



LATIN AMERICA'S VACCINE GAMBLE WITH VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS

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International attention has rightly focused on Chile's admirable COVID-19 vaccination record – [vaccinating](#) nearly 25 percent of its population compared to second place Brazil, with only 5 percent of its people vaccinated as of mid-March 2021.¹ Slow vaccine rollout is compounding the impact of the coronavirus in the region; Latin America is now widely considered to be experiencing the deepest and most severe health and economic COVID-19 impact of any developing region. Among the most vulnerable are 5.5 million migrants from Venezuela, 4.5 million living in just six host countries in South America working principally in informal jobs in the service sector and, for the most part, living in crowded, precarious housing.

In the scramble to provide assistance during national lockdowns, Venezuelan migrants in the [six principal South American host countries](#) were inconsistently and, too often, rarely eligible for national cash assistance, emergency pandemic programs, health care, and housing eviction protections.² When it comes to the COVID-19 vaccine, migrants would,

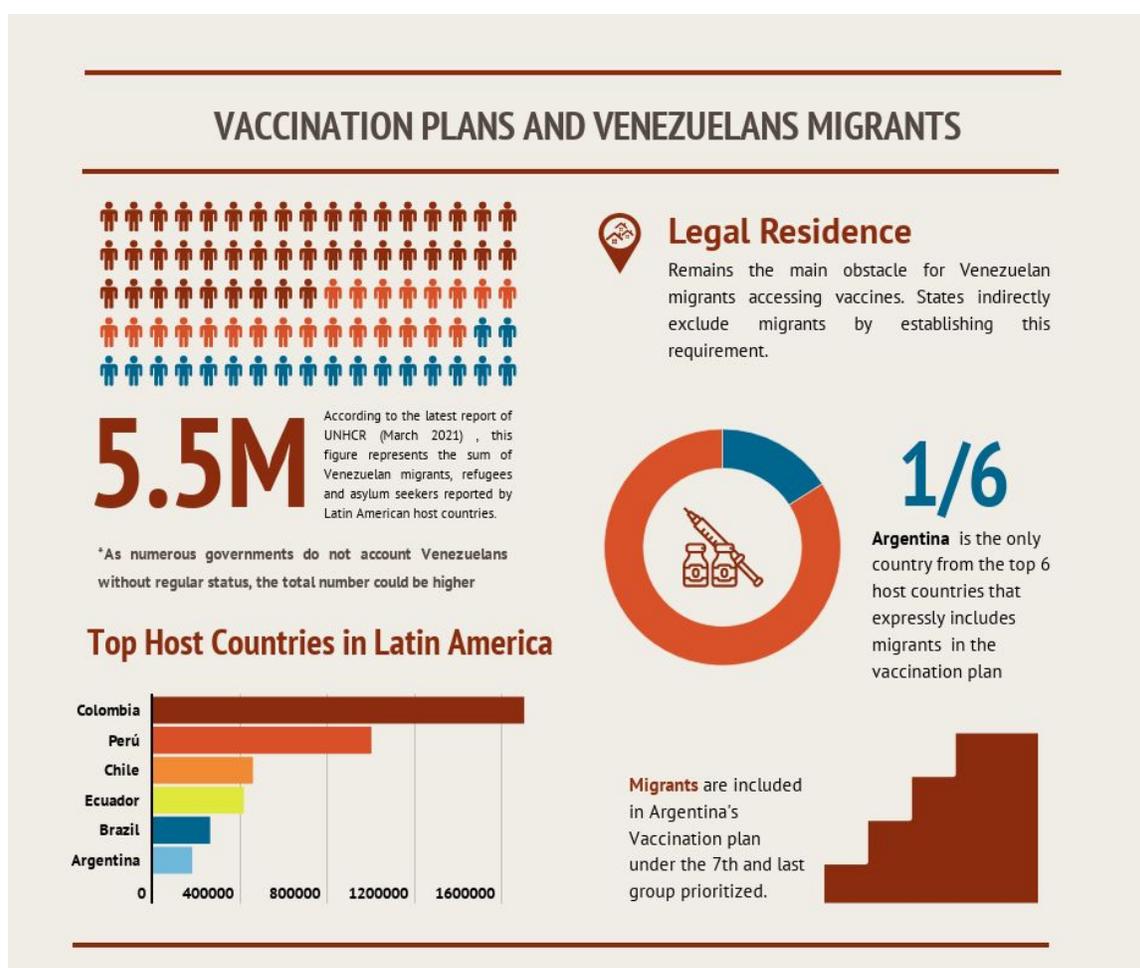
¹ Americas 360 Podcast, "COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout in the Americas: How is the Region Doing?" Woodrow Wilson Center, March 12, 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/audio/covid-19-vaccine-rollout-americas-how-region-doing>.

² Jacqueline Mazza, "Venezuelan Migrants Under COVID-19: Managing South America's Pandemic Amid a Migration Crisis," Woodrow Wilson Center Latin American Program, Working Paper, December 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/venezuelan-migrants-under-covid-19-managing-south-americas-pandemic-amid-migration>.



in theory, be among the key vulnerable populations to vaccinate in order to help limit a vicious cycle of infection and re-infection among the poor.

Newspaper [headlines](#) in the South America frequently convey the impression that all Venezuelan migrants will be receiving the vaccine.³ However, we reviewed the national vaccination plans in all six of the top migrant-receiving countries; and we found only one, Argentina, which makes an explicit reference to covering migrants as its last priority group.⁴ While not explicitly covering non-nationals, Brazil’s plan does mention “refugees living in shelters” as an example of a vulnerable population. This could mean that migrants with refugee status who are homeless or living in shelters could qualify under one of its categories.⁵



³ See, for example, “Perú vacunará contra el COVID a migrantes venezolanos,” *Gestión*, February 8, 2021, <https://gestion.pe/peru/peru-vacunara-contr-el-covid-a-migrantes-venezolanos-noticia/?ref=gesr>.

⁴ Ministerio de Salud de Argentina, “¿Quiénes tienen prioridad para recibir la vacuna?” 2021, <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/coronavirus/vacuna/prioridad>.

⁵ Ministério da Saúde da Brasil, Plano Nacional de Operacionalização da Vacina contra a Covid-19, February 15, 2021, https://www.gov.br/saude/pt-br/media/pdf/2021/janeiro/29/PlanoVacinaoCovid_ed4_15fev21_cgpmi_18h05.pdf.

While press reports in the other four host countries might indicate that Venezuelan migrants are covered, that is the case only for those who can prove legal residence. Colombia, home to the largest population of Venezuelan migrants, has explicitly announced the legal residency requirement.⁶ In a bold and important move, Colombia announced a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) initiative to cover all qualifying Venezuelans who entered Colombia before January 20, 2020. But unlike the U.S. version of TPS, Colombia's TPS requires individuals to apply, in order to ensure that they meet the required criteria. The government estimates that less than half of the 1.7 million Venezuelans currently in Colombia will immediately qualify to be vaccinated; Colombian authorities have made clear in numerous statements that to receive a vaccine, Venezuelans must have a valid residence permit known as the PEP (Permiso Especial de Permanencia) or other residency status.⁷ Venezuelans who receive TPS in the future will likely qualify for the vaccine, but only on an individual basis once their TPS status has been formally granted.⁸ Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru also require legal residency for vaccines, although there is no new policy to expand legal residency, leaving millions without access to a vaccine for the foreseeable future, regardless of age or health status. Chile was criticized by Amnesty International's executive director for Chile for advancing a national vaccine plan that excluded Venezuelans: "In the context of a very successful vaccination plan that does not seem to be leaving anyone behind, the Chilean government is choosing the path of discrimination, denial of rights to at-risk groups and ignoring best health practices in its efforts to contain COVID-19."⁹

Latin America may be taking yet another gamble with its precarious recovery: that full health and economic recovery from COVID-19 will still be possible while leaving millions of Venezuelans within their borders without the vaccine.

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⁶ "¿Todos los migrantes venezolanos ahora podrán tener vacuna de covid?" *El Tiempo*, February 8, 2021, <https://www.eltiempo.com/politica/gobierno/todos-los-migrantes-venezolanos-ahora-podran-tener-vacuna-de-covid-565586>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Duncan Tucker, "Chile: National plan must include COVID-19 vaccine for everyone living in the country", Amnesty International, February 10, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/chile-plan-nacional-debe-incluir-vacunas-contra-covid-para-todas>.

