

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic<sup>1</sup> on March 11, 2020. As COVID-19 spread worldwide, governments applied restrictive measures that limited international mobility in order to reduce the pandemic's impact. While most of these measures impacted international travel, several countries have also applied restrictions to internal movement.

## IMPACT ON CITIES

Cities are epicentres of propagation of the COVID-19 due to factors such as their population density and levels of mobility. For these reasons and considering that migrants tend to settle in urban economic centers where they are more vulnerable to infection by the virus, it is necessary to include migrants in efforts to fight the coronavirus<sup>2</sup>.

“IOM has been working with governments and partners to ensure that migrants, regardless of their legal status, returnees and forcibly displaced persons across the world are included in local, national and regional preparedness, response and recovery efforts”<sup>3</sup>.

## MEASURES ON HUMAN MOBILITY

In order to control the propagation of the virus, most countries in the region have put in place multiple measures of lockdown as a preventive policy, where people must remain at a specific place, confined in a particular location without the possibility of circulation except for certain activities (food supply, medical consultations, competition for jobs providing essential services, etc).

These measures, adopted by federal governments, are being applied on a mandatory basis in South American countries (Argentina<sup>4</sup>, Bolivia<sup>5</sup>, Chile<sup>6</sup>, Colombia<sup>7</sup>, Ecuador<sup>8</sup>, Paraguay<sup>9</sup>, and Peru<sup>10</sup>) or optional (Venezuela<sup>11</sup> and Uruguay<sup>12</sup>). In some cases, the lockdown policy changes along the time and it might turn even more restrictive in some specific areas. In the case of Brazil, although there is no lockdown measure for the entire territory, several states have been adopting regulations concerning this situation. On the other hand, Bolivia<sup>13</sup>, Chile<sup>14</sup>, Ecuador<sup>15</sup> and Peru<sup>16</sup> have also adopted curfews by time slots in order to reduce as much as possible the mobility of people within the national territory.

Based on the propagation and depending on the response to COVID-19, many countries have eased restrictions on mobility, enabling more sectors of the economy and allowing outdoors recreational activities for different population groups and, in some cases resuming in-person classes. However, this flexibilization is lower in cities than in rural settings. In Argentina<sup>17</sup>, the government allowed the reopening of more economic activities and outdoors recreational activities in cities with

less than half a million population. In Uruguay<sup>18</sup>, at early May, rural schools of up to 50 students were allowed to reopen. Thus, the map of mobility restrictions may not be uniform inside a country and it varies over short periods of time depending on the local evolution of the pandemic. While some countries have taken general measures, the greatest restrictions are imposed and/or maintained in urban areas.

## GREATER VULNERABILITY IN URBAN CONTEXTS

In South American cities, there are some structural problems: poor public transport, not enough health care facilities, and inadequate housing. A significant part of the migrant population has difficulties in accessing or maintaining decent housing living in informal settlements<sup>19</sup>. The loss of incomes threatens the ability to pay for rental housing, and leading to evictions. In response to this situation, some measures have been taken by national/local governments. For example, Argentina<sup>20</sup> and Colombia<sup>21</sup> have suspended evictions. In Bogotá, Colombia<sup>22</sup>, a Solidarity Lease Transitory Contribution was created to alleviate the cost of renting. Migrant population affected by the emergency is included because of its social and economic conditions. In Montevideo (Uruguay)<sup>23</sup>, both local government and the Human Rights National Bureau support migrants who suffer evictions, seeking to facilitate an agreement between landlord and migrants. However, since some of the rentals of migrants are informally agreed, many of them are exposed and left with no regulatory protection. Thus, if they are excluded from the plans and national response services, the situation of increased risk of propagation is aggravated for the entire population<sup>24</sup>.

## MIGRANTS IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Conditions in informal settlements (inadequate housing, overcrowding and lack of basic services) worsens migrants' social and housing conditions substantially. Under overcrowding conditions, it is more difficult to apply lockdown and physical distancing measures adopted by the national and local governments, exposing migrants to situations of greater possibility of infection. Recommended hygiene measures to prevent virus transmission are often impossible to comply (hand washing, disinfection of surfaces, etc.) as people do not have running water and other basic services.

These infosheets have been elaborated by the Migration Analysis Unit of the IOM Regional Office for South America. These documents are designed to capture the most recent information in a fast-moving environment.



OIMSuramerica



OIMSuramerica



ONUMigración