

# COLOMBIA FACTSHEET

For more than two decades, UNHCR has worked closely with national and local authorities and civil society in Colombia to mobilize protection and advance solutions for people who have been forcibly displaced. UNHCR's initial focus on internal displacement has expanded in the last few years to include Venezuelans and Colombians coming from Venezuela. Within an interagency platform, UNHCR supports efforts by the Government of Colombia to manage large-scale mixed movements with a protection orientation in the current COVID-19 pandemic and is equally active in preventing statelessness.



In Maicao, La Guajira department, UNHCR provides shelter to Venezuela refugees and migrants at the Integrated Assistance Centre ©UNHCR/N. Rosso.

## CONTEXT

A peace agreement was signed by the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP in 2016, signaling a potential end to Colombia's 50-year armed conflict. Armed groups nevertheless remain active in parts of the country, committing violence and human rights violations. Communities are uprooted and, in the other extreme, confined or forced to comply with mobility restrictions. The National Registry of Victims (RUV in Spanish) registered 54,867 displacements in the first eleven months of 2020. Meanwhile, confinements in the departments of Norte de Santander, Chocó, Nariño, Arauca, Antioquia, Cauca and Valle del Cauca affected 61,450 people in 2020, as per UNHCR reports. The main protection risks generated by the persistent presence of armed groups and illicit economies include forced recruitment of children by armed groups and gender-based violence – the latter affecting in particular girls, women and LGBTI persons. Some 2,532 cases of GBV against Venezuelan women and girls were registered by the Ministry of Health between 1 January and September 2020, a 41.5% increase compared to the same period in 2019.

Alongside a continuing conflict, Colombia is the country most impacted by the large-scale mixed movement of over 5.5 million Venezuelans, the second largest forced displacement crisis globally and the largest ever in Latin America. It has also been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic (over 1.3 million confirmed cases and more than 36,000 deaths as of late November, one of the ten countries most adversely affected by the pandemic worldwide). By late 2020, there were over 1.7 million Venezuelans in Colombia. Some 120,000 Venezuelans returned home in 2020 after losing income and in some cases facing evictions as a result of the pandemic, but with the easing of lockdowns, many have started to return to Colombia. Migración Colombia estimates 80% of those who returned home during the pandemic will re-enter Colombia in the coming months, accompanied by two or more people. Hundreds are already entering daily via informal border points despite the official border closure.

While Colombia's asylum system has offered protection to a small but growing number of Venezuelans, many Venezuelans seek to regularize their stay through the Special Stay Permit (PEP), which enables access to legal employment. The PEP currently allows over 708,000 Venezuelans to reside legally in Colombia for up to two years with access to basic services and the labour market. Despite this high number, some 56% Venezuelans in Colombia find themselves in an irregular situation and thus more vulnerable to protection risks.



UNHCR in coordination with its partner, Fundescodes, provides child-friendly spaces for boys, girls and adolescents in Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca department. ©UNHCR/ Laura Cruz Cañón.



## KEY FIGURES

**9** million people registered as victims of the internal armed conflict, including:

- **8** million IDPs: **12.4%** of IDPs are Afro-Colombian, **5.6%** indigenous peoples, and **24%** children and youth.

**54,867** new displacements registered by the National Registry of Victims (RUV in Spanish) in 2020.

**1,717,352** Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia as of 31 October 2020.

**665** recognized refugees as of mid-2020, of which **67%** are Venezuelans, and more than **20,000** asylum claims pending as of November 2020 (cumulative since 2017).

Activities benefiting Venezuelans, Colombian returnees and host communities implemented by UNHCR in 182 municipalities in 28 departments in 2020 (as of November).

Activities benefiting IDPs implemented by UNHCR in **87** municipalities in **12** departments.

**6,823** activities implemented by UNHCR within the RMRP 2020, including:

- **3,392** related to protection (e.g. support to safe spaces for GBV survivors, protection monitoring, legal aid)
- **736** related to health (e.g. primary health care, COVID-19 prevention and support to public institutions, sexual and reproductive health care, psychosocial support and prenatal care)
- **263** related to multipurpose cash transfers
- **232** related to livelihoods (e.g. supporting the Graduation Model, assisting the government to promote inclusion of Venezuelans in the labour market and regularization)
- **150** related to education (e.g. providing education in emergency services, school kits, and access to distance learning activities)
- **148** activities related to shelter (e.g. construction and renovation of temporary shelters, including in Riohacha and Maicao)

Over **135,000** people on average benefitted every month from one or more types of assistance by UNHCR and 64 implementing partners within the RMRP.

**18,100** IDPs and populations at risk have benefited from one or more UNHCR interventions as part of the COVID-19 response between March and October 2020.

## UNHCR Response

### Refugees, migrants and returnees from Venezuela

Within the interagency platform (GIFMM), UNHCR supports local and national authorities to ensure a protection-orientation in managing the large-scale presence of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia. Through community outreach and engagement, an extensive field presence and collaboration with local and national actors, UNHCR monitors and analyzes the protection environment for Venezuelans, and identifies and ensures a targeted response to those with specific needs and those requiring international protection. By October, more than 250,800 Venezuelans and Colombians returning from Venezuela had benefitted from UNHCR's direct and indirect interventions in 2020.



Venezuelan refugees and migrants cross the Simon Bolivar Bridge, one of seven legal entry points on the Colombia-Venezuela border and the most prominent entry point in Colombia. Prior to the March 2020 border closure, 30,000 people crossed this bridge into Colombia on a daily basis. © UNHCR/Siegfried Modola

Specifically, UNHCR's main activities with Venezuelans and Colombians returning from Venezuela include:

**Information and orientation:** UNHCR operates **30 information and orientation centres** (PAOs Spanish) across Colombia. During the pandemic, PAOs continued to operate remotely via 59 telephone helplines and call centres.

**Access to asylum:** As of 30 September 2020, 3,724 Venezuelans received legal assistance, including support in the refugee status determination process. As of this same date, 7,270 people, including public officials and other relevant professionals, were trained in international protection by universities in the Network of Legal Clinics supported by UNHCR.

**Registration:** UNHCR registers people receiving orientation and assistance in its global registration software **PRIMES**. UNHCR has signed MOUs with 26 partners for the use of PRIMES, in addition to the Governor's Office of Norte de Santander, the Mayor's Office of Cúcuta and the Mayor's Office of Villa del Rosario. Remote registration continued in 2020 despite the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency, and the total number of registered receptions in PRIMES as of 30 November 2020 is 43,599, representing 157,080 individuals.

**Documentation:** UNHCR supports the National Civil Registry with **7 mobile units**, which registered and issued documentation to 5,688 Colombian returnees and 4,648 IDPs and vulnerable people in the first semester of 2020. The pandemic resulted in a temporary suspension of the mobile units, which resumed activities on 21 July in Arauca, La Guajira, Norte de Santander and Atlántico. Together with IOM and UNICEF, UNHCR also assists the National Civil Registry to issue birth certificates to children born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents, as part of the government's initiative to prevent **statelessness**. Birth certificates have been issued to over 47,000 children under this initiative.

**Shelter and reception capacity:** Together with other GIFMM partners, UNHCR has helped the government to reinforce reception capacity along the border and in major cities. Direct assistance is provided to shelters that offer accommodation to Venezuelans with specific needs. Some of these shelters were temporarily closed during the pandemic and have recently reopened. The Integrated Assistance Centre (CAI in Spanish) in Maicao (La Guajira) accommodated some 408 vulnerable Venezuelans in 2020, despite operating at reduced capacity with COVID-19. In September, the CAI began to receive new residents. It was also expanded to accommodate 1,400 persons, although its capacity will remain restricted for the time being to comply with the government's biosecurity protocols.

**Health:** With the pandemic, UNHCR has donated 333 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) and 198 family tents to **15 departmental health authorities**, primarily for the treatment and isolation of COVID-19 positive patients.

**Cash based assistance:** UNHCR stepped up its cash based assistance during the pandemic. Through 10 partnerships, UNHCR provided **multipurpose cash** to 17,013 families across the country (as of end November 2020).

**GBV prevention and response:** UNHCR has helped to set up and support a **Regional Safe Spaces Network (RSSN)** to provide survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and children and adolescents at risk with comprehensive services. RSSN comprises 48 partner organizations and allies, including government institutions, NGOs, and other UN agencies with a presence in key locations along the Venezuelan border. In 2020, the RSSN provided in-person and virtual services to 397 SGBV survivors and 762 children at risk. Legal and psychosocial professionals (duplas in Spanish) were supported to assist 1,617 women and individuals with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).

**Child protection:** UNHCR supports 13 safe spaces for children and the Ombudsperson Delegate for Children, Youth and Elderly, which assisted 2,150 children and adolescents in 2020. UNHCR also cooperates with the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF in Spanish) and civil society in promoting the rights of children, identifying gaps in their protection and mobilizing a response to the gaps. UNHCR signed an MOU with ICBF in March 2020, afterwards agreeing on an action plan to enhance case management, technical assistance, capacity building, infrastructure in child friendly spaces, income generation for families, prevention, anti-xenophobia campaigns, coordination mechanisms and strategic alliances in 14 departments.

**Community engagement:** UNHCR provides technical assistance and support to 30 Venezuelan community-based organizations and 3 independent leaderships for community-based protection, outreach and integration with host communities. Communication and outreach efforts were stepped up by these actors during the pandemic, benefitting 589 persons directly and 167,473 indirectly.

**Combating xenophobia:** The campaign against xenophobia, Somos Panas Colombia, launched by UNHCR in December 2017, has reached millions of people through content that promotes solidarity between Colombians and Venezuelans. In 2020, the campaign included specific components focused on combating xenophobia against women, children and adolescents, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which manifestations of xenophobia have increased. An example of this work is the publication entitled [Myths and Real People](#), which has reached more than 14 million people.

## Conflict-affected populations

Colombia is included in the target countries of the High Commissioner's IDP Initiative to operationalize UNHCR's new IDP policy. The operation's mixed protection and solutions strategy ensures that IDP interventions are in line with this new policy, with priorities including:

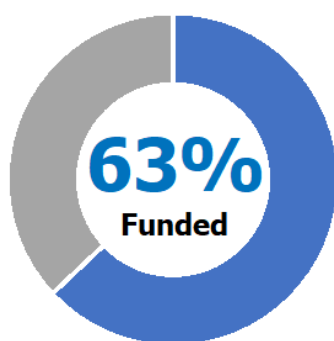
**Advocacy:** UNHCR advocates with a full range of stakeholders (local and national authorities, civil society, humanitarian, development and peace actors and donors) for measures and interventions that reduce the risk of displacement, ensure a timely and adequate response to displacement and drive solutions to displacement. Equally important is the inclusion of IDPs in national development plans.

**Institutional support:** UNHCR seeks to reinforce institutional risk analysis mechanisms and promotes regional Prevention and Protection Plans (e.g. Plan Choque Chocó). It coordinates and complements interagency responses to new displacement and also facilitates IDP access to the National Registry of Victims and, more broadly, a stronger State response. UNHCR also supports the Ombudsperson and Inspector General to strengthen the State's implementation of IDP protection policies, including follow-up to the Unconstitutional State of Affairs and institutional presence in IDP or at-risk communities.

**Protection monitoring:** UNHCR undertakes protection monitoring, on its own and through partners, in areas affected by new displacement and ongoing violence, mainly border regions and along the Pacific coast. Protection monitoring informs advocacy and efforts to facilitate and complement State response to conflict-affected populations.

**Solutions:** In advancing solutions for IDPs, UNHCR works with local authorities and the Ministry of Housing to assist communities in legalizing informal settlements. In 2020, UNHCR supported the legalization and land titling processes of 16 settlements that benefitted over 24,000 persons. UNHCR also advocates for the inclusion of IDPs in PDETs, contributing towards their implementation in areas where it has a presence. Beyond legalization, UNHCR engages in a range of activities that contribute toward livelihoods, community protection mechanisms and basic community infrastructure, community and institutional capacity building.

**Community engagement:** UNHCR supports the Casas de Derechos (Houses of Rights), which work to mobilize civilian State presence in areas with high concentrations of IDPs, high levels of violence and human rights violations but low presence of local and national institutions. Assisting 9,000 people a year, the Casas de Derechos have become a recognized, protective environment for Colombian IDPs, as well as returnees and Venezuelan refugees and migrants in recent years. The Casas de Derechos empower and support a network of community leaders, who identify and inform forcibly displaced populations about the locations and services available in the Casas, which are largely provided by officials from the Ombudsperson's Office Human Mobility Delegate.



**US\$96.6 million**

UNHCR 2020 Financial Requirements

#### UNHCR Colombia receives the support of private donors and:

Austria, Canada, Denmark, European Union, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, KOICA, Republic of Korea, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Spain for UNHCR, Sweden Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America, Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), Chanel Foundation, Latter-Day Saints Charities (LDS), L'Oréal Fund for Women, Major League Baseball Players Trust (MLBPT) and USA for UNHCR..

#### CONTACT US

**Rocío Castañeda**

Public Information Officer

Tel.: +57 (1) 546366 Ext.2110

Email: [castaner@unhcr.org](mailto:castaner@unhcr.org)