



Colombia FETP COVID-19 field investigation with the Amazonas State Department of Health in San Juan de Atacuari on the Brazilian border, May 2020. *Photo by CDC Global.*

The Needs of the Many: Colombia Responds to COVID-19

When SARS-CoV-2 spread in Colombia in mid-March 2020, the national government feared the worst: a collapse of the health system. In response, President Iván Duque Márquez ordered the strictest nationwide lockdown in the Western Hemisphere. To implement the lockdown, the national government centralized authority, coordinated a trial run in the city of Bogotá, and based policy decisions on epidemiological data from an updated reporting system. The lockdown curbed the initial spread of the virus and bought the government time to increase intensive-care capacity. But the shutdown of the economy threatened to push millions in Colombia's informal sector into poverty. The government rapidly expanded the social safety net, which nearly doubled the total number of welfare beneficiaries. It also took steps to provide assistance for the highly vulnerable population of 1.8 million Venezuelan migrants in the country. As the lockdown continued into its third month, the high socioeconomic costs of isolation and the government's lack of consultation with municipalities, which were heterogeneous and were each affected differently by the virus, led to a breakdown in compliance. The government began to re-think its strategy.

This case is part of a lessons-learned series on internal government coordination of pandemic response before vaccines became available.

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