



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



**ACNUR**  
Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas  
para los Refugiados

**PROTECTION  
IN VENEZUELA**





© UNHCR Venezuela Tatiana Font/2019

## UNHCR'S Work in Venezuela

UNHCR opened its first office in Venezuela in 1991, responding to an invitation from the Venezuelan Government.

Since then, it has been promoting coexistence between refugees and the local population, providing technical support to government institutions charged with the recognition of refugee status and upholding the rights of persons in need of international protection.

UNHCR has been implementing in Venezuela a community-based protection strategy with the purpose of strengthening the capacity of the government, civil society, and the communities themselves to respond to the needs of refugees and their host communities.

In these communities, UNHCR works alongside social organisations and civil society in the identification, referral, and assistance of people with specific needs.

Beginning in 2019, with the launch of the Humanitarian Response Plan for Venezuela, UNHCR has been increasing the scope of its support for the affected and vulnerable population through its leadership role in the Protection Cluster and Shelter, Energy, and Non-Food Items Cluster.

Since early 2020, UNHCR has also been actively taking part in the UN inter-agency response to the COVID-19 emergency.







# 31 Years with Venezuela

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## Message from our Representative, Enrique Vallés-Ramos

Venezuela and UNHCR have a long history together. Our first office in Caracas was established over 30 years ago, in 1991. I too go a long way back with Venezuela. It is the country where I have spent the longest time in my 27-year career with the United Nations. Venezuela has had a profound influence on me, both as a humanitarian professional and as a human being.

I first arrived in 2007 to head UNHCR's Field Office in San Cristóbal. It was a very different situation back then, and our work

at the time dealt mostly with Colombians arriving in Venezuela to seek refuge from the conflict raging in their country. The most striking memory I have kept from that period in Táchira, which lasted until 2011, is that of the great generosity that Venezuelans demonstrated in welcoming those who were seeking protection in their country.

Following four years in our headquarters in Geneva and three years to reopen UNHCR's office in Guatemala, duty (and probably also the heart) called me back to



Venezuela in 2018, when I took on the job of Deputy Representative of the Venezuela Operation in Caracas. This second time, I found a very different country that was beset by problems that I had not witnessed or imagined possible during my previous stay. But I also found again a country and a people that, despite adversity, had kept that same generosity and welcoming nature that is at the very heart of being Venezuelan.

Over the past few years, our Operation in Venezuela has grown dramatically, taking on new tasks to meet the needs of not only those who had sought refuge from conflict abroad, but also those of the Venezuelans who are most vulnerable and at risk in these difficult times. When I came back in 2018, our Operation had some 40 staff. Three years later, we have more than 140 personnel distributed across the country. Last year alone, UNHCR and its partners in Venezuela reached a milestone of 3 million beneficiaries in this country, improving the lives of many among those who are most in need.

When I look back at what we have been doing in Venezuela, I feel pride for our achievements, but not complacency, because there is still so much more that needs to be accomplished to ensure that needs are met. That is why we are here to stay, serve, protect, and support Venezuelan institutions in their efforts to provide help to our people of concern: refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as people affected by the situation in the country, natural disasters, and other emergencies. This is my personal commitment as Representative of UNHCR Venezuela and that of all my colleagues in the Venezuela Operation.









Italian refugees and migrants arriving in La Guaira on the *Marco Polo* within the framework of the National Immigration Plan

## History of Venezuela as a Host Country

Venezuela has a long tradition of welcoming people from abroad since its very independence in 1811. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw groups of Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire fleeing persecution in Damascus and modern-day Lebanon; groups of Corsicans fleeing crop diseases, political unrest, and a cholera epidemic during the reign of Napoleon III; groups of West Indians looking for opportunities in the gold mines of the state of Bolívar; and others arriving at Venezuela's ports.

It was not until the end of World War II that refugees in much larger numbers began to arrive. Between 1947 and 1951, the International Refugee Organisation (precursor to UNHCR) resettled over 17,000 refugees and

displaced people from Europe in Venezuela, making it the third-largest receiving country in the world in terms of accepted people in relation to its own population.



Spaniards from the Canary Islands irregularly entering the Port of Carúpano in 1949 on *La Elvira* in hopes of starting a new life in Venezuela





Barracks at the El Trompillo Immigrant Reception Centre in Carabobo, used to house European refugees between 1947 and 1957

More broadly speaking, between 1949 and 1961, around 800,000 foreign nationals are estimated to have entered Venezuela through both regular and irregular means with the intention to remain in the country—primarily Europeans leaving behind their hunger-stricken and war-torn communities, as well as considerable numbers of East Asians and Middle Easterners.

The following decades were characterised by a marked increase in the immigration of Colombians, other South Americans, Dominicans, and Haitians—either fleeing armed conflicts and repressive dictatorships or seeking better economic opportunities.

The number of Colombians in Venezuela increased from under 200,000 in 1971 to

over 500,000 in the 1981 census. When considering the large number of refugees and irregular migrants, some sources estimate the presence of over 1.5 million Colombians in Venezuela at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This massive influx of Colombians into Venezuela, many fleeing from the armed conflict in Colombia, paved the way for the establishment of the first UNHCR office in Caracas in 1991. Initially, the Operation's work was focused on providing individual assistance to displaced Colombians in Venezuela, ensuring their enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the 1951 Geneva Convention of Refugees.





MY FAMILY AND I FLED HUNGARY DURING THE BUDAPEST OFFENSIVE AT THE END OF 1944. AFTER

LIVING IN VARIOUS REFUGEE CAMPS, WE FINALLY ARRIVED IN VENEZUELA. VENEZUELA GAVE US A VERY WARM WELCOME AND HAS ALWAYS BEEN OPEN TO US MAINTAINING OUR OWN TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS IN OUR NEW HOME.

JUDITH KRISTÓFFY-JESZENSZKY DE NYISZTOR – Hungary



AFTER ONE OF MY FAMILY MEMBERS WAS MURDERED AND ANOTHER TORTURED BY THE FRANÇOIS DUVALIER REGIME,

I FLED TO VENEZUELA. THE LOCALS IN NIRGUA, YARACUY, WELCOMED ME WITH OPEN ARMS AND LOVED THE WAY I SPOKE SPANISH. AFTER EVERYTHING VENEZUELA GAVE MY FAMILY AND ME, I AM COMMITTED TO GIVING BACK HOWEVER I CAN.

RAYMOND CREPSAC – Haiti



MY FAMILY AND I WERE REUNIFIED WITH MY GRANDFATHER IN VENEZUELA 10 YEARS AFTER HE FLED

FROM THE "SAVAGE PURGES" IN YUGOSLAVIA. WE FOUNDED THE FIRST BALLET COMPANY IN MARACAIBO, AND I HAVE SINCE BEEN DEDICATED TO PROVIDING LOCAL GIRLS WITH DISCIPLINE AND A FINE EDUCATION. I HAVE NEVER BEEN MADE TO FEEL A FOREIGNER HERE. ANYONE WHO COMES TO THIS COUNTRY WILL FEEL RIGHT AT HOME.

ALEKSANDRA "SASHA" GOSIC DE VOJKIĆ  
Serbia (Yugoslavia)



CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIET ARMY I HAD BEEN FIGHTING FOR CONSIDERED ME A TRAITOR

SIMPLY BECAUSE I HAD BEEN TAKEN AS A PRISONER OF WAR INSTEAD OF BEING KILLED IN BATTLE? I COULD NOT RETURN HOME AFTER WORLD WAR II ENDED, SO I FLED TO VENEZUELA. EVER SINCE I ARRIVED IN VENEZUELA, I HAVE BEEN WELL. I STARTED A NEW LIFE WITH A NEW FAMILY, HAD A LONG CAREER TEACHING, AND EVEN WON MANY CHESS COMPETITIONS.

DANIL TORADSE – Georgia





MY HEART  
SWELLS WITH  
GRATITUDE  
WHEN I THINK  
OF EVERYTHING  
VENEZUELA  
GAVE ME: A

PLACE WHERE I WAS SAFE FROM  
PERSECUTION, WHERE I BEGAN  
MY PROFESSIONAL CAREER IN  
MEDICINE, WHERE I RAISED MY  
FAMILY, AND WHERE I AM IN  
COMMUNION WITH THE CARONÍ  
RIVER EVERY DAY TO THIS DAY.

MIGUEL RODRÍGUEZ – Uruguay



I FOUND OPPOR-  
TUNITIES IN VEN-  
EZUELA I WOULD  
HAVE NEVER  
BEEN ABLE TO  
FIND IN TRINIDAD  
WITH MY BASIC

SCHOOLING. AS A WIDOW AND SIN-  
GLE MOTHER, I WAS ABLE TO HAVE  
MY OWN HOUSE HERE AND PRO-  
VIDE A BETTER LIFE FOR BOTH OF  
MY CHILDREN. THE LOCALS WOULD  
ALWAYS SAY, “SHE’S A TRINI. TREAT  
HER WELL.” VENEZUELA IS MY HOME.

MARINA CUPID APPLEWHITE – Trinidad And Tobago



## Community-Based Protection

Since its establishment in 1991, UNHCR Venezuela and its partners prioritised the local integration of refugees from Colombia and other countries around the world into the communities in which they had settled. As the refugees began to settle and their numbers began to decrease in

the 2010s, UNHCR shifted its focus from assistance to individuals and families to a community-based protection strategy that works with communities hosting refugees and asylum-seekers to ensure that the benefits reach all members of the host community.





## Colombian Refugee Single Mother Empowering Women from Her Host Community

Esperanza\* is from the coastal region of Colombia. When her father refused to join an armed group operating near Ciénaga, Magdalena, he was murdered. Esperanza also became a victim of domestic violence: she lost one of her kidneys at the hands of the father of her two youngest children. She fled with her three children and arrived in Venezuela in 2012.

“It wasn’t easy to leave everything behind and a place that was my own in order to find safety for my kids and for me. I fled without bringing any identity documents. I couldn’t look for a normal job in Venezuela because I didn’t have an ID with me. Although I was living in the shadows, thank God I didn’t lose hope.

“Applying for asylum here opened many doors for me. I was no longer a foreigner without personal documentation, but rather someone with rights: a person who also had the right to be in this country.”

In addition to receiving support from UNHCR and NGO partner HIAS while applying for asylum in Venezuela—she and her children are now recognised refugees—Esperanza was referred to services providing psychological care and legal assistance. Her oldest son Martín\* had also been a victim of domestic violence. Esperanza and her children therefore received family therapy to treat the effects of the violence they had experienced.

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\* Name changed for protection reasons



Esperanza with her three children ©UNHCR Venezuela



Staff member with Esperanza's oldest son ©UNHCR Venezuela

"I shed so many tears seeing how lonely Martín felt. My son has changed so much, though. He is my pride and joy. Martín tells me, 'Mom, you suffered a lot. I want to grow and study and learn all sorts of things to make sure that you never have to suffer again.'"

All three children were enrolled in school and registered in a community connectivity camp and recreational activities where they could interact with other children their age, and Martín also had the opportunity to participate in a photography workshop and cinematography course with NGO partner Luz y Vida.

Of her own accord, Esperanza began a small sewing business, primarily focused on clothing repairs. She was awarded a scholarship to attend a professional sewing course and received a subsidy to purchase equipment for her sewing shop. By virtue of her dedication, her shop has grown from simply doing repairs to selling school uniforms and designing formal wear, including wedding dresses.

As the business has grown, Esperanza has deliberately employed Venezuelan women in her host community who are also survi-



Esperanza employs single mothers and GBV survivors in her host community ©UNHCR Venezuela

vors of gender-based violence (GBV) and are heads of family, motivating them to get ahead and succeed just like she has.

"I want these women to be independent and confident in their own abilities. My goal is that this community, which provided support to my children and me and were family to us when we had none, can now *salir adelante* in the same way that we have been able to."





The San Isidro *chocolateras* after finishing their first batch of chocolate ©UNHCR Venezuela

## Solidarity Initiatives

Within the framework of the Venezuela Humanitarian Response Plan launched by the United Nations in 2020, UNHCR works with Venezuelan communities in vulnerable situations, supporting these communities as they take on a role in identifying and solving the problems that affect them, be they material, social, or psychological. This role is spearheaded by local community outreach volunteers, women's networks, and youth networks, who work together to develop solidarity initiatives and projects with the aim of responding to the issues and difficulties their respective communities face.

### Petare

In Petare, one of the largest slums in Latin America, the unemployment rate among women increased considerably during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women were left without sources of income with which to buy groceries for their homes, and some GBV survivors were forced to remain with their aggressors due to economic dependence.

Thus, UNHCR and NGO partner *Fogones y Bandera* supported professional chocolate production and culinary workshops to promote livelihood opportunities



Beginning the chocolate-making process ©Fogones y Bandera/UNHCR Venezuela



Proudly showing off a fresh chocolate bar produced by the chocolateras ©UNHCR Venezuela



Chocolate bars ready for sale ©Fogones y Bandera/UNHCR Venezuela

for 18 women at risk in the community of San Isidro. Award-winning Venezuelan chef María Fernanda Di Giacobbe provided a comprehensive training on chocolate making, from fermenting the cocoa bean to moulding and packaging the chocolate. In addition to the professional workshops, the participants received training on GBV prevention and response, as well as on sexual and reproductive health.

These 18 women have proceeded to produce and sell chocolate and other edible goods, generate income, purchase their own chocolate refiner, and formally establish San Isidro Emprende, their own cooperative, which they are set on growing to also support women entrepreneurs in other fields, such as piñata making.



“BEHIND THE CHOCOLATE IS THE VALUE THAT EACH OF US IS GIVING TO OURSELVES. WE ARE DELIVERING EVERYTHING WE’VE STORED UP INSIDE OUR HEARTS THAT WE HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO LET OUT. WE’RE SERVING OUR LOVE IN EACH AND EVERY BAR OF CHOCOLATE. I GUESS THAT’S WHY THE CHOCOLATE TASTES SO DELICIOUS!”

~ CHOCOLATERA ROSANA OLIVEROS





Girl from Brisas del Sur wearing one of the handcrafted facemasks ©IRFA/UNHCR Venezuela



Members of the local youth network crafting facemasks ©IRFA/UNHCR Venezuela

## Bolívar

In eastern Venezuela, the youth network of Brisas del Sur in the city of Ciudad Guayana developed an initiative to design and make three-layer cloth face masks to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in their community.

A local seamstress provided a workshop on the crafting of facemasks for 30 teenagers, young men, and young women in the community, and NGO partner IRFA donated fabric and four sewing machines to the youth network for this initiative. Then, volunteers from the ages of 13 to 26 hand-made 1,000 face masks to deliver to people in vulnerable situations: 400 elderly people, 200 people with chronic diseases, and 400 children and adolescents.

The volunteers also designed banners with COVID-19 prevention messages to put on display in strategic places in the community, including local businesses and neighbours' homes. Through the delivery of these

face masks, the volunteers raised awareness on COVID-19 prevention and the correct use of face masks.

## Zulia

In the remote, indigenous Wayuu and Bari community of Río Negro, Zulia, access to basic goods can be a challenge. Border crossings undertaken by locals to Colombia for work or to purchase food or medicine has been a daily reality. Thus, the local women's network Jieyúú Kojutsuu ("Women of Value") developed an environmentally friendly community orchard initiative with the aim of generating alternative subsistence opportunities for the local population in their own community.

UNHCR donated water tanks, solar streetlights, farming equipment, and seeds and provided leadership training for the women's network. IOM provided training on soil preparation and the production of organic repellent and fertiliser with ingredients



Preparing organic insect repellent ©IOM Venezuela



Connecting the water tanks donated by UNHCR for irrigation ©UNHCR Venezuela

that are all locally available. The fertiliser is made with cow/goat manure, molasses, and vegetable matter, while the repellent is made with neem leaves, tobacco leaves, and vegetable ash.

In addition to providing alternative subsistence opportunities, specifically for women at risk, the goal of the community orchard initiative is also to include elderly people in community life and provide organic farming activities for children and teenagers, who might otherwise be exposed to force recruitment by armed groups in the region. The women's network will be organising information sessions on GBV prevention, children's rights, and the inclusion of elderly people for the 26 participants who are working on the orchard. The women's network plans on expanding this environmentally friendly subsistence farming project to include other local families—137 more people—given the remoteness of the community and the limited access to transportation.



Women from Río Negro preparing the orchard for sowing ©UNHCR Venezuela

## Táchira

Around Venezuela, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the education of many children, particularly those who live in places with poor connectivity. A Colombian refugee woman and four local Venezuelan women in the small Andean town of Mano de Dios noticed that there were local children who were behind in reading, writing, and mathematics.





Coromoto\* providing catch-up classes for children in Mano de Dios, Táchira ©UNHCR Venezuela

Upon identifying this need, they decided to work together as volunteers to provide complementary catch-up classes for 10 children in the community. In a matter of months, the initiative grew to include a total of 32 children whose studies had been considerably affected by the pandemic.

NGO partner Jesuit Refugee Service organised capacity building for the five volunteers on child protection, GBV, and sexual and reproductive health. UNHCR donated school supplies, tables, chairs, whiteboards, and biosecurity gear to support the initiative. The community has also pitched in, with different people donating snacks and supplies, and others providing stipends to support the volunteer teachers.



Local boy participating in catch-up classes for children in Mano de Dios, Táchira ©UNHCR Venezuela



Local girl participating in catch-up classes in Mano de Dios, Táchira ©UNHCR Venezuela

In the words of Coromoto\*, the Colombian refugee teacher, “Education is a treasure and the best gift we can give to our children.”

Coromoto and the other four volunteer teachers are now in the process of expanding their initiative, identifying illiterate elderly people who will soon join these special classes to learn how to read.

## Apure

In the heart of Los Llanos in central Venezuela lies the city of San Fernando de Apure, which has been particularly affected by human mobility. As a result, there are a considerable number of cases of unaccompanied children in San Fernando whose parents have left in

\* Named changed for protection reasons





The newly rehabilitated community sports field in El Muertico, Apure ©UNHCR Venezuela

search of better opportunities in neighbouring countries, as well as elderly people left to the care of their teenage grandchildren. There have also been a sizable number of children and young returnees who have been arriving back in San Fernando since the start of the pandemic.

Community outreach volunteers from El Muertico in San Fernando identified a sports field as a potential safe space where activities could be organised for children and young people in the community. UNHCR rehabilitated the field and, together with HIAS and the Apure Red Cross, provided capacity building on project management and GBV prevention and response, as well as the protection needs of children, people with disabilities, elderly people, and LGBTI people.



Community outreach volunteers playing volleyball on the sports field ©UNHCR Venezuela

Since then, volunteers have organised summer camps, catch-up classes, and sporting activities for children and teenagers, including children with disabilities, as well as activities for elderly people in this rehabilitated sports field. It serves as a safe and inclusive space for around 800 people from El Muertico and surrounding communities.



# UNHCR and the Venezuela Humanitarian Response Plan

The United Nations launched the Venezuela Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) to help the millions of vulnerable Venezuelans who have been hit hard by the country's crisis. Within the architecture of the Plan, UNHCR leads two key groupings of hu-

manitarian actors: the Protection Cluster and the Shelter, Energy, and Non-Food Items (NFI) Cluster. Under UNHCR's leadership, these two Clusters provided assistance to over 1.7 million vulnerable people in Venezuela in 2021.



Team-building session with Protection Cluster partners ©UNHCR Venezuela

## Protection Cluster

The Protection Cluster's 145 partners (including UN agencies, NGOs, and INGOs) delivered lifesaving protection services to some 776,000 people at heightened risk, including Venezuelans, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Around the country, from large urban settlements to remote villages, partners supported the physical, mental, and psychosocial wellbeing of the affected population; ensured access

to legal documentation; mitigated risks faced by people in mobility; and worked to prevent, reduce, and respond to all forms of violence.

The Venezuelan Humanitarian Fund supported 18 intersectoral projects designed to address the needs of indigenous communities in the states of Amazonas, Bolívar, Delta Amacuro, and Zulia; vulnerable children returning to school in the states of Apure,



Pilot interviews conducted with community members in San Cristóbal, Táchira ©UNHCR Venezuela

Amazonas, and Delta Amacuro; and people affected by armed confrontations in the Capital District.

In line with UNHCR's global protection mandate in humanitarian emergencies, the Protection Cluster launched a three-month pilot survey in Táchira, Miranda, and the Capital District in 2021. The survey, called the Protection Monitoring Tool (PMT), both identifies the needs and risks encountered by Venezuelans in vulnerable situations at a community level and analyses if they are being met and addressed.

Thirty-five staff from Protection Cluster partners conducted the survey in 24 different municipalities with 366 community members, including community leaders, service providers, and local teachers. According to participants, the top three priorities of their communities were access to water and sanitation solutions, health, and food. The report with the PMT results recommends that humanitarian actors involve communi-

ties in designing programmes that address these priorities as a way to empower the communities and ensure the sustainability of such programmes.

Following the success of the pilot survey, the Protection Cluster is planning on launching the PMT nationally in 2022, conducting the survey in 21 states and the Capital District.



Capacity-building session with Protection Cluster partners ©UNHCR Venezuela





Landslides resulting from heavy rains in Tovar, Mérida  
©UNHCR Venezuela



## UNHCR Response to Natural Disasters and Flooding

In 2021, the Government of Venezuela declared a 90-day state of emergency after heavy rains, mudslides, and floods resulted in a natural disaster, particularly in the states of Apure, Bolívar, Delta Amacuro, Mérida, Yaracuy, and Zulia, which led to scores of deaths and thousands of affected households. According to the Ministry of the Interior, Justice, and Peace, 54,543 people (approximately 14,000 families) were affected in 87 municipalities in 11 states.

In the Andean state of Mérida alone, there were 20 people dead, 3 missing, and

1,200 families who lost their homes. UNHCR supported adapting facilities of the main school in Tovar, including the installation of 12 RHUs, in order that they could serve as a temporary shelter to host 125 families who had suffered total loss of their homes. UNHCR and NGO partner CISP delivered 419 habitat kits and 534 NFIs (including bunkbeds, mattresses, blankets, solar lamps, mosquito nets, and jerry cans) to affected people, as well as 2,331 NFIs to support the response of Civil Defence, the local fire department, and other local authorities to assist 5,027 affected people.





Inter-agency response to flooding in Tovar, Mérida ©UNHCR Venezuela

In the south-western state of Apure, heavy rains and flooding in La Victoria, El Amparo, and Guasdualito affected some 4,500 families. 248 people were displaced due to the flooding, including Jivi indigenous people. UNHCR supported the inter-agency response in coordination with local authorities through the distribution of 5,418 hygiene kits (including mosquito nets, water purification tablets, sanitary pads, and condoms), jerry cans, and solar lamps to assist nearly 20,000 affected people.

In the north-western state of Zulia, 5,402 Yukpa indigenous people from the Apón and Macoita River Basins lost their homes, belongings, and livelihoods due to flooding. UNHCR supported the inter-agency response in Zulia, delivering 15,369 NFIs (including mosquito nets, solar lamps, jerry

cans, buckets, hammocks, and kitchen sets) to benefit 1,145 Yukpa indigenous families, as well as 586 NFIs (including bunk beds) to benefit 656 affected people in urban areas of western Zulia. Meanwhile, heavy rains in the Sur del Lago region led to a leishmaniasis outbreak. Some 200 people were getting infected each month in the community of El Cruce, including elderly people. UNHCR and NGO partner Zulia Red Cross delivered 3,406 NFIs (including mosquito nets, solar lamps, jerry cans, and buckets) and 7,200 water purification tablets to benefit 248 people who contracted leishmaniasis. NGO partners Zulia Red Cross and TECHO also organised capacity building on safe building, risk management, and emergency response for 401 people in affected regions.





Before and after: cleaning of a gully of wastewater in Petare ©UNHCR Venezuela

In neighbouring Falcón, heavy rains led to an outbreak of dengue fever. UNHCR delivered mosquito nets, solar lamps, buckets, blankets, kitchen sets, and water purification tablets to assist 1,519 people affected by flooding and the dengue outbreak. In addition, UNHCR supported the response of La Vela de Coro Red Cross and the Falcón Civil Defence with the installation of 2 RHUs and the donation of biosecurity gear.

In the central state of Aragua, heavy rains caused the outburst of Lake Valencia, the Turnero River, and the Madre Vieja River, flooding surrounding communities. UNHCR delivered 131 NFIs (including mosquito nets and mattresses) and an industrial kitchen to strengthen the response of the Aragua Red Cross, benefitting 2,400 affected people.

In the state of Miranda (Greater Caracas), community outreach volunteers from

Antonio José de Sucre in Petare identified a gully of wastewater clogged up by garbage. In anticipation of the rainy season, UNHCR and NGO partner Fundación Vivienda Popular supported the community in cleaning the gully, to avoid it from overflowing and flooding the houses of 60 families that live along its banks. UNHCR provided the necessary supplies, and 30 volunteers from the community collected enough waste to fill up 14 6m<sup>2</sup> trucks. The initiative reduced the risk of flooding and the risk of wastewater-related diseases for 60 local families, including elderly people with chronic illnesses, elderly people with disabilities, children with chronic illnesses, and separated children. UNHCR also delivered mattresses and bedding to the Office of the Governor of Miranda to benefit 300 people affected by heavy rains.



Inter-agency response to flooding in Delta Amacuro ©UNHCR Venezuela

In the north-eastern state of Delta Amacuro, heavy rains caused the Orinoco River to burst its banks and flood at least 40 Warao indigenous communities. UNHCR donated mosquito nets, hammocks, solar lamps, jerry cans, mattresses, blankets, water purification tablets, and other NFIs to benefit 4,114 people affected by the flooding—mainly indigenous Warao people. The general response by local authorities (including health brigades, food, and water assistance) benefitted a total of 11,736 affected people.

South of Delta Amacuro in the state of Bolívar, the flow rate of the Caroní and Orinoco Rivers in 2021 was reportedly the highest recorded in the last 70 years, and several other rivers in the state burst their banks. UNHCR donated 2,000 mosquito nets, 850 mattresses, 10 RHUs, 10 air conditioning units, and 10 water tanks, as well as 45,460 other NFIs (including solar lamps, bunk beds, hammocks, jerry cans, water purification tablets, and condoms), biosecurity gear, and



office supplies to strengthen the emergency response of local authorities in Bolívar in assisting 8,000 affected people, including indigenous Pemón people.

UNHCR is committed to continuing providing protection and assistance to people displaced by the effects of climate change in Venezuela, as well as to helping strengthen their resilience in the face of future disasters.





Rehabilitation of the Dr. Alfredo Van Grieken University Hospital in Coro, Falcón ©UNHCR Venezuela

## Rehabilitating Health Centres in Venezuela

As Venezuela has been rebounding from the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR prioritised the rehabilitation of 31 health centres around the country in 2021. These rehabilitations included improving the structural integrity of facilities; providing accessibility features for people with disabilities; installing water tanks and handwashing stations; setting up solar panels and lamps, providing a clean and reliable source of power and lighting; donating RHUs to increase the capacity of these centres; and donating NFIs and office equipment to strengthen the response provided by these centres.

These rehabilitations of health centres improved the access of 388,684 people around the country to medical services.

In the historical city of Coro, flanked by the sand dunes of Médanos de Coro National Park, the Dr. Alfredo Van Grieken University Hospital was providing health services to around 66,600 patients every year (5,500 per month) in the state of Falcón. UNHCR, HIAS, and the Falcón Red Cross completed a thorough rehabilitation of the hospital, including waterproofing the rooftop, installing 66 solar panels on the rooftop to supply critical parts of the hospital (intensive care unit, neonatal intensive care unit, etc.) with clean and reliable energy, repairing and enhancing the hospital's water pumping system and electrical system, and rehabilitating the hospital's two elevators for the smooth and speedy transfer of patients to different available services.



Installation of solar panels at the health centre in Anare, La Guaira ©UNHCR Venezuela

To support the COVID-19 vaccinations in the state, UNHCR installed 12 RHUs at the hospital to serve as a new vaccination centre that is accessible to elderly people and people with disabilities. The hospital has been able to assist 12,000 people every month in this new centre. UNHCR is preparing to install another 19 RHUs to amplify the provision of general health services to patients.

In the coastal community of Anare in La Guaira, UNHCR installed 22 solar panels and 10 solar lamps (and provided backup batteries) at the local health centre. This new reliable source of power at the health centre is crucial for storing the vaccines—including COVID-19 vaccines—of the nearly 20,000 inhabitants of two entire parishes.

Marielba Romero, an administrative assistant at the health centre, expressed, “Now we can sleep more peacefully. If the power goes out at night, we don’t have the fear or stress of having to run out and take the vaccines somewhere else to avoid the cold chain from being broken. When the power used to go out, we could not even use nebulisers for asthma emergencies. Now, whenever there are power outages, we know that the solar panels will automatically switch on, ensuring that the centre can always attend to emergencies, maintain the continuous refrigeration of vaccines, and remain lit up.”

Within the framework of the Humanitarian Response Plan, UNHCR will continue to work with partners to improve the response capacity of prioritised health centres across the country.



## Protection

+229K

Communication with Communities: Information sessions and broadcasting of key messages through media and messaging apps

 783

Individual Attention: Orientation, legal assistance and psycho-social support

 +43K

Participants of institutions, NGOs, and community structures trained on protection-related matters

 +42K


Deliveries to support health centres and prioritised communities

 +1,2K

Hygiene kits for people with specific needs

 +19K


Rehabilitation/construction of health centres, educational centres, and emergency shelters, as well as support to triage areas in hospitals



 60


Medical support kits for 3 health centres



 +466K  
**WASH**

Total Beneficiaries  +2.93M

Female - Male  57%  43%

0 - 17  26%

 15 Partners

71 Priorities



2.57M were indirect beneficiaries (mainly in WASH and Shelter activities: NFI endowments, rehabilitations, or construction) and 0.36M were direct beneficiaries (mainly in Protection activities: training, information sessions, individual attention, and material assistance). More than 1.37M beneficiaries (47%) were newly assisted people and 1.55M were recurring beneficiaries (53%).

# UNHCR RESPONSE

## Venezuela, 2021

### 2 Institutional Counterpart Work Plans

**Shelter**  
+2.23M

### Prioritised communities



153

Rehabilitation/construction of health centres, sports fields and community centres

269

Refugee Housing Units to support the COVID-19 response

+3,4K

Habitat kits for people with specific needs

+2,4K

Other kits for people with specific needs

NFI

**702** Direct donations to reception-quarantine centres and prioritised communities

+4,1K

School kits and catch-up classes for children and adolescents

Age Groups

PEOPLE ASSISTED

18 – 59  
67%

60 and over  
7%

Disability  
12%

Indigenous  
7%

% of activities with participation of diversity groups

+5,6K  
**Education**

and 355K  
(ance).

The presentation of information on maps produced by the Secretariat of the United Nations and its agencies, funds, and programs do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations or its agencies, funds, and programs concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city, or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its borders or boundaries.





Shelter, Energy, and NFIs Cluster providing a workshop on solar energy ©UNHCR Venezuela

## Shelter, Energy, and NFIs Cluster

The coordinated response of the 46 humanitarian organisations that comprise the Shelter, Energy, and NFIs Cluster (3 UN agencies, 11 INGOs, and 32 national NGOs) reached 932,523 people in vulnerable situations in 18 states and the Capital District in 2021.

The construction of and improvements to shelters were key in providing dignified comprehensive assistance to those in vulnerable situations, including protection, education, and essential health services. Eighty-seven centres, institutions, and temporary shelters were rehabilitated, and 222 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) were installed.

Focusing on highly vulnerable communities with limited access to energy, Shelter Cluster partners installed 42 photovoltaic systems and 1,106 solar streetlights, thus providing

dignified access to essential services and reducing protection risks.

The distribution of NFIs was critical in the assistance provided to people in vulnerable situations, especially those affected by flooding and armed conflicts. The delivery of basic goods is aimed at promoting resilience and livelihoods in the most vulnerable communities. Partner organisations delivered 2,988 habitat kits, 1,852 family kits, 845 individual kits, and 14,037 solar lamps.

In the eastern state of Delta Amacuro in the vast Orinoco Delta, many indigenous Warao communities still engage in subsistence hunting (deer, guinea pigs, lowland pacas, and collared peccaries), fishing, and farming, as well as barter: locals trade fish for crops, hammocks for clothes, and canoes for





Fifty Warao volunteers building the first stilt community centre in that region of Delta Amacuro ©NILO

farming equipment. The Warao also trade molluscs, birds, and monkeys (illegal wildlife trade) with Guyanese and Trinidadians for household goods.

However, hunting is sporadic and not a reliable source of food, and heavy rains and flooding in 2021 caused the loss of different crops for several communities in Delta Amacuro. The shortage of fuel has affected the livelihood of the Warao people, and the state-run food subsidy programme has not been delivering in many communities, leading considerable numbers to seek better opportunities in the city of Tucupita, as well as neighbouring Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago. Of the approximately 300 Warao indigenous communities in the municipality of Antonio Díaz before the COVID-19 pandemic, there are reportedly only 180 communities still living there.

Shelter Cluster partner organisation NILO (Naciones Indígenas Libres y Organizadas) identified four hard-to-reach riverine Warao communities: Dijarukabanoko, Jokore, Boca de Joanakasi, and Bebeina. NILO coordinated the building of a stilt community centre. Fifty Warao volunteers of all ages collected different kinds of local wood and built the first meeting place of its kind in the region. In this space, NILO has provided handicraft workshops for 90 Warao women, as well as workshops on GBV in this space, and donated solar lamps. Families with solar lamps report that they no longer have to deal with bat bites, as bats tend to stay away from the light.

In this centre, Warao people can foster solidarity amongst themselves, while also cultivating their culture. They have a place where they are able to teach younger generations traditional music and pass down the wisdom and cus-





Members of the community planting seeds together ©NILO

toms of older generations, including traditional agricultural methods. Sixty-four farmers from five community orchards are able to meet and trade their crops, while women can trade their handmade hammocks and other products.

Given the success of this first centre, NILO founder Nina Hurtado plans on promoting the creation of more ecological community centres: “Ecoescuelas con propósito.” 80 Warao men from Dijarukabanoko and neighbouring communities are now working on building a larger *ecoescuela*. She hopes to secure funding in order to install solar panels and provide power and water treatment solutions to these remote indigenous communities, and eventually bring *ecoescuelas* to other isolated communities around the country.



Warao indigenous volunteers gathering timber to build a stilt community centre in Dijarukabanoko, Delta Amacuro ©NILO



Warao women preparing handicrafts in the new community centre ©NILO



## In Memoriam

EDI ONKHOPOTSE OLSSON (1990-2021)

Edi Olsson served as Associate Protection Officer in UNHCR's Field Office in Guasdalito from 1 December 2020 until his passing on 12 December 2021.

Edi was born on 10 September 1990 in the small town of Gällivare in Lapland, in the very north of Sweden. He caused a sensation from a young age: he was the first coloured baby ever born at the local hospital. Edi's South African father moved back to South Africa before he was born, so Edi was raised by his Swedish mother Carin. His mother and he then moved to Umeå in north-eastern Sweden, where Edi grew up.

When Edi was 12, his little sister Elsa was born. Both his mother and sister describe him as loyal. Family was so important to him: bringing relatives and friends together and spending time together. He believed fighting and staying angry at each other was wasting the limited time we have on Earth, so he would choose to look past that. But if he felt that something was not right, he would stand up for other people and for himself. At 25 years of age, on his own initiative Edi travelled alone to South Africa to look for and meet his father and his father's family, whose hearts he





Edi with his mother and sister @UNHCR Venezuela



managed to win over. Boldness, bravery, and determination characterised him.

Edi had both the ability to notice people and the gift of empathy. Within one week of being assigned a project together at university, Edi learned that his project partner was not comfortable with his housing situation. Despite barely knowing him, Edi offered him the living room in his apartment as a temporary place to stay—an offer that other people might make without actually meaning it. Edi meant it, however, and Peter Stattin ended up becoming Edi's flatmate for around four years and one of Edi's best friends.

Edi pursued studies in political science and law, seeing those skills as tools that would enable him to help others. In his free

time, Edi weightlifted, boxed, practiced Muay Thai, wrote songs, and participated in poetry slams, often with lyrics focused on injustices he saw in the world. His desire to assist those in need led him to work for a shelter for young asylum-seekers (HVB) in Sweden while still in university. Edi's commitment to assist asylum-seekers was such that, at one point, Edi called Peter to ask if he could host an Eritrean asylum-seeker in his apartment while they found a better solution for the young man. Edi then followed up on the Eritrean man's case for several years until he was finally granted a temporary residence permit.

After graduating in 2018, Edi became the first UN Volunteer to work with IOM in Ecuador. Having previously volunteered

in Colombia and arduously studied Spanish on his own (listening to the radio in Spanish, watching TV in Spanish, and practicing with native speakers), he had a good level of Spanish upon accepting his first assignment with the UN. In the northern border region of Tulcán, Edi was able to see first-hand and understand the needs of many Venezuelans traveling to Ecuador and beyond in search of better opportunities.

Edi then joined UNHCR's Venezuela Operation as Associate Protection Officer in the western border town of Guasdalito in December of 2020. He arrived amidst a new trend of Venezuelans who had left the country now returning because they had lost their livelihoods abroad during the pandemic.

As the number of returns trickled down, Edi settled into his role as focal point for the state of Barinas. Edi's leadership was essential in securing a Letter of Understanding with Caritas in Barinas, marking the start of activities in Barinas directed towards people in mobility and the creation of a temporary shelter to assist them. The establishment of psychosocial services in the city of Barinas also brought considerable improvements to the assistance provided to GBV survivors. Edi then pioneered a post-distribution monitoring pilot project for NFIs and core relief items and got the rest of the UNHCR Guasdalito team on board.

Edi strengthened the operational capacity of the Office of the Ombudsperson in Barinas and was key in achieving the rehabilitation of their facilities in 2021. He maintained good relations with local authorities, who saw him as an integral and cooperative person who respected different points of view.



This was crucial in maintaining the humanitarian space open for UNHCR and partners in Barinas and the neighbouring state of Portuguesa.

One of Edi's favourite work activities was the participatory assessment he coordinated in both Barinas and Portuguesa, as it enabled him to better understand the needs of vulnerable local communities and people in need of international protection in both states. Edi's drive and passion for helping those in need, together with his legal background and great sense of empathy, were instrumental in his accomplishing so much with UNHCR Guasdalito in the span of just one year.

Edi's mother Carin describes him as "one of my best friends," in addition to





loyal. Despite being on the other side of the world in Guasdualito, Edi spoke on a daily basis with his mother about a broad range of topics (everything from philosophy to politics to food), something she describes as uncommon for young independent-minded Swedes. While in Guasdualito, Edi inspired his mother to start running, as a way to stay healthy physically and mentally. Following Edi's tragic passing after a motorcycle accident, Carin said she was overwhelmed by the incredible amount of people that showed up at his funeral in Sweden and shared stories of how Edi had "noticed" them, listened to them, looked after them, motivated them, and inspired them. As another of Edi's friends Alexander Björklund put it, "Edi helped us become better people: he EDI-fied us."

These sentiments are echoed by Edi's colleagues at UNHCR Guasdualito and UNHCR Venezuela as a whole. In addition to his considerable professional accomplishments, Edi took it upon himself to fully integrate himself culturally into the Los Llanos region where Guasdualito is located. These efforts were much admired by all his colleagues. The following messages from UNHCR Venezuela staff speak volumes to the kind of person Edi Olsson was.

*You left your mark that, without a doubt, will remain among those of us who knew you. You spread light, brightness, and charisma, which people either have or don't. You certainly did.*

**ENRIQUE VALLÉS-RAMOS**

*I'll always remember Edi for the great love he always professed for his family—especially for his mother. He would tell us how proud he was of her for tirelessly striving to provide a better life for him.*

**LUZ MANOSALVA**

*We spent a night with Edi in Puerto Páez on a work trip where we tasted spiders and ants. Edi immediately formed an almost magical connection with the staff at the lodge. With his wonderful sense of humour, Edi created an atmosphere of laughs and joy. Then, he decided to take control of the kitchen at the lodge and made energy drinks for all the staff and for us. That was Edi: nice, kind, thoughtful, and always ready to share. With his sensitivity and huge heart, he genuinely wanted to help others, give a voice to people who didn't have one, and transform the world into a place full of peace and magic.*

**VIRGINIA SANTORO**



After the brief moments I shared with Edi, I could list his many attributes as a professional, but even more so as a human being. His kindness, warmth, and humility made him so approachable and close to everybody. If I could describe him in one word, it would be “gratitude.”

Edi appreciated everything he had in his life, embracing each moment, experience, and person that accompanied him on his journey.

I was impressed to hear him speak so fondly of Guasdualito—he even began adopting the Llanero accent and dialect. People would call

him “El Gabán Sueco” (“the Swedish Jabiru stork,” a typical bird from Los Llanos). He got traditional Venezuela alpargatas (espadrille shoes) made for himself, learned to dance joropo, and even sponsored a local dancing group, in order that they might participate in the annual Gabancito Dorado dance competition. Edi was grateful for working in that very complex environment, for his work buddies, and for everyone who had welcomed him in that town.

**ELIAYSELA CABRERA**

The time I shared with Edi was short but rewarding... Only lovely memories when I think about you: professional and curious, with a timid look and gentle voice, and always so kind... A true gentleman.

**JOCY FAJARDO**

Edi, friend, you left, leaving us your example of humility, simplicity, and professionalism. I always admired how you integrated into the culture of our country, specifically the Llanero culture. Thank you for the worth and respect you demonstrated for our country and people. You came to be viewed as an Apureño. I will always remember your very genuine and natural smile. Fly high amidst the freedom and rights you always defended.

**ROXANA CARRERO**

While Edi was from Sweden, he spoke perfect English, had already learned French, and was very fluent in Spanish. He was interested in Levantine Arabic and was learning it in Guasdualito with some Syrians and Lebanese who had settled there. He practiced Muay Thai and grappling, and Mike Tyson was his idol in boxing. He was an all-around gentle giant. Praise be to the mother who brought up that young man.

**HAMED BAREKZAI**

Edi is one of those people that you only need to know for a brief period of time to realise that they're special. He was always respectful, looked after his peers, brought out the best in his coworkers, lived his life doing what he liked, and has left an indelible mark on all of our lives.

**MARÍA JOSÉ MAIORANA**



My buddy Edi... When Edi got to Apure, he deliberately fell in love with the local culture.

During his first days in Guasdualito, I was shocked to find him one afternoon after work outside the office listening to Simon Díaz's folk song "Sabana," while he gazed at the landscape. I walked up to ask him how he was doing, and he only responded with a thumbs up.

Curious, I asked him why he wasn't speaking, and then found out that he was trying a local tobacco paste called chimó. He eventually told me that he was in the process of adjusting to life in Los Llanos: listening to our music and trying out what many Llaneros use on a daily basis—chimó. He wanted to understand how the locals thought and lived. I then realised that Edi was fully committed to our Operation in Apure—not only through our work, but also through our customs, way of thinking, and way of living. He told me that, upon finishing his mission in Guasdualito, he would take with him in his heart all his best moments in Venezuela.

**JAVIER JARA**

Super down-to-earth guy... Edi was brilliant, was eager to keep learning new things, and had great ambitions for what he wanted to accomplish, but at the same time was humble and never forgot where he came from. Edi truly had a heart to serve. We shared an interest in the Middle East and learning Arabic. He was the only colleague I could speak to in slang American English (which I very much enjoyed), and I was impressed at how quickly he picked up Venezuelan slang. He always joked about how he as a Swedish guy looked "more Venezuelan" than me. Fly high, homie!

**JOHN JEFFCOAT MESZAROS**

Edi was always joking around with me. He told me I had scolded him over WhatsApp on a voice note. Whenever he got the chance, he would play the voice note for our other colleagues saying, "Look how Yoshely punished me." I would always protest, "Obviously not, Edi!" and he would answer, "Dear Yosh, I know it's all out of tenderness," with the genuine smile of a good friend. I always thought highly of Edi, and he will always have a place in my heart.

**YOSHELY RODRIGUEZ**

Edi Olsson was an outstanding colleague with a great sense of justice and equity. These principles were the cornerstone of everything he did both inside and outside of UNHCR. It was remarkable to see how, on the basis of respect, he was able to build positive relationships with his colleagues, State actors, and humanitarian actors in his area of responsibility in such a short time. I look back on all our fruitful discussions, analysing different possibilities and strategies for our work in Barinas and Portuguesa. For Edi, his calling and duty were providing assistance to those most in need and improving their living conditions by strengthening their resilience in a sustainable manner. He always fostered inclusion and integration at the office, as well as horizontal dialogue with his co-workers.

Edi always sought to acknowledge anything he learned from one of his colleagues through symbolic acts of gratitude that spoke to his nobility and humility. He fervently believed in building a better world for everyone without discrimination or inequality and dedicated his professional career to contributing to achieving that goal. Venezuela was his second home and Guasdualito was the place where he carried out his humanitarian mission.

**GERARDO CUBILLAN**







Mobile birth registration unit with the Civil Registry Office and NGO partner IRFA in Guanamo, Bolívar ©UNHCR Venezuela

## Prevention of Statelessness

UNHCR's mandate calls on the agency to lead international efforts to prevent statelessness, a condition that, according to some estimates, affects around 10 million people world-wide who have no nationality, depriving them of rights to which all citizens should be entitled.

In Venezuela, a lack of appropriate documentation can lead to unnecessary exposure to protection risks for indigenous people, other Venezuelans, and people living in the country in refugee-like conditions. UNHCR strives to limit such risks,

supporting institutions like the Civil Registry Office and the SAIME immigration and identification services in their efforts to ensure that residents of isolated communities have access to birth registration and documentation.

In 2021, UNHCR coordinated 6 mobile birth registration units with relevant institutions in remote areas of Venezuela. 332 people without birth registration were identified—primarily in the state of Bolívar—and 114 of these were successfully registered and issued a birth certificate. The remaining



Mobile birth registration unit in Cardozo, Bolívar ©UNHCR Venezuela

218 people have been scheduled for late birth registration procedures in 2022.

The focus of UNHCR's prevention of statelessness activities is on indigenous communities, whose members traditionally have a more detached attitude towards the notion of a nation-state, the importance of documentation, and the risks associated with a lack thereof.

UNHCR is preparing awareness campaigns in five indigenous languages—Warao, Jivi, Huottuja, Wayuunaiki, and Yukpa—on the importance of timely birth

registration and is currently organising joint missions and mobile birth registration units with the Civil Registry Office in states with the highest concentration of indigenous people: Amazonas, Bolívar, Delta Amacuro, and Zulia.

Finally, UNHCR continues to advocate with the Government of Venezuela for its accession to international conventions on statelessness: the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Statelessness and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.





March to end violence against women in El Ingenio, Miranda ©UNHCR Venezuela

## Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Both women and men experience gender-based violence, but the majority of GBV survivors are women and girls. According to UN Women, it is estimated that at least 35% of women around the world have experienced GBV in some form during their lives. Social distancing and mobility restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic led many women to remain confined at home with their aggressors, generating increased risks for them.

UNHCR and its partners have been working to prevent and respond to GBV in Venezuela, endeavouring to guarantee the access of refugee and asylum-seeker GBV survivors to protection services: psychosocial support, health services, legal assistance, and temporary emergency shelter, among others.

In addition, within the framework of the Venezuela Humanitarian Response Plan,

UNHCR and its partners work to ensure that GBV survivors—Venezuelan and otherwise—affected by the humanitarian situation in the country also have access to these protection services. UNHCR led the Safe Spaces Network, through which its partners provided individual case management and referral to relevant services to 1,119 GBV survivors, including 4 refugee women. A total of 10,876 people (74% female) received GBV services in Venezuela in 2021.

UNHCR and partners rehabilitated three emergency shelters for GBV survivors in the states of Barinas and Zulia, provided capacity building on GBV prevention and response for 413 public servants, and conducted 65 trainings on GBV prevention and response for 2,698 members of community networks across the country.

IG Live Event “Warning Signs of Gender-Based Violence in Relationships”



## UNHCR “Activised” for 16 Days to Put an End to Violence against Women

Gender-based violence can manifest itself in different forms. Some of these are more obvious: physical aggression and verbal abuse, for example. However, social constructs related to gender establish power relations in which women are often exposed to forms of abuse that might be less evident but are nonetheless aggressive and harmful.

In order to address these less conventional methods of aggression against women, UNHCR organised a virtual conference with the esteemed Venezuelan psychologist and sexologist Atenea Anca, Director of Clínica de la Pareja. The Instagram Live was programmed during the 16 Days of Activism against GBV and covered forms of violence that occur on a daily basis and are often not recognised or, in some cases, that have been normalised. Control, non-consensual sexual relations, public ridicule of one's partner,

infidelity, and unequal distribution of household tasks are serious instances of violence against women that can cause severe damage to their psychological integrity and mental wellbeing.

During this interactive session, participants were able to learn about the different forms of violence through the stories of three fictional women: Carla, Zuleima, and Paula. These three friends meet up for a coffee date and, as they share their stories, experiences where they have been abused by their partners start to come to light. The floor was then open for participants to share their opinions, express their concerns, and ask Atenea questions about GBV. Following the conference, UNHCR published a video on its IG account @acnurvenezuela sharing the highlights of the Live session, with clear examples that illustrate the different kinds of abuse discussed.





Mariana, a Colombian refugee and GBV survivor ©UNHCR Venezuela/Jeanneizy Garcia

## Blooming: They Survived Abuse and Were Able to Flourish in Venezuela

Mariana\*, a Colombian refugee, fled her country of origin after surviving GBV, leaving behind those days and nights where she could not leave her home for both fear of being found by her ex-partner and the pressure from armed groups who controlled her hometown.

“I used to lie on the floor of my living room at night with the lights off, and I could see shadows of people walking around my house. It was the guerrilla. Then when I would wake up, I would realise that my life was still in danger: my ex-partner would be outside waiting for me to open the door. He would follow me wherever I went.”

Mariana relates that she needed a lot of strength and self-love to get out of that

violent relationship. One night, after being beaten to the point of losing consciousness, she woke up sobbing and decided to get up and flee without looking back. Once she was safe in Venezuela, she flourished, started a family, and integrated herself into her host community by joining the community outreach volunteers that work together with UNHCR.

“I see myself in other women in this community: in their eyes, I recognise mine. When I approach them, they fall apart. I support them, and there I find my strength not to fade. As a community leader, I fight to get them out of that situation... By saving them, I save myself day after day. I focus on my children and on helping other people.



Angelica, a Colombian refugee and GBV survivor ©UNHCR Venezuela/Claudia Vielma

Giving love to others and feeling their gratitude takes me out of what I lived through... It gives me enough reasons to smile and keep pressing on.”

Mariana, with tears in her eyes, expresses how important it is for her to have a leadership role in her host community, where day after day she focuses on supporting those who need it most and becoming that light in the darkness for other people, just as UNHCR and HIAS were an anchor for her during some of her most vulnerable moments.



“For 15 years, I stayed in a relationship where I was morally and psychologically abused constantly by my then-partner without being aware of it. He limited the times I saw my family, restricted me from going out

with my friends, and controlled the way I dressed.”

Angelica\*, a Colombian refugee living in Venezuela, narrates how she normalised the GBV of which she was a victim for a long time, knowing nothing different and not receiving any support from her family. There were years and years of abuse where her ex-partner threatened her with killing both of them if Angelica ever dared to leave.

Angelica tells us that when she started to study, she realised that her husband’s behaviour was abusive and that she had been in relationships where love was not what she had experienced. She came to understand that her partner’s behaviour had become violently radical over time, and she finally recognised the danger she was in.

“One day, I went home after class to find that he had torn up all my tuition payment





Luisa, a Colombian asylum-seeker and GBV survivor ©UNHCR Venezuela/Hugo Quintero

receipts so that I wouldn't be able to prove that I had paid for my classes and would have to quit my studies. That was the moment when I said, 'Enough is enough,' and decided to leave him."

After her ex-partner chased her down and threatened again to kill her, Angelica finally fled Colombia, managing to leave that painful chapter of her life in the past for her children and her own sake.

"Education gave me the key to freedom. I smile, knowing that this pain is behind me and that today I can be myself without any limitations. I can make my own decisions. I am my own owner and master... I am free."



"I used to live in a beautiful part of Colombia. I remember being surrounded by flowers and that everything was peaceful. But one day, a group of armed men showed

up, and my relaxing landscape became one full of fear and uncertainty."

Luisa\*, an asylum-seeker in Venezuela, shares how fear came knocking on her door to change her mother and her lives forever. One day, a group of men came to her part of town and would look at her menacingly while catcalling and harassing her, filling her with anxiety and terror whenever she left her house. That fear grew exponentially after finding out what was happening to other girls on her street, and she spent nights and days wondering if one day these men would leave, and everything would be normal again.

"One day when I had gone out, one of these men surprised me and raped me. My life has never been the same since then. I could not fathom how someone could cause so much harm and let me live with it."

Terrified because that man might show

up again, Luisa and her mother decided to leave their home behind and find safety somewhere far away in Venezuela. Here, she found refuge in her faith in God, which gave her the strength to move on. With the psychosocial support she received through HIAS, Luisa has been able to grow past the pain and move on, giving thanks for each day she is alive.

“The church has given me strength to look back and consider myself a survivor.”

The story of Luisa’s bravery is there to show us that the risk of facing GBV is not limited to one’s social circles: “One day, danger can show up out of nowhere and change our lives. It requires a lot of strength on our part to stand back up, press on, and be survivors.”



“From a very young age, I knew that I was different from other children in my community. I did not have the same sexual orientation as my peers, and I did not like the same things they did. However, the first discrimination I ever faced came from my family... My parents did not accept me as I am.”

Carlos\* is a gay man who is a survivor of discrimination and various forms of physical violence, at the hands of both his friends and his own family. This left him feeling alone and completely isolated for an extended period of his life. Carlos highlights that it was difficult for him to integrate himself into his community due to the numerous rejections he has faced because of his sexual orientation.

“We can press forward no matter the circumstances. If we are going through difficult



Carlos, a GBV survivor ©UNHCR Venezuela/Kelvin Tossaint

times, we must seek help. Having sexual differences does not mean we should tolerate or be subjected to abuse. We are equal. We have the same value and dignity as heterosexuals.”

Carlos works together with several women volunteers in his community, strengthening his communication and leadership skills while helping other people in vulnerable situations, in his own quest to be finally considered as equal.

Carlos’s story shows us that GBV can manifest itself in different ways and affect both women and men. It also highlights the importance of seeking support from others and valuing all people equally.

“We should lean on others to find the strength we need to get back up and move forward.”

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\* Named changed for protection reasons



# World Refugee Day

One 20 June of every year, UNHCR celebrates the most important day in its calendar: World Refugee Day. On this day, UNHCR calls on people across the world to empathise with refugees and asylum-seekers, recognising the strength and courage of those have been forced to flee their homes and rebuild their lives elsewhere. Below is a selection of the winning photographs from

the photography competition that UNHCR Venezuela held to commemorate World Refugee Day 2021, as well as the winning drawings from the art competition that UNHCR Venezuela and Fundación Carlos Stohr held for World Refugee Day 2021. The full virtual exhibition with all of the drawings is available on <https://www.fundastohr.org/expo-acnur-2021>.

## PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION



1 Brendy Rodríguez | Zulia

**KEEP PRESSING  
FORWARD AND DO  
NOT TURN BACK,  
BECAUSE IN THE END  
THERE WILL ALWAYS  
BE AN OPPORTUNITY.**



3 Román Torres | Zulia

**FATHER AND SON  
PREPARING THE SOIL  
FOR A BETTER FUTURE**



2 Alejandro José Pernía | Mérida

**SAPIENTIAL TRADITION**

## CHILDREN'S CATEGORY

Jhadiel Manzano | 10 |  
Puerto Ordaz, Bolívar

### UNDER MY SKIN: VENEZUELA

My drawing was inspired by the story of Mr. Raúl Álvarez, a Colombian man who decided to move to Venezuela with his whole family over 50 years ago. His family has now moved back to Colombia, but he has stayed in Venezuela. He declares that, although he was born there, he is Venezuelan.

Technique: Mixed on Paper



Samantha Dávila | 10 |  
Mérida, Mérida

### HACIENDA LA VICTORIA

Hacienda La Victoria is an iconic venue of the state of Mérida, where immigration had a great cultural influence. A prime example is the French Corsican Simón Noé Consalvi Nobili and the Italian Calógero Paparoni, who industrialised the coffee market. The coffee farm these men established has now become the Coffee Museum, the Immigrant Museum, and the Francisco Paparoni Graduate School of Agriculture.

Technique: Crayon on Paper

Zoe Miranda | 10 | Isla de  
Margarita, Nueva Esparta

### HOMEMADE BREAD BUSINESS ENDEAVOR

This story of resilience is inspired by my dad. He is self-employed and works in computer science and telecommunications. When the pandemic started, he could not go out to work and almost all the companies he had been doing work for were shut. He began baking bread. He was able to make good bread and began offering it to our neighbours. And so, through the sale of bread, we were able to cope with and overcome the very difficult time we were going through.

Technique: Crayon on Paper



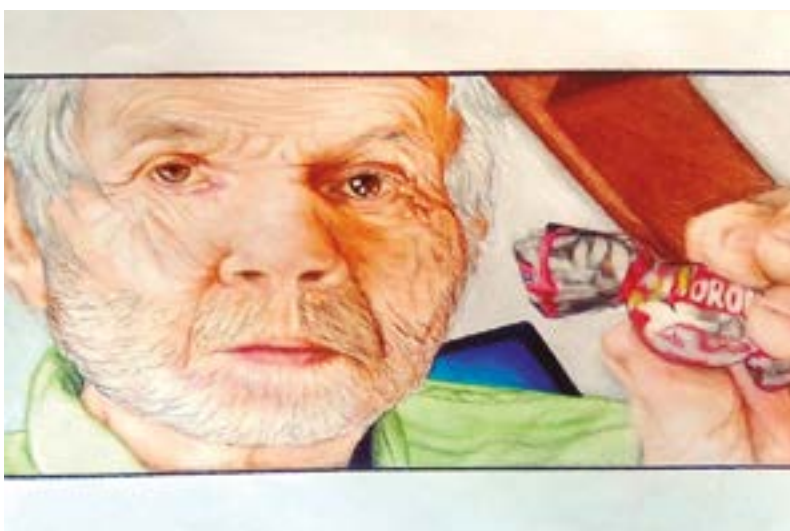


Daviangel Soria | 20 | Isla de Margarita, Nueva Esparta

### KARL WEIDMANN AND HIS DREAM JUNGLE

As a photography enthusiast, I was drawn to Karl Weidmann's story and was impressed by everything he was able to accomplish, with enough drive to follow his dreams. Seeing his work, I was fascinated by the vision he had of things and admire all the contributions he made to our history, documenting large portions of our jungles.

Technique: Graphite on Paper



Verónica Agreda | 16 | Isla de Margarita, Nueva Esparta

### CONFECTIONER ERNST WEITZ, AN IMMIGRANT FROM POLAND

Known by the name "Toronto," this signature chocolate candy is the creation of Ernst Weitz, a young Polish man who fled the imminent Nazi invasion of his country. Destiny brought him to sweeten the lives of the Venezuelan people. "I worked in Savoy on three separate occasions, even though life kept giving me lemons. Every product was a challenge," he remembered, with a smile on his face.

Technique: Crayon on Paper

María Victoria Milano López  
| 16 | Puerto Ordaz, Bolívar

### RESISTANCE IN THE FACE OF DESTRUCTION

What motivated me to choose this topic of resilience is that, day after day, human beings encounter difficult situations and challenges which must be faced and overcome with a resilient attitude. My drawing is inspired by a resilient person who faces adversity, surmounts the obstacles she faces, and is able to press forward in spite of everything.

Technique: Mixed on Paper



María Montaña | Isla de Margarita, Nueva Esparta

### RELENTLESS MARGARITEÑA

I was inspired by Mrs. Lourdes Brito, who devoted herself to selling vegetables on Gómez Boulevard in Porlamar. She was a cheerful and hard-working Margariteña woman and an example of resilience: during the pandemic, she continued going out every day to sell her fruits and vegetables, becoming an iconic figure in our region and a living example of strength and determination.

Technique: Mixed on Paper



Gustavo Fernández | Isla de Margarita, Nueva Esparta

### DO NOT ABANDON THEM

Marina Kashkurova, originally from Russia, founded Tashi Refuge in 2014 and transformed her home into a place to care for and protect vulnerable and defenceless animals. With the donations they receive, Tashi Refuge has been able to create spaces to give refuge to and sterilise animals. Their activities seek to raise community awareness on pet care, promoting love for, respect for, and compassion towards animals.

Technique: Gouache on Paper

Carlos Luis Sánchez | Carora, Lara

### GRANDFATHER BRUNO'S ENDURANCE

Bruno Perin Tolot was born in Italy in 1907. He lived through World War I as a boy and then fought in World War II, after which he left his country and arrived in Venezuela. Here, he worked in the construction of the Torres de El Silencio, the Lara-Zulia Trans-Andean Highway, and El Trapiche, which then became the Central La Pastora sugar factory. There, he met Rose and raised a family with her. He died in 1984 on his farm in Asentamiento La Yagua in Lara.

Technique: Ink on Paper























# UNHCR

## The UN Refugee Agency

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