

Venezuela Situation

August 2017

The number of Venezuelans seeking asylum has **increased year-on-year** since 2014. The total for 2014-2017 has reached approx. **80,000 persons** and will likely continue to increase.

The **primary receiving countries** of Venezuelan asylum seekers between 2014 and 2017 have been: USA: 42,000, Brazil: 14,400, Spain: 10,000, Peru: 4,700, and Costa Rica: 3,300.

Considering the evolving situation in Venezuela, it is projected that **people will continue to leave** the country and **UNHCR is stepping up** the response accordingly.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

- In Brazil, over **9,000 asylum applications** have been registered in 2017. In Roraima state alone, the Federal Police with support of UNHCR is registering around 150 arrivals per day. It is estimated that there are some **20,000 to 30,000 Venezuelans in Brazil**.
- In Colombia over **300,000 Venezuelans** are living in the country. Over **55,000 have requested the Special Stay Permit**. The most recent profiling exercise shows that **43% of new arrivals** are **Colombian nationals**, 24% are dual nationals and **33% are Venezuelans**.
- Countries in the Southern Caribbean are also hosting large numbers of Venezuelans: Trinidad and Tobago is estimated to host **over 40,000** Venezuelans, with some **200** registered as asylum-seekers; Aruba hosts about **20,000** Venezuelans, with fewer than a dozen seeking asylum to-date; and Curacao hosts an estimated **5,000** Venezuelans.



CONTEXT INFORMATION

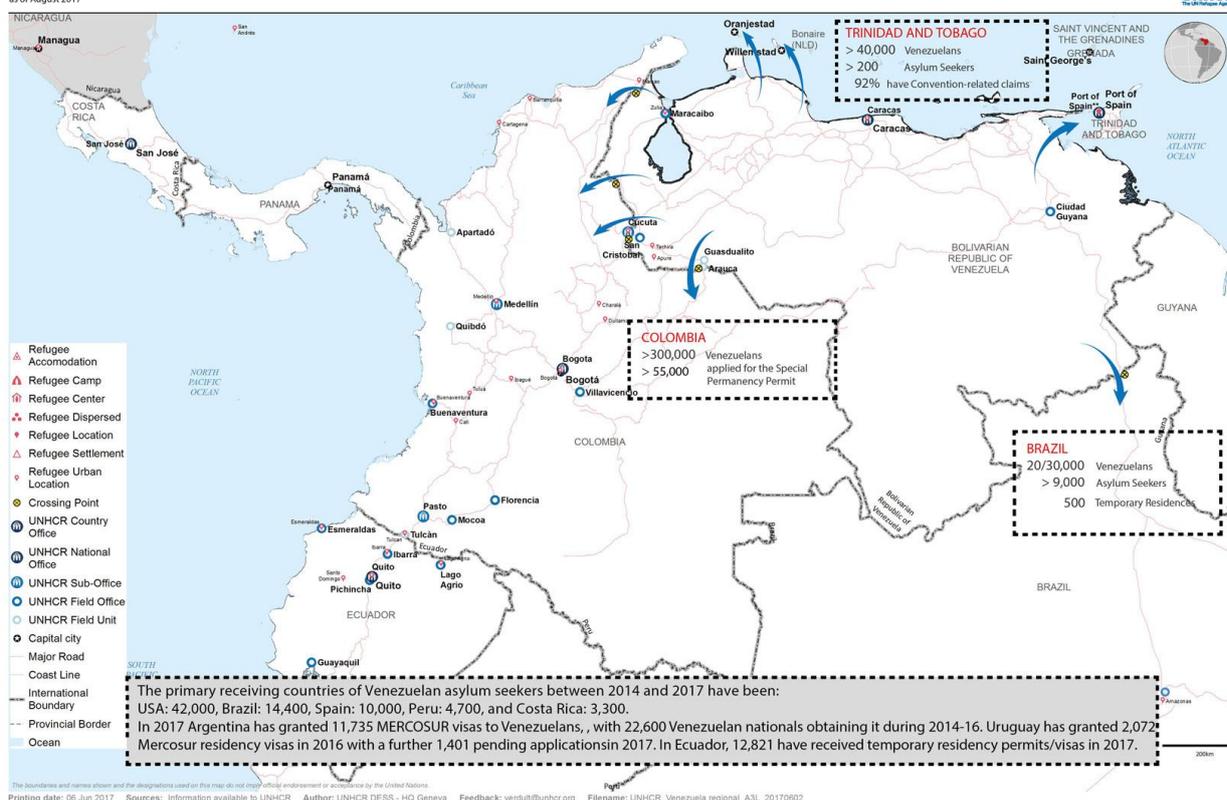
The political and economic situation in Venezuela continues to deteriorate. Recent developments in the country, including elections for the National Constituent Assembly and the unofficial referendum called by the opposition coalition (MUD) shows the polarization of Venezuelan society. The MUD has found itself weakened after the elections, which discouraged many supporters and diminished its leadership. After two weeks of escalated violence and confrontations in late July, there is a sense of tense calm in the streets, as most opposition supporters are not attending protests, sit-ins and other demonstrations. The outflow of persons seeking protection and fulfilment of basic needs in neighboring countries continues to grow.

Based on UNHCR's monitoring activities in areas bordering Venezuela, and also interviews with Venezuelans arriving in different countries in the Americas, it is clear that Venezuelans are leaving for a multitude of factors. Venezuelans flee insecurity and violence in the areas in which they were residing; or because they have been targeted by armed groups in the country. A number of persons that UNHCR interviewed, also reported having left due to their political or imputed political opinions. Others are leaving due to a lack of food and medicine, loss of income, and lack of access to essential basic social services.

Operational Context

Venezuela situation

Snapshot of current displacement from Venezuela
 as of August 2017



Brazil

- In Brazil, 500 Venezuelans have been granted a temporary residence permit as per Normative Resolution #126 of the National Immigration Council. Following the 31 July judicial order waiving the fee (approx. 100 USD) for low-income persons, for which UNHCR successfully advocated, it is expected that more people will apply for the permit. This could result in subsequent reductions of asylum claims due to the fact that many Venezuelans prefer to regularly cross the border to help their relatives back home.
- The Federal Government completed the multi-sectorial contingency plan, which is being reviewed by the Public Prosecution Office to verify that it complies with their recommendations. A joint mission by UNHCR, IOM, UNFPA, the Ministry of Social and Rural Development, the Ministry of Human Rights and the Mormon Church was deployed to Roraima state, where they engaged local authorities, civil society and other stakeholders to obtain inputs for the plan.
- Hundreds of indigenous Warao people from the Orinoco Delta in Venezuela have arrived in Brazil. They are located in Pacaraima and Boa Vista (Roraima state) as well as in Manaus (Amazonas state). The Warao say they travelled around 2,000 km. Many do not have documents, particularly children who constitute almost half of the Warao population in Brazil, which has made the registration process very complicated. Among the solutions achieved after active advocacy by UNHCR, the authorities are accepting the declaration of a Warao leader as identification for the children to present asylum claims. However, there is great concern regarding their safety, as a large number continues to live on the streets mainly in the border city of Pacaraima.

- A Local Task Force composed of UNHCR, the Government of Roraima, the Municipality of Boa Vista, the Civil Defence, as well as civil society representatives was established to develop and coordinate a common response to the Venezuelan migration flow in Roraima.
- Despite the breakthrough in the involvement of municipal authorities in the response in Roraima, humanitarian needs remain important. The inability of the local government to expedite processes in order to deliver a response in an emergency context is of particular concern. UNHCR and partners continue to advocate for the relocation of Venezuelans arriving, as Roraima's absorption capacity is limited. UNHCR remains the only UN agency with an effective presence.
- UNHCR has strengthened its presence on the border to better monitor influx trends, support local authorities in registering asylum-seekers, offer technical assistance to provide adequate shelter to those in need, among other activities.

Colombia

- Colombian authorities created a Special Stay Permit (Permiso Especial de Permanencia -PEP) to allow Venezuelans, who entered Colombia legally, but have overstayed their visas, to apply for a permit to stay in Colombia for up to two years, which includes the right to work. Over 55,000 have already requested this permit. The measure could benefit 230,000 Venezuelans. The authorities implemented this migratory alternative for Venezuelans after UNHCR provided technical advice on international law and best practices. UNHCR is working with the authorities to identify whether it is possible for asylum-seekers to obtain the PEP, while their claims are under review. The PEP will not apply for those, who entered Colombia after 28 July 2017, those who entered irregularly, or without passports. UNHCR will continue advocacy efforts to promote solutions that consider the difficulties many Venezuelans face when applying for a passport and in crossing through the small number of formal crossings on a 2,200 km border.



Every day thousands of Venezuelans, Colombian returnees and mixed families cross the Simon Bolivar Bridge in Cucuta, Colombia, to and from Venezuela.

- During border monitoring activities, UNHCR observed that the majority of Venezuelans entering Colombia in the border department of Norte de Santander and continuing their journey elsewhere, are going to Ipiales, a city near the Ecuadorian border.
- In Boyacá and Arauca border departments, UNHCR confirmed constant population flows at informal crossing points. Some Venezuelans are fleeing persecution and generalized violence, while others stated the pressing need for food, medicines and basic services. Women are also entering to have their children vaccinated. According to UNHCR's discussions with the population, 10% of those entering remain in Colombia, some in the border areas, while the majority proceed elsewhere, as there are limited or no employment opportunities in border communities. Smuggling of gasoline is very active and the main income for the population living at the border. Both the National Liberation Army (ELN) and Venezuelan border guards charge "taxes" on all smuggled goods.
- UNHCR is concerned with the complex security situation at the Colombian-Venezuelan border, where multiple armed groups are present and exert control in different areas, posing risks for the local

population and Venezuelan arrivals. In mid-July, clashes between the armed forces and an unidentified armed group in Norte de Santander led to the displacement of an estimated 240 individuals. UNHCR is working to identify and address the humanitarian needs.

- Over 650,000 Venezuelans have been pre-registered for the Border Mobility Card (TMF), which allows Venezuelans to temporarily enter Colombia to access basic goods and services. Registration is evenly distributed between women (51%) and men (49%). Over 56% continues to state “grocery shopping” as the reason for wanting the TMF.
- UNHCR is coordinating with authorities to provide financial and technical support to ensure a protection focus in migration trend studies and the public policies that result from them. UNHCR is also working with the World Bank to explore a joint project to analyse the economic impact and implications of cross-border trends, as well as the impact of long-term migration.
- UNHCR has provided funds and protection inputs for Phase 2 of IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). The DTM also establishes referral mechanisms for Venezuelans with international protection needs to UNHCR offices.

Ecuador

- Between 24 and 28 July, increasing numbers of Venezuelans arrived in Ecuador through the Rumichaca International Bridge (Border Col/Ecu). According to the Ecuadorian Migration Service, 1,000-1,200 Venezuelans arrived daily. UNHCR Tulcan dispatched monitoring missions and confirmed the congestion at the entry point, but also indicated that authorities have increased efforts to speed up migratory checks. No cases of arbitrary rejection were identified. No asylum claims have been registered at the border.

Southern Caribbean:

- As Chair of the UN Emergency Technical Team (UNETT), UNHCR has been in contact with other UNCTs in the Caribbean to establish capacity development needs and areas of responsibilities of the UN agencies present in the Trinidad and Tobago in different scenarios.
- In Trinidad and Tobago, the Venezuelan population circulated a petition to the Government to extend humanitarian visas to Venezuelans currently in the country. The petition had collected over 1,000 signatures by mid-August. Currently, the main form of legal status available to protect them from forced return to Venezuela – other than if they qualify for visa sponsorship through an employer or family member – is registration as an asylum-seeker with UNHCR.



In Trinidad and Tobago, the Cedros Dock serves as entry point from Tucupita, Venezuela

UNHCR Response

Main Objectives

- Collaborating with authorities and partners to provide legal support and in some cases social assistance to Venezuelans arriving.
- Working to guarantee the access of Venezuelan nationals' to proper registration and documentation to ensure their safety, access to basic services and livelihoods; including strengthening asylum systems.
- Cooperating with governments in the region to strengthen response plans and include a protection focus to guarantee the safety of people leaving Venezuela.
- Enhancing protection of children and other persons with specific needs.
- Promoting alternative legal pathways that have a positive impact on the livelihoods of the Venezuelans and their host communities.
- Developing solidarity campaigns with authorities, partners and host communities to combat discrimination and xenophobia.

Main Activities



Protection Brazil

- UNHCR Brazil is monitoring the situation of the indigenous Warao population living on the streets of Pacaraima (Roraima state). A total of 145 persons (71 children) were identified, none of whom had Brazilian documents; many children had no identification whatsoever. Their concerns include lack of shelter, state of health, lack of documentation and the number of unaccompanied minors. UNHCR continues to advocate for a registration mission led by the authorities.
- After a meeting with UNHCR and the Federal University of Roraima (UFRR), the Indigenous Council of Roraima (CIR) accepted to cooperate and work together towards protection-oriented solutions to the Warao situation and migration flows.
- UNHCR mobilized volunteers to support the Municipal Human Rights Secretary in the process of registering asylum claims by members of the Warao indigenous group in Manaus, Amazonas State. In the shelter run by local authorities, two UNHCR staff have been allocated to support new applicants.
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) are being implemented as a result of UNHCR's work with several organizations. Counsellors from the Guardianship Council of Boa Vista at the Federal Police are referring children with specific needs to the appropriate channels. UNHCR's efforts also led to the Guardianship Council of Pacaraima agreeing to identify UASC and other children with specific needs living in the city.



Many Warao indigenous persons who travelled over 2,000 km are living on the streets of Pacaraima, resorting to begging as a result of the lack of livelihood opportunities.

- UNHCR is working on a monitoring tool to map women and girls' protection needs to identify profiles and assess specific needs and develop a SGBV prevention and response strategy.

Colombia

- On 8 August, UNHCR established a presence in La Guajira Department, one of the most underserved departments in the country. The Field Unit's work will include work with persons of concern to UNHCR together with host communities, particularly the bi-national Wayuu indigenous groups, supporting identification mechanisms and emergency preparedness with local authorities, strengthening protection networks, as well as opening a guidance centre for persons of concern at the Paraguachon border crossing. On 11 August, the Unit participated in a campaign to identify Venezuelans with specific needs and provide basic healthcare and legal orientation for over 500 people.



The new Field Unit in La Guajira provides legal orientation and basic assistance to 500 Venezuelans.

- UNHCR continues to work within the Cluster structure for a coordinated whole-of-UN response to arrivals from Venezuela, with a particular emphasis on the specific needs of individuals at risk of sexual and gender-based violence, armed violence and recruitment, particularly the youth.
- Opción Legal has started a program funded and supported by UNHCR, which will provide direct assistance and representation for refugees, returnees, and others in need of international protection. This will include legal clinics, strategic litigation, and field brigades in remote areas in the Departments of Atlántico, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Arauca and Antioquia.
- UNHCR designed rapid needs assessment forms for border and other key persons of concern reception areas to ensure that SGBV and Child Protection cases, including UASC, are referred and followed up on. This focus on specific needs has also been ensured in the planned profiling exercise at the border, where psychologists will ensure that all at-risk cases identified are attended and referred to local and national stakeholders. At the national level, SGBV and Child Protection alliances and interventions have been strengthened with an emphasis on the Venezuela situation, most notably through the adoption of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for SGBV in emergencies through UNHCR's leadership in the SGBV Sub-Group.
- UNHCR was given the go-ahead to develop and implement an information and anti-xenophobia campaign with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency.
- On 4 August, the Office of the Ombudsman hosted an inter-institutional meeting to identify possible whole-of-Government actions for a "most pressing issue": the rights of Venezuelans in Colombia. UNHCR was the only non-Governmental participant and led a discussion to evaluate possible alternatives for Venezuelan nations with an irregular migratory status.

Southern Caribbean

- UNHCR undertook an extended mission to Curacao in August to work with the Government and the local Curacao Red Cross to strengthen emergency planning and preparedness measures. The mission has so far included meetings with members of the Permanent Representation of the Dutch Government, Members of Parliament, the Ministry of Justice and the Directorate of Risk Management

and Disaster Policy, as well as meetings with asylum-seekers and host communities accommodating Venezuelans.

- In Trinidad and Tobago, UNHCR chaired the meeting of the UN Emergency Technical Team (UNETT) as part of preparedness measures being undertaken by the UN Country Team. A 72-hour-plan of what to do in case of an emergency was developed and shared with members.
- As part of the collaboration with the Government, UNHCR conducted a training seminar with senior immigration officials and two recently hired staff members of UNHCR's partner, Living Water Community. The workshop took place within the Quality Assurance Initiative with the focus of raising awareness on key individuals that might or are entering the country. Topics included the international legal refugee framework and the right to asylum; international protection and how to identify persons of concern; cultural sensitivity; procedural fairness; current Refugee Status Determination procedures and SOPs for dealing with asylum-seekers.



Shelter Brazil

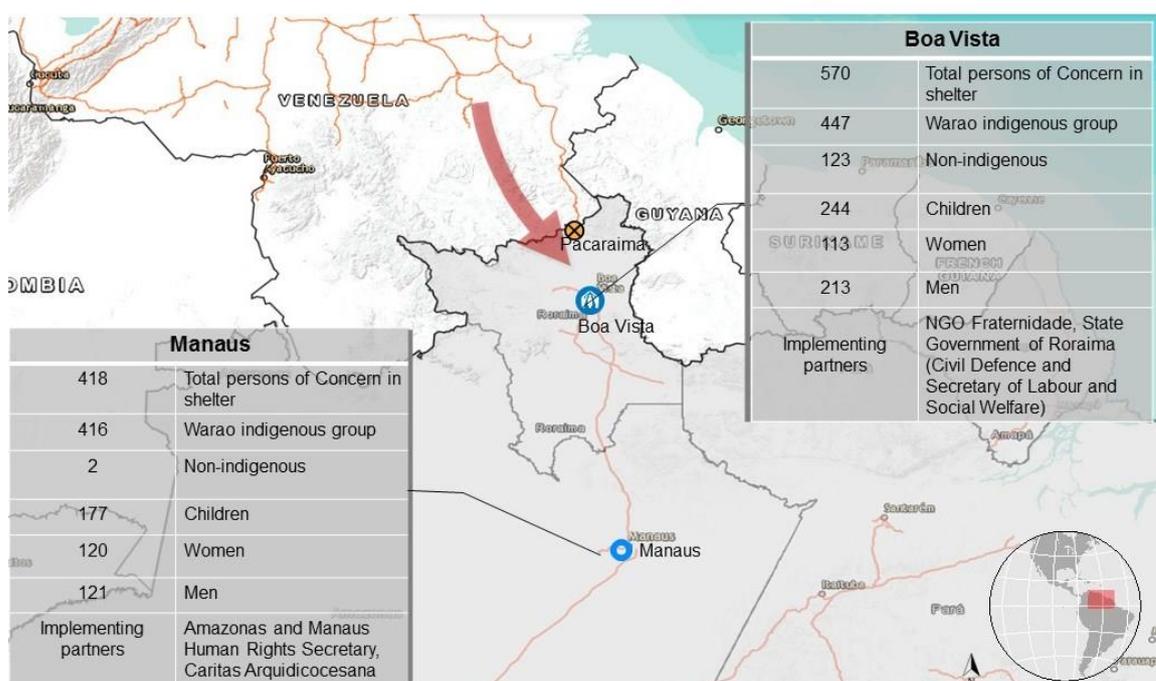
- The shelter response covers three areas of intervention: Pacaraima town, Boa Vista capital city of Roraima state, bordering Venezuela; and Manaus capital city of Amazonas State. The response is aimed at accompanying the current displacement trend as persons of concern enter Brazil through Pacaraima (approx. pop. 10,000), continue around 200 Km south to Boa Vista (approx. pop. 300,000) and then approx. 750 Km south to Manaus city (approx. pop. 3,000,000).



Brazil: Shelter response
 Venezuela Situation

29 August 2017

UNHCR Brasilia



*The number of persons of concern in Manaus refer to those living in the shelter and the 5 houses rented by the Municipality.

Pacaraima (Roraima state)

- UNHCR and the Municipality of Pacaraima made advances in the creation of the executive project for the new shelter. The Mormon Church agreed to provide the materials specified by the Municipality for infrastructure repairs and the construction of external toilets.
- Concerned with new arrivals forced to live on the street, UNHCR and Casa Civil are continuously reiterating the importance of establishing the shelter as soon as possible.

Boa Vista (Roraima state)

- The government of Roraima has started infrastructure repairs, while the Municipality has begun the earthworks of the external area. The Mormon Church is providing food as an emergency action, and will also support structural repairs. UNHCR has donated two industrial drinking fountains, which are the only sources of potable water. In addition it has delivered over 40 mattresses from the 600 it committed to acquire, and the first batch of hygiene and cleaning items purchased by UNHCR has been distributed by the government. 300 mosquito nets will also be donated for distribution. In addition, UNHCR will finance Fraternidade to locally recruit temporary staff to manage the shelter while the government concludes its selection process.



People continue to live under precarious conditions in the Boa Vista shelter. A laundry area and new toilets will be constructed, once earthworks are concluded.

Manaus (Amazonas state)

- UNHCR, the Municipality and Caritas established SOPs for the referral system for Waraos arriving in Manaus. Those who arrive at the shelter will receive health assistance and information on how to present an asylum claim. After thirty days, they will be referred to one of the five houses rented by the municipality. An estimated 190 persons are living in the houses. After the first reallocation, the following issues were identified: security in the houses; approval by the host neighbourhood of their presence; alleged relations to local drug dealers; management and provision of food.

Colombia

- UNHCR is working closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to carry out Quick Impact Projects to enhance shelter availability and quality in border areas.
- The municipality of Arauca and the Risk Management Unit raised their alert to orange level in response to the situation at the border. At the same time, the Mayor spoke to local radio sources

saying that the municipality does not have a contingency plan and is not prepared to respond to a possible mass influx of Venezuelans due to the deteriorating situation in Venezuela; if needed they will make use of local sports facilities for temporary shelter. UNHCR is working with local authorities and the Colombian Red Cross to establish alternatives for shelter.

Main Challenges

- In spite of important advancements and commendable efforts in the region, there are still gaps in the legal and institutional frameworks, which constitute a major challenge for the effective protection of persons of concern. There is still a great need to strengthen asylum systems and enhance alternative legal pathways.
- While data collection and profiling exercises are underway, there is still work to be done in order to understand the needs of Venezuelans leaving their country and provide an adequate response.
- Despite positive developments, there is a great need to continue strengthening the shelter response across the region, and particularly in border regions. While there have been some advancements, particularly in Brazil, people are still living in precarious conditions.
- There is a need to continue strengthening response plans, so that governments are prepared in case of various scenarios emerging.
- There is a lack of livelihood alternatives for Venezuelans arriving, which increases the risks of forced recruitment by armed groups or criminal gangs, as well as exploitation. In the case of the Warao, it is particularly of concern; many are resorting to begging to survive.
- In countries of asylum, the capacity to provide adequate protection to children, unaccompanied and separated children and other people with specific needs is very limited and needs to be reinforced.
- While there have been some major advancements in terms of documentation, there is a clear need to continue working to guarantee proper registration, documentation towards regularization and inclusion.
- Collaboration with authorities and partners to guarantee access to basic services for persons of concern.

CONTACTS

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