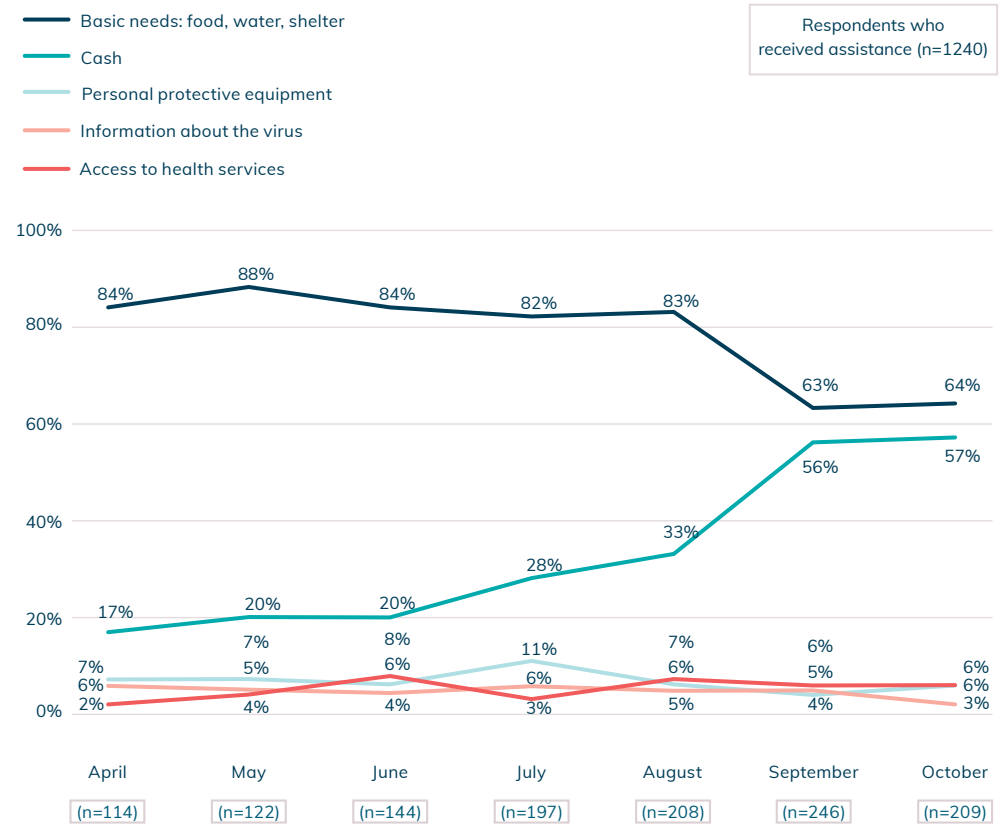
Provision of cash assistance became more common during the COVID-19 pandemic

Data collected about the type of assistance received by respondents seems to mirror the kind of assistance they needed. The main type of assistance received by refugees and migrants interviewed between April and October has been coverage of basic needs such as food, water and shelter, followed by cash assistance.

These two types of assistance received followed opposite trends over time: there was an increase in reported cash support and a fall in basic relief from August (see Figure 6).

Respondents did mention receiving other forms of assistance, although the proportions remain very low throughout the entire data collection period: this included personal protective equipment (7% of all respondents), information about the virus (5%) and assistance in accessing health services (5%).

Figure 6. Type of assistance received



Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.

Note: 6 response options were omitted with averages less than 4%.

4Mi & COVID-19

The [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative](#) (4Mi) is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements. Normally, the recruitment of respondents and interviews take place face-to-face. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face recruitment and data collection has been suspended in all countries.

MMC has responded to the COVID-19 crisis by changing the data it collects and the way it collects it. Respondents are recruited through a number of remote or third-party mechanisms; sampling is through a mixture of purposive and snowball approaches. A new survey focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants, and the surveys are administered by telephone, by the 4Mi monitors in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia and Latin America. Findings derived from the surveyed sample should not be used to make inferences about the total population of refugees and migrants, as the sample is not representative. The switch to remote recruitment and data collection results in additional potential bias and risks, which cannot be completely avoided. Further measures have been put in place to check and – to the extent possible – control for bias and to protect personal data. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

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