

www.ifrc.org
Saving lives,
changing minds.

Information Bulletin No. 1

Chile: Return Migration to Bolivia (COVID-19 Context)

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Information Bulletin N° 1	Date of issue: 25 May 2020
Date of Bolivian borders closure: 26 March 2020	Focal point for Chile: Stefania Tranfo, Field Migration Coordinator Focal point for Bolivia: Daniel Rejas, Regional Integrated Programs Coordinator Focal point at Regional Office: José Felix Rodriguez, Migration, Social Inclusion and Non-Violence Coordinator
National Societies currently involved: Chilean Red Cross (CRC) and Bolivian Red Cross (BRC)	
N° of other partner organizations involved: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), NGOs and local governments.	

ARO is publishing this special report on population movement due to the impact, flows and pre-existing dynamics in the region and the importance to reflect the coordination between NSs and IFRC to meet the needs of populations affected by COVID-19 and Migration.

The situation

In order to contain the spread of COVID-19, the Government of Bolivia declared the total closure of its borders except for health and safety matters on 26 March 2020.

A government order to suspend the repatriation of Bolivian citizens from the Chilean city of Huará dated on 30 March, together with the intensification of border patrols, caused concern among thousands of Bolivian citizens in Chile who started to reach the border towns and their consulates in the attempt to return to their country.

Most of the Bolivian citizens trying to return to their country are seasonal workers in the agricultural and wine-growing areas of central and northern Chile. The working season, which is between September and April, ended abruptly due to the economic slowdown that the pandemic is causing, thus leaving them without work and with no means to survive. In addition, many longer-term residents have decided to reunite to their families in Bolivia due to the lack of work in Chile. The majority of the population aiming

to return to Bolivia includes families with young children, pregnant women and elderly.

Between the end of March to date, Bolivian citizens have continued to reach the northern and border towns of Huará, Colchane, or to camp out at their consulates in Iquique, Antofagasta, Calama and in the capital Santiago to demand the authorities to help them return home and open the borders. Bolivian citizens have camped in makeshift tents for days despite the low autumnal temperatures, the night curfew in Chile and the social distance rules, with no access to safe water and food, and without basic hygiene facilities.



Photo 1: Bolivian citizens requiring assistance at the Bolivian Consulate in Calama. Source: Chilean Red Cross

Arrangements between the Bolivian Government and the Chilean counterpart, with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), local authorities and local organizations, ensured shelter, basic medical assistance and humanitarian aid for 1,600 Bolivians stranded in the cities of Iquique and Antofagasta where they have been transported to start a preventive quarantine in school-turned shelters. While some Bolivians were allowed to return to their country over the past few weeks, many of them are still stranded in Chile in need of food, safe water, winter clothes and shelter. A large number of Peruvians and Venezuelans are also in the same situation.

In addition, the presence of 20 individuals with COVID-19 among a group of Bolivians who moved from Santiago to Iquique at the end of April raised concern and indignation among host communities and local authorities of the northern region. The Mayor of Iquique publicly communicated his intention to sue the national Government for putting in danger the health of the citizens and for not having consulted the decision with the local government.

The COVID-19 health emergency hampers the humanitarian assistance, both threatening the Bolivian and other migrants stranded in Chile and putting at risk the life of health and humanitarian workers.

The Chilean Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with the financial support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), continues

monitoring the situation and providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable migrants in coordination with local governmental authorities and partners.



Photo 2: Volunteers from Chilean Red Cross providing support at a shelter in Iquique. Source: Chilean Red Cross

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Chilean Red Cross



Context	Chilean Red Cross interventions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 to 24 March: 487 Bolivian citizens crossed the border and started their quarantine in Bolivia¹. • 26 March: Bolivian borders are closed. • 30 March: At least 150 Bolivian citizens are in Huará aiming to cross to Bolivia; border 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iquique: Since the beginning of April, the local branch has been providing basic health assistance. A total of 12 volunteers are daily involved in the response. Some activities have been temporarily suspended after the confirmation of many COVID-19 cases among the population.

¹ [Gobierno confirma retorno de 487 bolivianos al país, previo cumplimiento de protocolos de salud](#), 24 March 2020, Ministerio de Comunicación Bolivia.

patrols are enhanced for the decision to stop repatriations².

- 3 April: The stranded population in Huara reaches at least 480 vulnerable migrants.
- First week of April: A temporary camp near Pisiga in Bolivia is built.
- 3 April: 400 Bolivian citizens are moved to Iquique.
- 4 April: A large number of the Bolivians in Huara are moved to the temporary camp in Pisiga.
- 7 April: 370 Bolivian citizens stranded in Colchane are moved to Iquique.
- 13 April: 300 Bolivian citizens are estimated to have reached Iquique by their own; 420 Bolivian citizens are estimated to be in Antofagasta.
- 16 April: IOM estimates 1,500 Bolivian citizens are stranded in Iquique and Antofagasta³.
- 17 April: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia communicates the gradual repatriation of at least 1,400 Bolivian citizens stranded in Iquique and Antofagasta⁴.
- 20 April: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia and its Chilean counterpart agreed that the 1600 Bolivian citizens stranded in Chile will complete quarantine in Chile, provided with shelter, humanitarian aid and basic health care⁵. A second group of 448 Bolivian citizens is moved from Iquique to Pisiga.

- Calama: Since the end of April, the branch of El Loa allows the use of its kitchen and toilets to approximately 200 Bolivian citizens on a daily basis. Furthermore, the local branch provides shelter to a group of 50 people (30 women and 20 children). Visitors are informed about COVID-19 preventive measures while remaining in the local branch and are provided with facial masks, gloves, blankets, mattresses, and food. The branch also provides basic health assistance with an ambulance as well as hot drinks and food to those outside the Bolivian Consulate at night. So far 54 volunteers, including volunteers with psychosocial support skills, have been involved in this 24-hour operation. Since the establishment of two shelters in the city at the beginning of May, the local branch is in charge of the preparation and distribution of three meals, water, and hygiene supplies to a total of 270 migrants. In addition, the local Red Cross facilitates the communication with family members as well as hosts 10 migrants in the premises of its branch, who assist in the logistics of the operation.
- Santiago de Chile: On 28 April, the CRC and IFRC organized a humanitarian operation to assist 700 Bolivian citizens who were moved from the Bolivian Consulate to the premises of a local church. During the activity, the Red Cross distributed 570 alcohol gel, 17 diapers, 1401 facial masks, 80 bottles of water, 10 baby coats, 102 jerricans and 570 sanitary towels. A total of 11 volunteers were involved in the operation, including two psychologists who provided basic psychosocial support.
- Antofagasta: On 30 April, the local branch organized a food distribution and basic health assistance to a group of approximately 100 Bolivian citizens who were outside the Bolivian Consulate. The operation, which involved 7

² [Bolivianos que salieron de Chile no podrán entrar al país y Defensa garantizará la ayuda humanitaria](#), 30 March 2020, Agencia Boliviana de Información.

³ [OIM estima que hay 1.500 bolivianos varados entre Iquique y Antofagasta](#), 16 April 2020, Soy Chile.

⁴ [Canciller anuncia repatriación de más de 1.400 ciudadanos bolivianos varados en Chile](#), 17 April 2020, Agencia Boliviana de Información.

⁵ [Cancillerías de Bolivia y Chile acuerdan implementar cuarentena de 1.600 bolivianos en territorio chileno](#), 20 April 2020, Comunicado de Ministerio Relaciones Exteriores de Bolivia.

- 23 April: The Bolivian Government informs its citizens that they will need to register through the consulate website in order to return to Bolivia and complete the quarantine in Pisiga⁶.
- 27 April: 391 Bolivian citizens are transferred from Iquique to Bolivia after a 14-day quarantine.
- 28 April: After three days outside the Bolivian consulate in Santiago, 400 Bolivian citizens are moved to the premises of a church to spend the night before being transferred to Iquique for quarantine. The number grows approximatively to 700 by the end of the day.
- 28 April: 223 Bolivian citizens are transported from Iquique to Bolivia.
- 29 April: 227 Bolivian citizens are transported from Antofagasta to Bolivia after the 14-day quarantine.
- End of April: The local Chilean Red Cross branch reports a number of Bolivians outside the consulate of Calama. By May 5th, the branch reports that the number has raised to 300.
- 2 May: A Bolivian citizen moved from Santiago to a shelter in Iquique has tested positive to COVID 19⁷.
- 4 May: The number of positive cases in the shelter in Iquique has risen to 22⁸.
- 7 May: The number of positive cases in the shelter in Iquique has risen to 90 and these people have been moved to a different shelter. Moreover, 200 Bolivian citizens who were camping outside the consulate in Santiago were transferred to a shelter in the city of Melipilla to comply with quarantine. In addition, the municipality of Calama

volunteers, could not be completed because many people of concern were moved to a shelter.

⁶ [Ciudadanos bolivianos que deseen regresar a Bolivia deben registrarse vía on line en los Consulados](#), 23 April 2020, Agencia Boliviana de Información.

⁷ [Un boliviano que cumplía cuarentena en Iquique da positivo al COVID-19 y se activa la alerta](#), 3 May 2020, La Razón.

⁸ [Más de 20 Bolivianos trasladados de Providencia a Iquique tienen Covid-19](#), 4 May 2020, La Nación.

established two shelters for approximately 270 Bolivian citizens stranded in the city.

Bolivian Red Cross



Context	Bolivian Red Cross interventions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 April: Bolivian government asked Bolivian Red Cross to manage the “Tata Santiago” camp in Pisiga which was assembled for 14 days quarantine. • 4 April: 480 Bolivian citizens started the quarantine in “Tata Santiago”, Pisiga.⁹ • 9 April: Civil Defense delivered more tents and supplies to Tata Santiago Camp, to control overcrowding. • 15 April: BRC and OIM were requested to stay at camp to receive more persons • 16 April: Buses arrived at the camp to take the inhabitants back home. • 17 April: All Bolivian citizens were in route to their homes. • 20 April: A new group of 448 persons arrived at the camp. • 27 April: Buses arrived at the camp to take the inhabitants back home. • 28 April: 223 Bolivian citizens arrived at the camp. • 5 May: Buses took the inhabitants back home. • 9 May: New group of 394 Bolivian citizens arrived at the camp. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 April: Bolivian Red Cross arrived to the camp. While the facilities of the camp were set for 300 people, there were at least 480. Red Cross warns of an overcrowding in the tents. • 5 April: First census was done, with all the protection measures for volunteers. In coordination with OIM, BRC started to administrate the camp and request food, water and power. The Restoring Family Links program became operational. • 6 April: Water and Sanitation activities were carried on during the day, requesting more portable bathrooms and cleaning service. The census concluded a total of 449 persons were in the camp. Coordination meetings between government, OIM and BRC were carried out to facilitate the administration, health and comfort of all the inhabitants. • 8 April: 11 people were evacuated from the camp due to health problems or pregnancy; their family members were also evacuated. Warm clothes, gender-differentiated hygiene kits and school kits for the children were delivered. • 9 April: Food kits were delivered to all the groups with the support of WFP and Save the Children. • 11 April: 4 committees were formed, (protection, water and hygiene, food and health) and energy supply and illumination works started.

⁹ <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/bolivianos-procedentes-chile-aislados-campamento-cuarentena-20200404-0017.html>

- 12 April: The day of the child was celebrated in Bolivia, so activities were organized with the children and special food was prepared.
- 16 April: All persons were checked for health problems so that they can boarded the buses that will take them to their homes.
- 20 April: A new group of 448 Bolivian citizens arrived at the camp. The conditions at the camp are better and more adequate for the new group.
- 21 to 26 April: BRC oversees administration and logistics, water supply is done on daily basis, there are no health problems. The Ministry of Health is in charge of all medical attentions and supplies.
- 27 April: The group departed in buses and the camp was cleaned and restocked for the new inhabitants.
- 28 April: A new group of 220 persons arrived at the camp, all the measures of food and water were adopted.
- 29 April to 4 May: BRC began coordinating with IOM and the government to assure that needs are covered.
- 5 May: The group departed, and the camp was cleaned and re stocked.
- 9 May: A new group of 394 persons arrived in the camp



IFRC

Actions

- Some of the RC actions are supported by the Population Movement Project in Chile, which is part of the regional migration appeal of IFRC. This Project is partially funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- IFRC staff assisted the Chilean Red Cross in the humanitarian operation in Santiago on 28 April 2020.

- Follow-up and support from CCST Lima to Bolivian Red Cross.
- Operations, Shelter, Health and Migration in constant communication providing advice and support.
- Close monitoring of the situation through constant communication with local branches and implementing partners in the most affected cities.
- Coordination team supporting National Societies.
- IFRC staff ready for deployment if required.

Contact information

For further information, specifically related to this operation please contact:

Focal Point for Chile:

- Stefania Tranfo, Field Migration Coordinator, stefania.tranfo@ifrc.org
- Ruth Romero, Migration Project Coordinator, ruth.romero@ifrc.org

Focal point for Bolivia:

- Daniel Rejas, Regional Integrated Programs Coordinator, daniel.rejas@ifrc.org

In the IFRC Americas Regional Office:

- Santiago Luengo, Migration Cell Coordinator; email: santiago.luengo@ifrc.org
- José Felix Rodriguez, Migration, Social Inclusion and Non-Violence Coordinator; phone: +507 317 3050; email: josefelix.rodriguez@ifrc.org
- Jono Anzalone, Head of the Disaster and Crisis Preparedness, Response and Recovery (DCPRR) department; email: jono.anzalone@ifrc.org
- Felipe del Cid, Continental Operations Coordinator; phone: +507 317 3050; email: felipe.delcid@ifrc.org
- Pabel Angeles, Disaster Manager for Andean Countries CCST, email: pabel.angeles@ifrc.org
- Inés Brill, Head of Andean Countries CCST; email: ines.brill@ifrc.org

In IFRC Geneva:

- Antoine Belair, Senior Officer, Operations Coordination; Disaster and Crisis (Prevention, Response and Recovery); email: antoine.belair@ifrc.org

How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the

maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
2. Enable healthy and safe living.
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.

www.ifrc.org

Saving lives, changing minds.

