

# Assistance needed and received by Venezuelan refugees and migrants during the COVID-19 outbreak in Colombia

This snapshot focuses on the assistance needed and received by Venezuelan refugees and migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic in five Colombian regions: Atlántico, Cundinamarca, La Guajira, Norte de Santander and Nariño. 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.

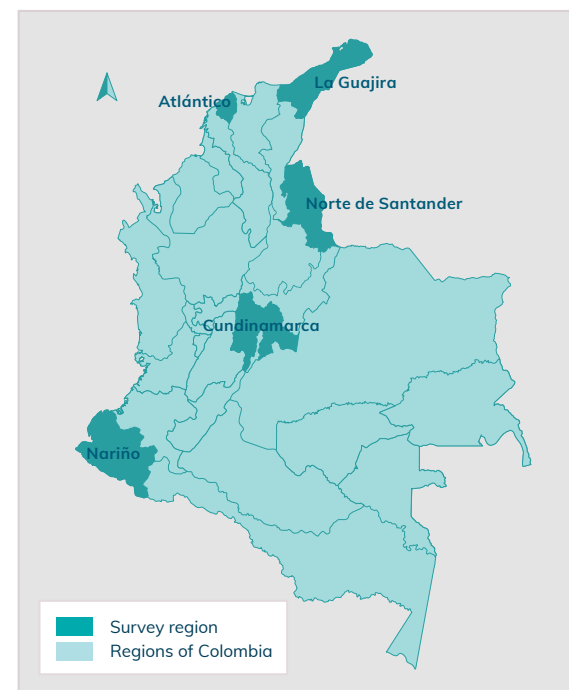
## Highlights

- Needs are high among respondents across regions, but data shows higher assistance needs among respondents in Colombia's border departments, including both the border with Venezuela and the one with Ecuador.
- Overall, the most frequent needs reported by respondents were food and cash, but results show significant variations according to the region. While surveys from Atlántico and Cundinamarca show the highest need for housing-related assistance, those from Norte de Santander present the highest need for access to work and livelihoods. La Guajira, on its part, is the region with the highest need for food, while Nariño is the region with the greatest reported need for cash.
- If they received cash assistance, respondents in all five regions would mainly use it to cover housing and food.
- Respondents in Cundinamarca least frequently reported receiving assistance, suggesting difficulties in access to assistance for refugees and migrants settled in Colombia's capital district.
- Data shows strong gaps between refugees' and migrants' assistance needs and the assistance they received. Among other things, almost no respondent received support in accessing work and/or livelihood opportunities and documentation, despite the high demand.

## Profiles

The analysis is based on 1,615 surveys implemented between July 2020 and January 2021, partially by face-to-face interviews and partially remotely, by phone. At the time of the survey, 23% of respondents were located in the Cundinamarca region, 22% in La Guajira, 20% in Nariño, 16% in Atlántico and 18% in Norte de Santander.<sup>1</sup>

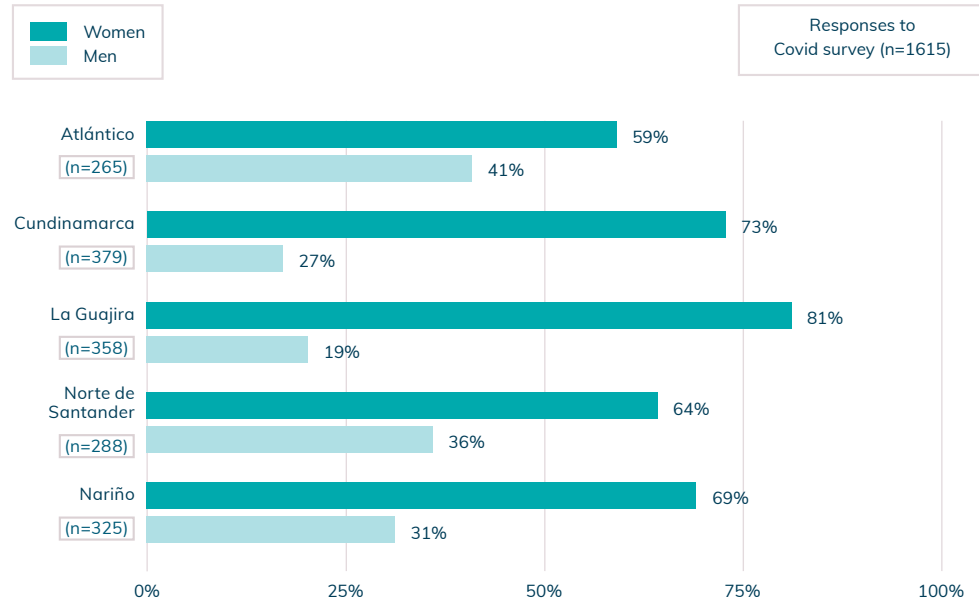
### Map 1. Survey regions



70% of all respondents were women and 30% were men. At the regional level, this proportion changes slightly, but women represent the majority of respondents in all locations (see Figure 1).

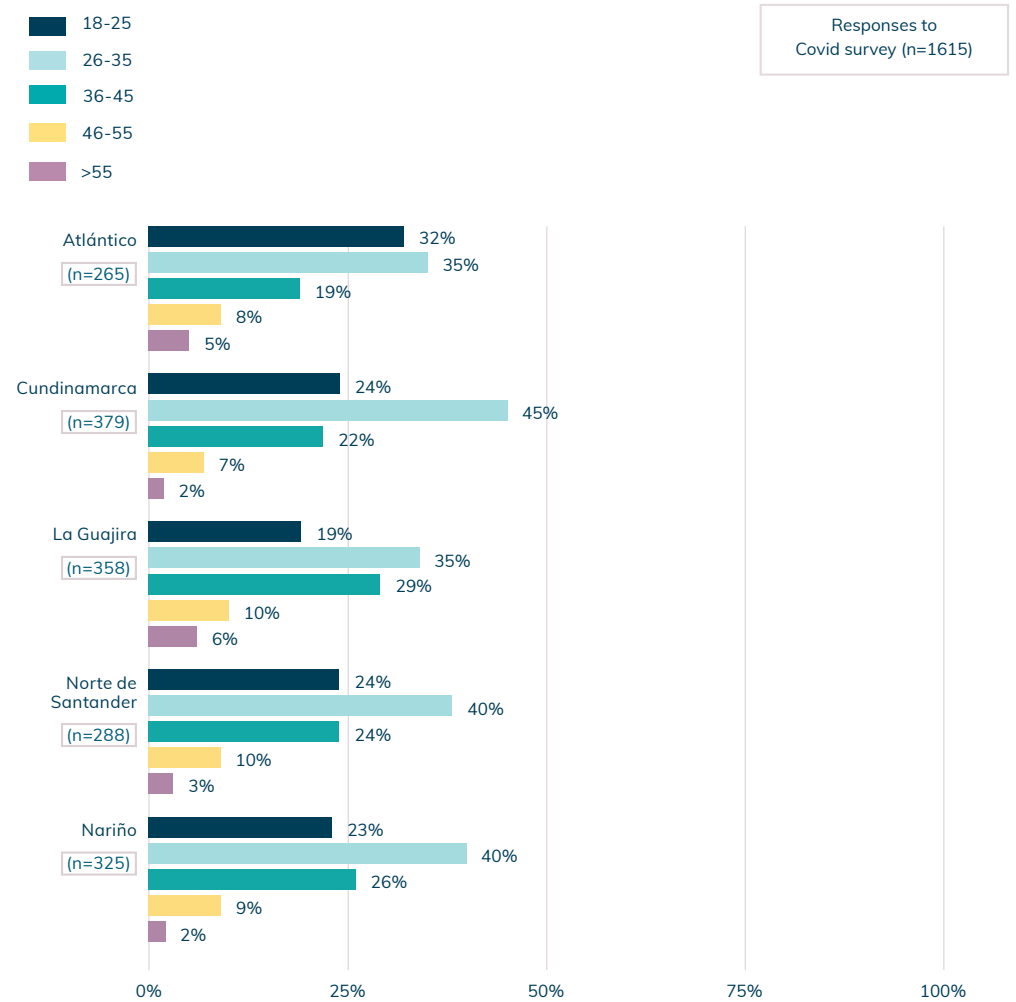
<sup>1</sup> Between 97% and 100% of the people surveyed were located in the capital cities of each region, except in the region of Norte de Santander, where 57% were in the capital city and the remaining percentage were in regions such as Villa del Rosario (22%), Pamplona (19%) and Chinácota (2%).

**Figure 1. Sex by survey region**



The average age among respondents was 33.4 years. Age ranges were similar in each region (see Figure 2). Note that findings are indicative as sampling is non-probabilistic: sample composition varied somewhat for each month and has not been weighted and may therefore account for some of the differences in findings. In particular, there are slight differences by month for age and sex, and larger differences for survey location.

**Figure 2. Age ranges by survey region**

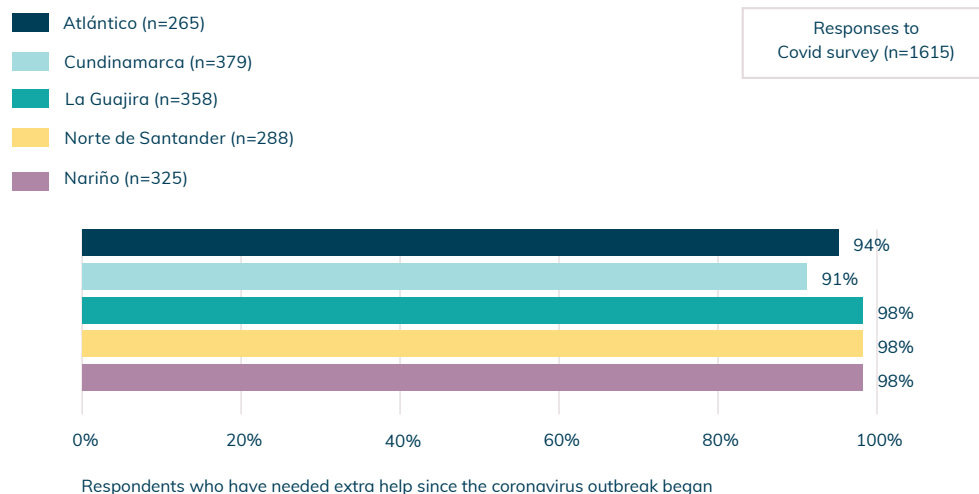


## Respondents in border regions indicate the greatest assistance needs

96% of respondents reported needing additional assistance during the COVID-19 outbreak. Although the level of reported need is extremely high in all locations, border regions (La Guajira, Norte de Santander and Nariño) show significantly<sup>2</sup> higher levels of reported needs (see Figure 3).

In the non-border regions where 4Mi operates (Atlántico and Cundinamarca), data is collected in larger cities with a higher level of urban and economic development, offering relatively better access to job opportunities and/or alternative means of subsistence for Venezuelan refugees and migrants. In contrast, 4Mi in border areas operates in smaller cities with more precarious (and informal) economies, offering more limited opportunities to people on the move.

**Figure 3. Are you in need of extra help since the coronavirus outbreak began?**

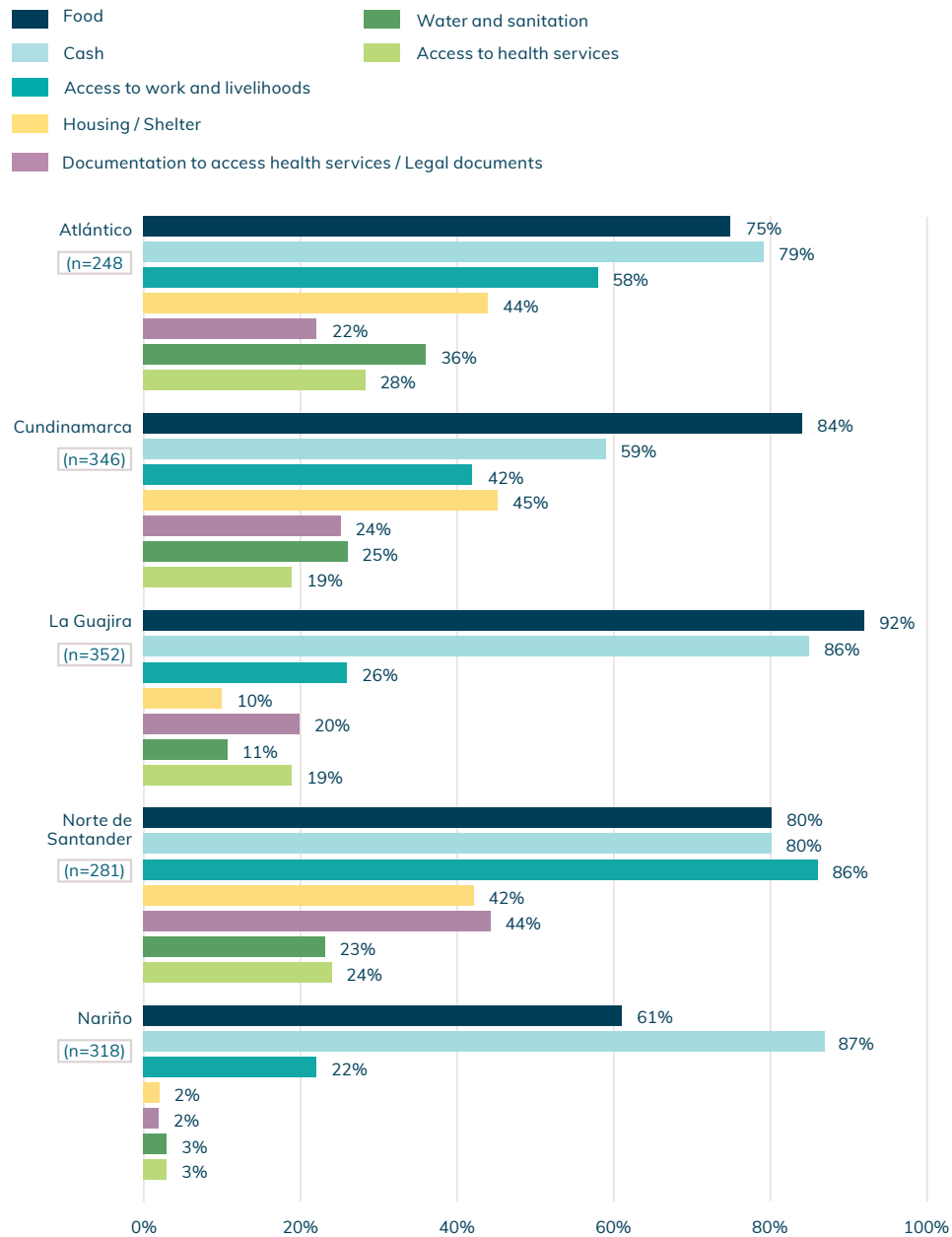


<sup>2</sup> Significant differences identified throughout this analysis were found through z-tests at the 0.05 level of significance. This only applies to our sample and cannot be interpreted as being representative of the entire refugee and migrant population.

Overall, the type of assistance most frequently reported as needed by respondents was food (79%), followed by cash (78%), access to work and livelihoods (45%), housing/shelter (28%), legal documents (22%), water and sanitation (19%), access to health services (18%), among other options.

Data presents strong differences in the reported needs between regions (see Figure 4). In the Atlántico region, the most reported need was cash (79%), followed by food (75%). Atlántico is also one of the three regions with the greatest reported need for housing/shelter (44%). Cundinamarca, on the other hand, stands out as the region with the lowest need for cash (59%) and with the highest need for housing/shelter (45%). The high need for shelter in Cundinamarca might be due to the fact that almost all the surveys conducted in the department were carried out in the Bogotá Metropolitan area, where rents are higher than in other cities and people on the move struggle to afford housing. La Guajira, on its part, is the region with the highest need for food (92%) and the second highest need for cash (86%).

**Figure 4. What type of assistance do you need?**



Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.  
 Note: 7 Response options were omitted with averages less than 20%.

Unlike the other regions, Norte de Santander not only reports the highest percentage in the need for access to work and livelihoods (86%), but this need is above food (80%) and cash (80%). This region also stands out for being one of the three regions with the highest need for housing/shelter (42%) and for being the region with the highest need for legal documents (44%). Nariño, on the other hand, is the region with the greatest reported need for cash (87%) and with the lowest reported need for food assistance (61%).

*“My experience as a migrant has been difficult, it is difficult to find work, they pay very little. I lost my home because I could not pay the rent and my husband, the children and I now stay in a single room. I’m not working and sometimes we go out to sell avocado and fruits”.*

**27-year-old woman in Norte de Santander (Colombia)**

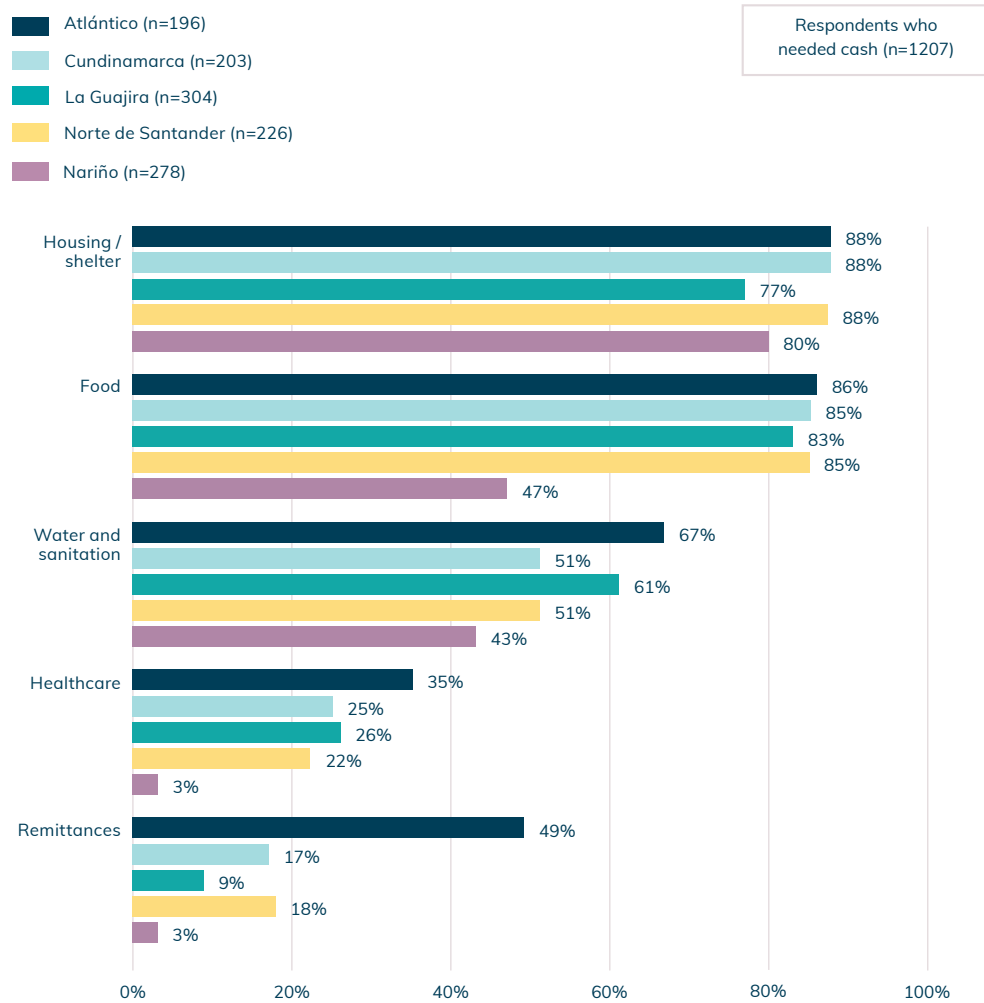
## Respondents would mainly use cash assistance to cover housing needs

Respondents who indicated needing cash assistance were also asked what they would use the money for. 83% of all respondents stated they would use the cash to cover needs related to housing and shelter. In line with the results of the previous section, Atlántico (88%), Cundinamarca (88%) and Norte de Santander (88%) are the regions that show the greatest interest in using the cash to cover housing needs.

Additionally, among respondents who reported the need for cash 77% also stated that they would use it to buy food.

Atlántico is the region where respondents most frequently reported a need to use cash for water and sanitation (67%), remittances (49%) and healthcare (35%) (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. What do you need the cash for?**



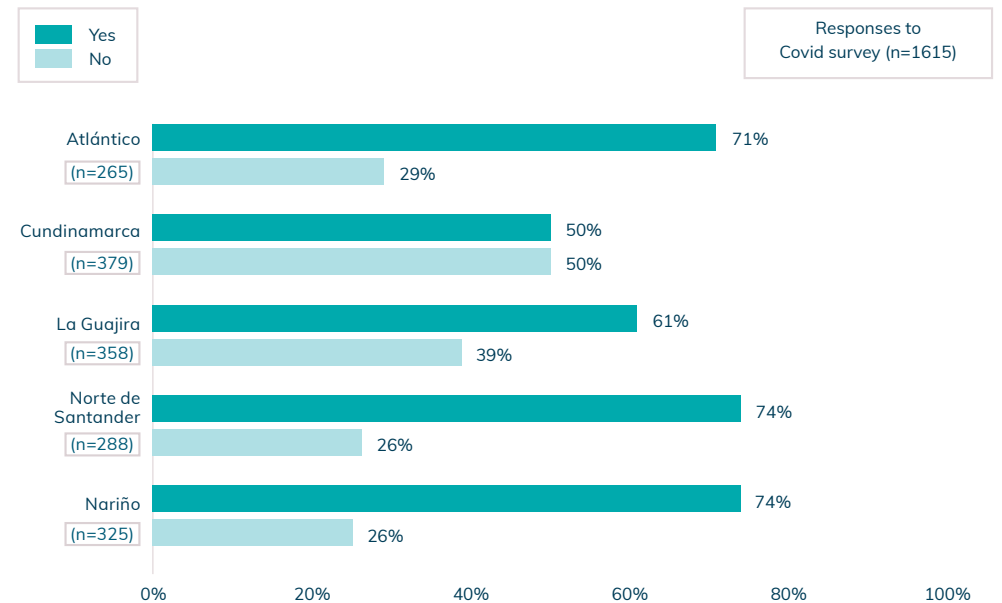
Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.  
 Note: 3 Response options were omitted with averages less than 26%.

## Important gaps in the assistance received in all regions

There are important gaps in the assistance received in all five regions. This is particularly the case in Cundinamarca, where 50% of respondents stated that they had not received assistance during the pandemic.

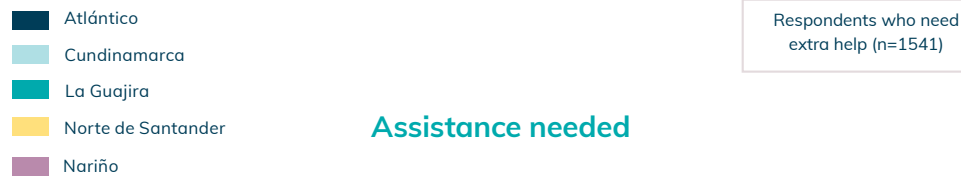
The proportion of respondent not having received assistance is also high in the other regions: 39% in La Guajira, 29% in Atlántico, 26% in Norte de Santander and Nariño (see Figure 6). For Cundinamarca this could be linked to the fact that the majority of interviews were conducted in Bogota where, according to 4Mi monitors, it has been particularly difficult to access to assistance programs due to the high number of refugees and migrants located in the city and because of a lack of information on where and how to access such assistance.

**Figure 6. Have you received additional assistance since the coronavirus crisis began?**

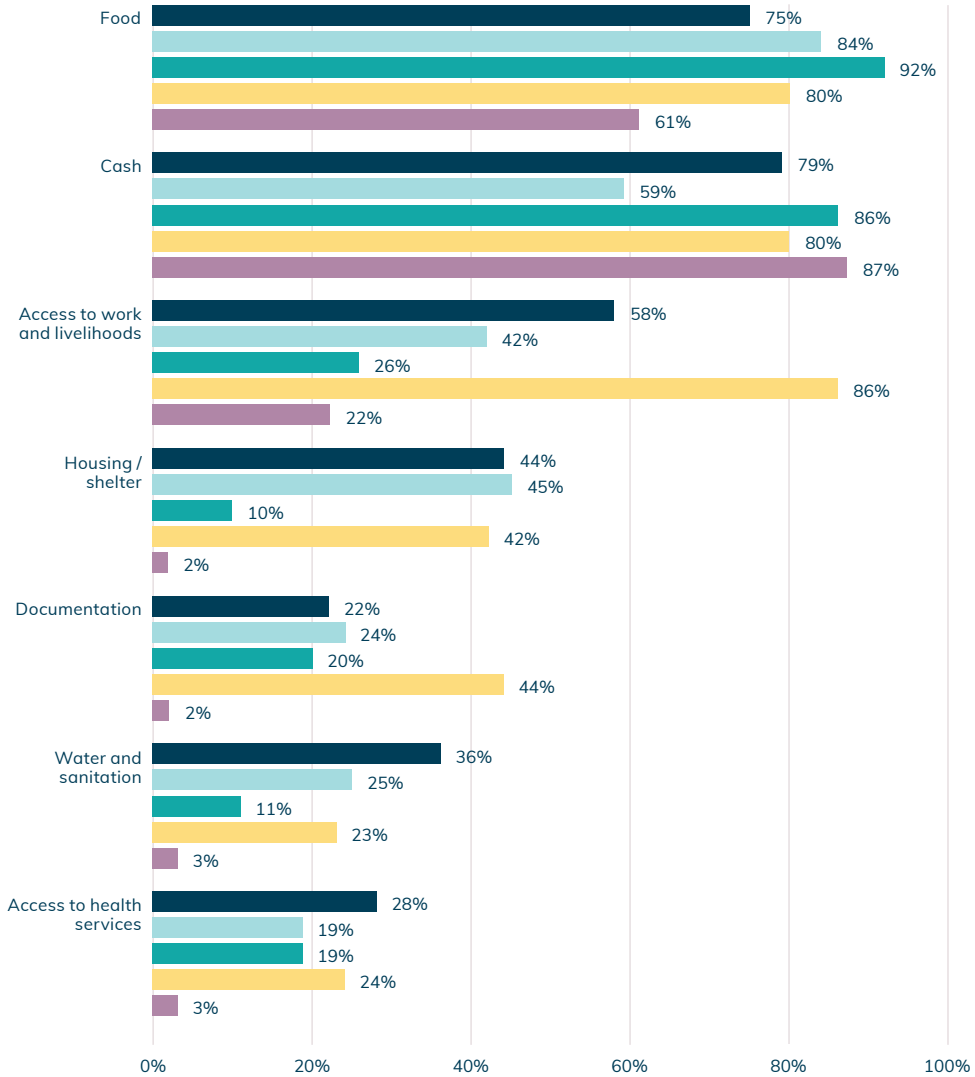


Despite the strong gaps in its reach, at a general level, it appears that the type of assistance received is in line with the type of assistance mostly needed, since food and cash top the list of assistance received. One notable exception is assistance in accessing work and livelihoods: only 1% of all respondents reported having received it, while it was indicated as necessary by 45% of them. This indicates a disconnect between the assistance provided, that remained largely focused on emergency response rather than longer-term resilience. One of the main obstacles to the creation of livelihoods programs is the irregular status of Venezuelans in Colombia. This might change following the introduction of a new regularization option, [The temporary Protected Status](#), by the Colombian authorities. The analysis by region shows considerable disparities (see Figure 7).

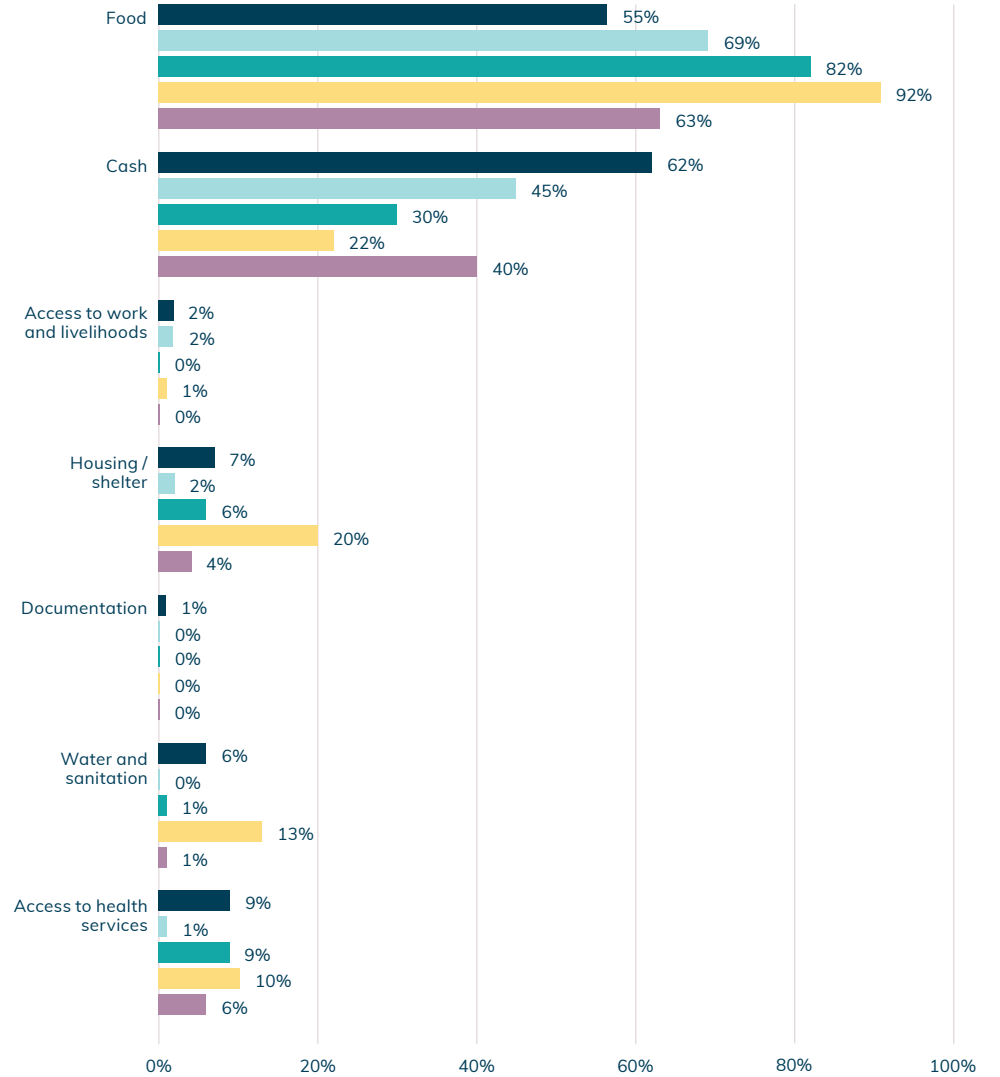
Figure 7. Type of assistance needed vs assistance received



Assistance needed



Assistance received



One of these is the generally low level of assistance received for housing/shelter, when the need for this kind of assistance is mentioned by a large proportion of respondents: between 42% and 45% in regions such as Atlántico, Cundinamarca, and Norte de Santander.

*“I came to Colombia and I worked in the coal mines. Then my husband came, he works in construction, but he has not found a permanent job because he does not have documents, neither do I. Employers will not let us work because we do not have the Special Stay Permit (PEP). A few days ago, I got a job interview, but they didn’t hire me because I didn’t have the PEP. I live in a little house. I have not received help and we owe 4 months of rent and the utility bills. I have no gas, I cook with firewood. What we most want is to work”.*

**38-year-old woman in Norte de Santander (Colombia)**

**DRU DANISH  
REFUGEE  
COUNCIL**



## 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](http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi)

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