

Venezuela Situation

October 2017

The number of **Venezuelans seeking asylum** has **risen yearly** since 2014. Between 2014 and 2017, over **100,000 asylum claims** were lodged, half of which in 2017 alone (as of September).

Many Venezuelans who have left their country are **vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, violence** and forced to seek alternative coping mechanisms. This is particularly the case in border areas where services are limited and insecurity is high.

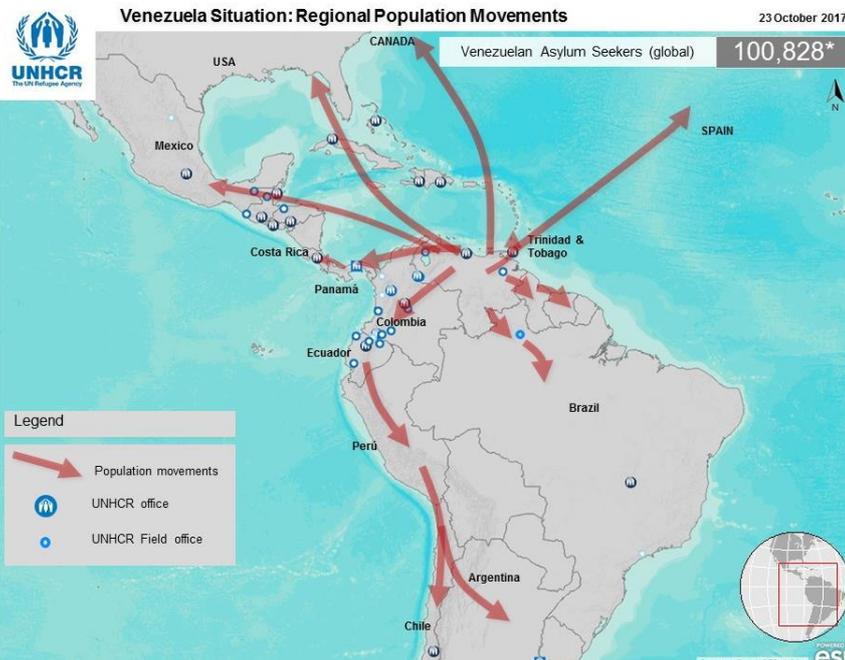
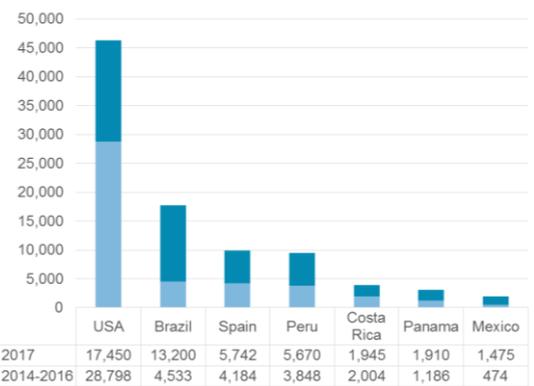
Considering the evolving situation in Venezuela, it is expected that **people will continue to leave** the country over the coming months. **UNHCR** is stepping up its response accordingly.

Growing numbers of Venezuelans have been leaving their country. Taken together, public estimates in the various countries where they are arriving put their number between the hundreds of thousands to over one million. Among them are persons who seek international protection abroad as conditions in Venezuela continue to be difficult.

Based on UNHCR's monitoring activities, Venezuelans are leaving the country for a variety of reasons, including, specific threats by armed groups, fear of being targeted on account of political opinion or profile, threats and extortion, high levels of crime, domestic violence, food insecurity and lack of access to adequate health care and medicines, discrimination in the labour market and unemployment.

UNHCR is aware that many persons in need of international protection do not seek asylum in host countries due, for example, to restrictions on employment or processing delays. UNHCR has been urging governments to continue to identify appropriate protection-oriented humanitarian responses, such as through visa, special stay arrangements or migratory regimes, that include safeguards on access to rights and basic services and provide protection from abuse and exploitation. In a region known for its solidarity, commendable efforts are underway in this regard.

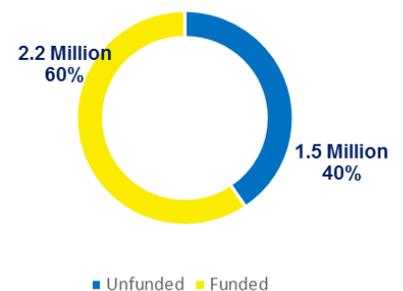
VENEZUELAN ASYLUM CLAIMS IN MAIN HOST COUNTRIES 2014-2017*



A Venezuelan family is welcomed into the house of Luisa, a Colombian, and her five children. Luisa only recently returned from Venezuela herself, after having fled there to escape the conflict in her own country.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

Regional preparedness activities until end of 2017
3.7 Million



* All figures are estimates from government or external sources and are subject to change.

Main Activities

Protection

- UNHCR is collaborating with partners and governments to undertake profiling exercises and border protection monitoring activities, to ensure that the needs of arriving Venezuelans are properly understood and addressed.
- UNHCR is scaling up its presence along border areas to better provide humanitarian assistance and to support government activities. In Colombia and Brazil, two new Field Units have been opened and additional staff deployed to key areas. In Ecuador and Peru, UNHCR is reinforcing its protection presence through partners.
- Technical support is being provided to governments in the region to develop protection-based responses, as well as to prepare preparedness/contingency plans in the event of a mass influx. Capacity-building to strengthen national asylum systems remains a particular focus.
- Throughout the region, UNHCR is working with authorities and partners to strengthen the protection responses for unaccompanied children, indigenous people, older persons, and other persons with specific needs. Legal support is being provided, as well as social assistance, resources allowing.
- UNHCR has been developing solidarity campaigns with authorities, partners and host communities to combat discrimination and xenophobia toward Venezuelan nationals.

Shelter and Assistance

- In Brazil, a shelter response for new arrivals, including from the Warao indigenous group, is underway. Shelters are being constructed or refurbished in locations along the route being taken by Venezuelan arrivals and are providing a safe space for some 700 persons. UNHCR is providing financial and technical support for the shelters and has developed procedures to ensure the proper care of unaccompanied children.
- In Colombia, UNHCR is working to improve existing infrastructure in border departments, in coordination with national and local authorities, the Colombian Red Cross and other local partners.

Alternative Legal Pathways

- UNHCR has been providing technical support to governments in the region to establish alternative legal pathways for Venezuelans. In Colombia, a Special Stay Permit (PEP) is available to Venezuelans who lawfully entered the country with a passport before 28 July 2017. It is believed that as many as 240,000 Venezuelans could benefit from the PEP, with 65,000 persons having already applied. In Brazil, the government re-activated the use of temporary residence permits under its national law, which has been granted to at least 1,600 persons. Elsewhere, visas are available under regional frameworks, such as MERCOSUR and UNASUR, and bilateral agreements.
- The majority of these visas and permits grant the right to work, study and access basic services. In May 2017, Colombia introduced a Border Mobility Card, allowing Venezuelans to cross into border departments for up to seven days to access goods and services and to visit relatives. It does not grant the right to work or stay in the country.

Remaining Challenges

- Protection risks for Venezuelan nationals in countries in the region remain a priority concern, including access to asylum procedures, physical security, access to documentation, sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse, and access to services. This is particularly the case in border areas, where many Venezuelan families are settling temporarily in search of livelihood opportunities. The Colombian border, in particular, raises risks of violence and forced recruitment, including of children, by armed groups and criminal gangs.
- Despite positive efforts in a number of countries, reception capacity for Venezuelan arrivals remains limited. Many Venezuelans continue to live on the streets, where they remain at risk of exploitation and abuse.
- In the Caribbean, while the overall numbers are relatively small, the increase in the number of Venezuelan arrivals has placed significant pressure on the reception and processing capacity of these island States.
- Despite positive steps in the development of government contingency plans and activities along the border in Brazil, humanitarian needs remain dire. Local governments can be challenged to quickly respond to emerging needs, particularly in the event of a mass influx.
- While alternative legal pathways are in place for Venezuelans, they do not always include protection safeguards and restrictions and fees limit their availability.

CONTACT: Regina de la Portilla, Associate External Relations and PI Officer, delaport@unhcr.org