



Migration Profile

VENEZUELA

A. Executive Summary

Historically, Venezuela has always been considered the most prosperous South American country, due to an outstanding oil production; but in 2008 a major inflation crisis hit the national economy, causing an on-going political and financial instability. As a consequence, from February 2017 to October 2021 Venezuelan refugees, who are now in other Caribbean or Latin American countries, have increased exponentially, and in the last decade Venezuela has become the biggest South American country to send out large numbers of refugees, due to political and social unrest. This situation has deteriorated even more at the beginning of the current decade, also because of the global pandemic crisis, with 5.9 million Venezuelans abroad and approximately 7 million Venezuelans in need, of whom 3.2 million are children.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Venezuela is located in South America, covering an area of 916,445 sq. km. The country is surrounded by Colombia, Guyana and Brazil, while its northern coastal regions are limited by the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean sea, where Venezuela owns a good number of islands. According to the World Bank, in 2021 Venezuelans were 28.5 million people. Thanks to its prosperous economy, during the 20th century Venezuela attracted many migrants from Europe and from other continents, welcoming new cultural realities and social groups. According to UNFPA, 94% of Venezuelans live in urban areas, making it the most urbanized country in Latin America, while the remaining 6% reside below the Orinoco River. According to Venezuela's National Institute of Statistics (INE), the ethnic composition of the country is formed by two major groups: the moreno/mixed people (49.9%) and the white descendants of European migrants (42.2%), while the indigenous group represents 2.8% of the whole population. The overwhelming majority of people is Christian (about 89.5%), while 9.7% is not affiliated to any specific religion, and the remaining groups are Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists or belonging to other religions. According to the World Bank, life expectancy is 68 years for males and 76 for females. Statistical data also shows that since 2017 the mortality rate in Venezuela has increased significantly (1,8% in male population).

II. International and Internal Migrants

According to OCHA, Venezuelans in need account for 7 million people, and UNICEF reports that 3.2 million of them are children. In 2021 alone, in the country there were 4.5 million people who received assistance.

Most of the internal migration is caused by lack of employment in rural areas, thus forcing Venezuelans to move into more populated urban areas. In addition, other pushing factors are poor

income revenues, followed by safety issues, but also lack of basic services such as adequate drinking water, permanent food markets, access to healthcare and education, as well as no ownership of tools and assets in rural areas.

The main regions, where Venezuelans migrate from, are urban areas too. But, support programs are also needed for people located at the border regions waiting for an opportunity to flee the country. Here, according to UNOCHA, Save the Children Foundation gives protection to 349,000 migrant children.

Historically, Venezuela has been a recipient of immigrants seeking better financial opportunities; but since the 2008 economic and political crisis the situation has dramatically reversed. There are approximately 5.9 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the world; and approximately 4.8 million of them are found in Latin America and the Caribbean, as reported by UNHCR in 2021. However, only 170,000 Venezuelans have been officially recognised as refugees. Currently, over 850,000 Venezuelans are seeking asylum in another country due to political reasons.

Countries receiving Venezuelan refugees and migrants are Colombia, sheltering 2.1 million of them in 2021 (a 24% increase from 2020), Peru hosting at least 1 million Venezuelans, Ecuador and Chile, welcoming each country approximately half million refugees. Other recipients include Brazil, Argentina, Panama, Dominican Republic, Mexico and Costa Rica, as reported by the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.

Since 2018, Venezuela has experienced an increase in migration flows. As of February 2018 Venezuelans in other Latin American or Caribbean countries amounted to 1.2 million; but as of October 2021, this figure grew fourfold, reaching approximately 4.8 million. The R4V has reported a considerable increase in irregular migratory flows caused by the COVID-19 restrictions of movement within neighboring countries. For that reason, Latin American countries have been promoting various initiatives, in collaboration with the Venezuelan Government, by disclosing the real number of Venezuelan refugees in each host country, providing basic services such as food, water, healthcare and shelter to refugees, and education. The aforementioned initiatives are in line with the 2022 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), coordinated by UNHCR and the IOM, with the support of over 700 organisations.

During the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a significant influx of returnees to Venezuela, and many of them have faced several challenges to re-enter the country, especially by plane, due to flight cancellations and other restrictions; and international agencies have also reported numerous human rights violations migrants and refugees have faced while returning to their own country. In some cases, returnees' quarantines have been spent inside cells. The OAS member countries have enabled corridors to guarantee the return of Venezuelan migrants and refugees to their country: 27,000 returnees used the Colombia-Venezuela corridor; three other corridors were opened in April 2020, helping 105,000 returnees from Colombia in total and 6,000 more from Brazil.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Forced emigration from Venezuela is mostly determined by lack of food, water, education and basic services scarcity; in fact, according to ENCOVI 89% of the entire population lives in poverty, and more than 5.9 million refugees and migrants have already left Venezuela. As of March 2020, seventeen different countries host around 80% of Venezuelans (approximately 4.5 million)

throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, triggering the largest external displacement crisis in Latin America's recent history.

Venezuelans are originally from different households, and 47% of them declared that at least one of its members has migrated abroad, where they are taking in all kinds of jobs. According to the World Bank, 57% of working-age Venezuelans in Peru have higher education and 42% of them are young adults between the age of 18 and 29. This trend is attested in all of the arrival countries. Due to the importance of education and integration of migrants within the welcoming communities, Colombia and Argentina have allowed all Venezuelan children and youth to enroll in its national education system regardless of their immigration status. This means an additional 260,000 new school enrollments in Colombia alone. Likewise, the Church in Venezuela is promoting professional and entrepreneurial training within its country and the Episcopal Conference of Venezuela, gathered in the *Asamblea Nacional de Pastoral*, has invited all parishes to promote professional formation and entrepreneurship to Venezuelans in collaboration with ecclesiastical organizations like INVECAPI, APEP, CECAL and other.

A general overview of the Venezuelan diaspora shows how vast the dispersion of the population has been over the last decades. The main welcoming countries of Venezuelan migrants are Colombia, U.S., Peru, Brazil, Mexico, Spain, Canada, and Ecuador. According to the Official U.S. Homeland Security statistics, more than 135,000 Venezuelans arrived in the U.S. as permanent residents since 1999, while more than 366,000 have entered as temporary workers, but more than 8.8 million have entered with non-immigrant visas, and over 11,000 refugees have been granted political asylum. These include a wide range of highly skilled and educated (HSE) Venezuelans. Notwithstanding their dispersion over the whole globe, HSE Venezuelans have traditionally migrated to the U.S. and Europe. The European Union also provided integration initiatives - with support of national, regional and local authorities as well as local parishes and Caritas - for highly skilled and educated Venezuelans through the joint action of Member States which designed and enacted a model for the integration of Highly Skilled Third Country Nationals (HSTCN), by receiving third countries migrants based on their technical and professional capabilities, but also other aspects such as family concentration and circularity of the program by integrating source countries' government.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

Historical data shows that over 20% of Venezuelans had to leave their country since 1999. However, from 2018 there has been a steady decrease of disaster-induced displacements, especially flood related calamities. IDPs amounted to 2,400 as of 1 January 2020 due to floods in Mérida, Táchira and Lara regions, but according to IDMC's Venezuela's Situation update of December 31, 2020, since January 2018 IDPs have decreased by approximately 30,000 individuals. Floods are the main reason for IDPs' displacement, and the 2018 Orinoco and Caroni rivers' flooding impacted the country severely. The risks for future disasters and IDPs' displacements are relatively low: the IDMC foresees 42,206 new potential victims, due to earthquake, flood, storm surge, tsunami or cyclonic wind in the next few years.

Colombia shelters 1,742,927 registered Venezuelan refugees, of the total 5.9 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide. According to R4V, Peru hosts 1,286,464 refugees, while Ecuador 482,897 and Chile approximately 448,138. Among many other countries, Brazil, Argentina, Panama, Dominican Republic, México, and Costa Rica have also received significant numbers of

Venezuelans.

Since February 2018, forced migration to Colombia has increased 300%, mostly due to violence or political unrest. The main issue for new migrant outflows is that receiving countries are now imposing many restrictions to asylum seekers, who have to file their request in Venezuela, where resources to reach appropriate channels within the country are almost nonexistent. In addition, the COVID-19 outbreak forced neighboring countries to limit the number of refugees allowed into the country, even to the point of closing their borders to Venezuelans. Colombia also did that because of the pandemic, and borders were shut until early 2021, except for humanitarian reasons, transportation of cargoes and merchandise, and the departure of foreign citizens as long as it was coordinated with Migración Colombia and the municipal authorities.

Since 2017 refugee's figures have kept increasing. In 2018 refugees under the UNHCR's protection were 21,047, jumping to 93,239 in 2019 and reaching 186,832 people in 2021. Asylum applications increased from 464,223 in 2018 to 794,569 in 2019, and the trend keeps increasing from 2019 through 2021, when applications skyrocketed to 952,246. Border closures during the pandemic have also caused a further increase in asylum applications, and, during the COVID-19 outbreak, migrants, IDPs and people in need have been receiving support from international organisations trying to meet all Venezuelans' needs. The most important support initiatives are connected to healthcare, water and hygiene. These activities are sponsored by NGOs working together with the Church; however, 83% of these organisations are local, while only 17% belong to international NGOs.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Venezuelan children, men and women, are subject to human trafficking, both in forced labor and in sexual exploitation. The recruitment of children is perpetrated by foreign armed groups, and afterwards traffickers exploit these victims in Aruba, The Bahamas, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Curacao, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guyana, Haiti, Iceland, Macau, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Spain, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. Venezuelan women and especially young girls are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking in Colombia, Ecuador, and Trinidad and Tobago. In 2020, 23% of the victims identified in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo were Venezuelan born. In 2019, Spanish authorities reported that Venezuela was the number one source of victims being exploited in Spain.

Traffickers usually find their victims, especially women and girls, in Caracas, Maracaibo and Margarita Island, and use them for sex trafficking and domestic jobs within Venezuela itself. In addition, some foreign children from other South American, Caribbean, Asian or African countries have been identified by the Venezuelan authorities, and in some cases human trafficking has been linked to the gold extraction in the Orinoco Mining Arc in the Bolívar state. These children are also forced into sex trafficking, recruited to join armed criminal groups and work precariously under difficult conditions. In 2019, it was estimated that 45% of miners in Bolívar were underage. School drop-out rates during the pandemic reached 82% in the border states, and 75% of those who left school had direct or indirect connections to outlawed armed groups.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, according to a press report, in 2020 governmental authorities investigated 66 human trafficking cases, arresting or indicting 63 individuals, while in 2019 traffickers being arrested were 17 and 99 in 2018. Between January and June 2020, Venezuelan authorities identified approximately 233 victims exploited by 11 trafficking rings. According to

media sources, the Venezuelan Organized Crime Office (ONCDOFT) also activated a 24-hour hotline to receive reports of abuse against women, including trafficking allegations. Authorities investigated 6 alleged traffickers and issued arrest warrants for 7 national guard officers, involved in facilitating trafficking crimes. This happened after a ship en route to Trinidad and Tobago capsized and killed 28 of these victims.

VI. National Legal Framework

Venezuela has its *Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela*, where the fundamental rights and norms are included and all Venezuelans must enjoy and abide by them.

These are the same norms included in the Declaration of Human Rights. In 2004, the *Ley de Extranjería y Migración (LEM)* was enacted, and in article 13 it states that all foreigners will have the same fundamental rights enjoyed by Venezuelans. Equality, then, is a principle affecting all the other laws regulating migration.

Venezuela also enacted the *Ley Orgánica sobre Refugiados o Refugiadas y Asilados o Asiladas*, which ensures the application of constitutional rights and other rights recognised by national laws to international refugees and migrants within the country. Specifically, these rights include the possibility to receive documentation for their protection against involuntary repatriation (art. 16, 18 LORRAA); not be penalized for irregular entry (art. 4 n. 4 and art. 2, LORRAA); access to employment (Organic Labor Law, art. 27, 28 and 317), and many other rights. Notwithstanding the focus that this regulation has on foreign migrants, the LEM also establishes trafficking offences as greater violations against the law. These violations are specifically the facilitation of illegal entry into the country (art. 52, LEM), labor exploitation of migrants (art. 53, LEM), promotion of illegal immigration (art. 55, LEM), illegal trafficking of persons (art. 56, LEM).

A new legal framework aims at regulating the humanitarian activities carried out by civil organisations, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity of access to victims (UN General Assembly Resolution 43/131 of December 8, 1988 on humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters and emergency situations). In addition, Venezuela has ratified several international conventions such as: the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and also the Protocol of Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Venezuela also signed the non-binding resolutions: New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016, giving rise to the Global Compact for Refugees (2018) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2019).

Human rights issues in the member states of the Organization of American States are monitored by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in the framework of the Charter of the OAS and the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR).

Venezuelan migrants are not considered as such within their own country and therefore the legal framework refers only to the destination country. The status attributed to migrants in each of these countries is different. Colombia has recently drafted a law for the new “Temporary State Protection for Venezuela Migrants”, in order to grant temporary regularisation to Venezuelan migrants meeting the proposed requirements.

VII. Main Actors

The State

In 2012, the Bolivarian Republic created the Organized Crime Office (ONCDOFT) which fights against human trafficking through investigations, arrests, prosecutions and among other activities a 24/7 hotline support. Other State actors include the Administrative Service for Identification, Migration and Aliens (SAIME), the National Refugee Commission (CONARE), handling all asylum requests in the country.

The National Council for Human Rights looks after the Venezuelan compliance with human rights. The Autonomous National Council for Children Rights (IDENA) acts as a guarantor of children's rights in Venezuela, while all citizens are able to receive human rights protection from the *Defensoría del Pueblo*, established to promote, oversee and defend human rights in the country.

Venezuela has also working relations with the ICRC, providing training for healthcare professionals, members of the armed forces and volunteers.

International Organisations

Most international organisations active in Venezuela are part of the 2022 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP). The RMRP is coordinated by UNHCR and IOM, and many organisations and states are involved, UNICEF, Save the Children, WFP, WHO, PAHO, UNAIDS, ILO, WVI, HIAS, UN Women, as well as the WFP, IPPE, iMMAP, IFRC, to implement, fundraise and handle the RMRP finances. This Plan includes 223 projects from 144 organisations targeting 4.5 million of the most vulnerable Venezuelans, of whom 56% are women and girls and 44% are men and boys. Other organisations include the American States Organisation (OAS), the E.U. and Iran with direct or indirect humanitarian collaboration with the country. Other associations support more than 3.1 million people, and 76,000 of them have a specific handicap. Indigenous people are not disregarded by the OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan, and the program has reached approximately 303,000 individuals belonging to the indigenous groups. The main regions that have already received aid from this program are the Distrito Capital (with 594,000 people reached), Zulia (451,000 people assisted) and Táchira (428,000 people helped).

NGOs and Other Organisations

Local and regional organisations are connected to the Platform for National Humanitarian Action (PAHNAL), which coordinates 766 humanitarian centers within Venezuela trying to mitigate the effects of the Complex Humanitarian Emergencies (EHC). Church organisations involved with PAHNAL include *Fe y Alegría*, *Apoyo don Bosco*, *Damas Salesianas*, *Red de Acción Social de la Iglesia*, *JRS Venezuela*, *AVESSOC* or *Caritas Venezuela*. PAHNAL is independent from the State and has called for an easement of the new guidelines regulating all humanitarian activities in Venezuela. The main challenges these organisations face are access to basic services (internet, electricity, phone, water), and 78% of them have reported an increase in operational costs, reducing staff and halting projects. Other problems include safety issues and threats, lack of transportation and permits, health safety resources and lack of access to fuel.

The Catholic Church

Venezuela has 1,146 parishes located in 335 municipalities, and 44 active bishops. Venezuelan migrants and refugees receive support through these parishes and Red CLAMOR, an aid network sustained by all Latin American countries and CELAM, the Latin American Council of Episcopal

Conferences. Red CLAMOR also promotes programs run by Caritas, religious congregations and other Church's organisations. Before Red CLAMOR the Holy See had an organisation called *Puentes Solidarios*, which coordinated the humanitarian efforts to help 10 different Venezuelan Episcopal Conferences, in their local parishes and communities. The main initiatives pursued by Red CLAMOR are food provision, shelters for migrants, supplies, cash to support vulnerable migrants and their daily expenses, medical services, legal aid, security and safety for children and teenagers, as well as psycho-social programs to support migrants that have been separated from relatives. Red CLAMOR is also involved in social research, especially to identify and help prevent human rights violations.

Fe y Alegría, *Asociación Civil Red de Casas don Bosco*, *Damas Salesianas*, *Red de Acción Social de la Iglesia*, JRS Venezuela, AVESSOC or *Cáritas Venezuela*, are some of the organisations actively bringing humanitarian aid to the country.

Particularly, *Fe y Alegría* focuses on providing aid to children in need in the 23 Venezuelan states, by educating more than 125,978 students, through their 177 schools, 155 community learning centers and their 23 own radio stations. There are over 10,000 collaborators of *Fe y Alegría* in Venezuela, and many other associations are connected to it, like UNICEF which alone supports more than 15 million people in the country and joined forces with the *Fe y Alegría* Foundation.

Asociación Civil Red de Casas don Bosco offers more than 700 daily breakfast and meals within their shelter houses across the whole country.

The Jesuits in Venezuela have offered educational programs to 445,528 Venezuelans, with their own 187 schools and 4 spiritual centers. Since 2001 JRS in 53.5% of the activities undertaken has been focused on peace and reconciliation, and also offers humanitarian assistance, psychological and health care as well as basic need assistance.

Additionally, AVESSOC coordinates joint healthcare efforts in Venezuela and also provides its own healthcare services through 30 associated hospitals and healthcare facilities.

Since 2016 *Cáritas Venezuela*, among other initiatives, has fed 16,846 people in comprehensive nutrition programs and also supports 412 parishes through its educational, financial or operational cooperation.

Other initiatives include supporting pregnant women. JRS pays for an ultrasound exam for every pregnant Venezuelan woman present in the Cúcuta region, in Colombia, conducting postnatal visits or helping secure basic necessities both for mothers and newborns.

The Missionaries of Saint Charles Borromeo (Scalabrinians) also support migrant mothers in the Diocesan Center of Migration shelter in Cúcuta, and offer many other programs.

The local Church is also involved in providing support to refugees, migrants and returnees at both sides of the Colombia-Venezuela border, as is the case of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, partnering with IOM in providing food and support to migrants within the Diocese. On the other side of the border connecting Colombia and Venezuela through the Simón Bolívar bridge, the Diocese of Cúcuta provides more than 1,000 daily meals to Venezuelans arriving in Colombia through the busiest border in the country.

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