

# Venezuela

February 2019

- The salient event of the month was the 23 February unsuccessful attempt on the part of the opposition to bring humanitarian aid into the country from across the borders with Colombia and Brazil. The government backlash against what it decried was a US-led attempt to justify an international intervention was especially forceful in the states of Táchira and Bolívar, where at least seven people died and scores were wounded and arrested.
- The land borders of Venezuela have been closed since that date and this has caused increasing hardship for the population in Amazonas, Apure, Bolívar, Táchira and Zulia states, which host most of UNHCR's persons of concern. The border closure has had a significant impact on prioritised communities whose livelihoods traditionally depend on cross-border trade and employment, that rely heavily on medical facilities and supplies available in Colombia and where many children attend classes in Colombian schools.
- At the international level, President Nicolas Maduro broke diplomatic relations with Colombia, while opposition leader Juan Guaidó conducted in the last week of the month a tour of South American allies in preparation for his return to Venezuela.
- As the country went through political upheaval, the economy continued in its steady decline, with uncontrollable price rises, a progressive dollarization of the economy and a relative stabilization of both the official and black-market exchange rates of the dollar. The 18,000 Bolívar monthly minimum salary closed the month at the equivalent of 5.5 dollars at the official rate and 4.9 dollars at the black-market rate, while the cost of meeting just the basic food needs of a family in Venezuela closed at an estimated equivalent of 300 dollars.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### TOTAL ESTIMATED HOST COMMUNITIES

#### BENEFICIARIES

+ 87,000

### PERSONS OF CONCERN (GOVERNMENT FIGURES)

Refugees 8,246

Asylum seekers 1,108

Source: National Refugee Commission Venezuela

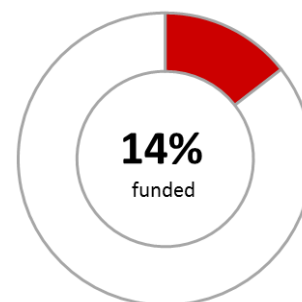
Persons in refugee-like situation: 117,653

Source: INE Venezuela

## FUNDING (AS OF FEBRUARY 2019)

**USD 15.9 million**

requested for Venezuela



■ Tightly earmarked

□ Funding gap (indicative)

## UNHCR PRESENCE

### Staff:

#### 77 Personnel:

63 national staff

2 affiliate workforce/employees

1 national intern

11 international staff

### Offices:

1 Representation in Caracas

4 Field Offices in

San Cristóbal (Táchira), Guasualito

(Apure), Maracaibo (Zulia) and

Ciudad Guayana (Bolívar)

1 Field Unit in Caracas



## Working with Partners

- UNHCR is implementing community-based activities in 54 prioritised communities in eight states, primarily in the border areas with Colombia, Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago, but also in Greater Caracas and the nearby Miranda state. UNHCR is working with 15 implementing partners (Aliadas en Cadena, AZUL Positivo, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Refugee Education Trust (RET), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Red Cross Zulia, Luz y Vida, Fe y Alegría, Sociedad Wills Wilde, Fogones y Banderas, Fundación Innocens, Fundación Casa Bonita and Fundación Soy un Guardian), as well as other local actors, including government institutions and NGOs.
- UNHCR holds regular coordination meetings with humanitarian and development actors to discuss the design, coordination and implementation of the protection response for persons of concern and host communities, including identification, provision of humanitarian assistance, monitoring of refugee rights and promotion of durable solutions.
- UNHCR liaises within the United Nations Country Team and with specific United Nations agencies to mainstream protection issues within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, and other shared mechanisms.
- UNHCR chairs the Protection Working Group, an inter-agency space for joint analysis of protection gaps and coordination of protection response and advocacy.
- UNHCR's main Government partners are the National Commission for Refugees (CONARE), the Ombudsperson's Office and Child Protection Councils, as well as community councils.

## Main Activities

### Community-based Protection

- UNHCR promotes an innovative community-based approach to assess and respond to the protection needs and risks of persons of concern in Venezuela.
- UNHCR is strengthening communication with communities and organizing trainings for outreach volunteers and youth networks to enhance the identification and referrals of persons with specific needs.
- UNHCR is working with community structures such as community groups, women and youth networks to engage the community in the implementation of **projects** identified by the communities themselves, seeking to improve community response and ensuring the sustainability of projects and community processes. Since 2018, UNHCR and its partners have been implementing community projects on nutrition, health, water and sanitation and education.
- UNHCR is supporting a national protection network providing assistance and counselling to persons in transit, and safe spaces for the attention of sexual and gender-based survivors and children at risk. The safe spaces provide confidential case management, counselling, psychosocial support, medical aid and legal services.
- UNHCR supports two community centres in Caracas and San Antonio in Táchira delivering multi-sectorial services from different actors to provide legal counselling, group information sessions on different topics such as rights and referral pathways, hygiene promotion, HIC prevention, as well as catch-up classes for children out of school and material assistance for persons with specific needs, among others.

### Asylum and Durable Solutions

- UNHCR promotes international refugee law and refugee status determination procedures, encouraging State institutions to identify and refer persons in need of international protection to the asylum procedure. UNHCR and partners conduct capacity building activities with government institutions.
- In close coordination with UNHCR in Colombia, UNHCR Venezuela facilitates and supports the voluntary repatriation of refugees, ensuring that they are enabled to take well-informed and voluntary decisions and are repatriated in conditions of safety and dignity. Since 2015, UNHCR has supported the voluntary repatriation to Colombia of 194 persons of concern.

# Activities implemented in February 2019

## Working with Partners and Authorities

- The UNCT -headed by the Resident Coordinator and comprising the heads of UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, IOM, UNAIDS, UNFPA, FAO and OCHA- met on 8 February in Caracas with a number of Venezuelan human rights NGOs (PROVEA, Acceso a la Justicia, Red Venezolana de Gente Positiva, Espacio Publico, Sinergia, Accion Solidaria, Civilis Derechos Humanos, Centro de DDHH UCAB, Convite AC and REDHNNA) to discuss the need to enhance dialogue and information sharing between the UN and civil society organisations.
- UNHCR's SGBV/Child Protection Officer conducted a mission to Maracaibo with partners HIAS' National Coordinator and met with members of the Safe Spaces Network in Zulia to revise and harmonize procedures and formats, present child protection and community-based strategies, strengthen the identification of cases during community-based activities and revise the 2019 work plan 2019 with the inclusion of community-based joint activities.
- On 13 February, the UNCT, including UNHCR, met with the Special Humanitarian Assistance Committee of the opposition-led National Assembly. During the meeting, the Resident Coordinator confirmed the UN's interest in providing assistance to Venezuela, emphasised the need to establish complementary mechanisms of assistance and communication between the UN and the NA and pointed out the need that humanitarian aid not be turned into a political issue.
- On 15 January, the Resident Coordinator and OCHA presided over the first meeting of the Assistance Cooperation and Coordination Team (Equipo de Cooperacion y Coordinación de la Asistencia - ECCA by its Spanish acronym) aims at improve inter-sectoral coordination, includes UN agencies, NRC, national NGOs and the Red Cross Movement and has activated the sectors of Protection (UNHCR), Nutrition (UNICEF), Health (PAHO) and Water and Sanitation (UNICEF).
- On 21 February, the UN System met in Caracas with the International Contact Group (ICG) EU and Uruguayan representatives, who expressed their interest in promoting a political solution for new free and fair elections in Venezuela and to allow humanitarian aid into the country in accordance with humanitarian principles.

## Community-based Protection

- UNHCR supported nutritional brigades of the National Nutrition Institute in the prioritized communities of Palotal, Mi Pequeña Barinas, Mano de Dios and La Fría, in Táchira state, where 192 persons were assessed and 55 of them (children, lactating women and older persons) were diagnosed of nutritional deficit
- UNHCR and the Ombudsperson's Office discussed the issue of birth certificates in Zulia State, which have not been issued since January 2018. According to UNICEF, the State of Zulia has received enough supplies to issue 42,000 birth certificates but has not yet taken any action to deliver them to the communities and families.
- UNHCR and Red Cross organized group information sessions and individual counselling, HIV prevention and sexual reproductive health in the main bus station in Ciudad Guayana (Bolívar state). Red Cross also provided blood pressure measurement and provided basic counselling on on asylum and other migratory pathways for those who needed it.
- UNHCR partner HIAS in Táchira state delivered water pumps to the Llano de Jorge community (Táchira state), community leaders. This project will benefit some 10,000 residents of this community and surrounding areas.
- The UNHCR-supported youth networks of Gran Sabana and Simón Bolívar I communities (Zulia state) supported by UNHCR carried out information sessions on sexual and gender-based violence prevention, children rights and sexual and reproductive health to around 350 members of the community.
- UNHCR in Táchira state carried out through partner National Institute for Nutrition (INN) two CERF-funded nutrition brigades in the Manos de Dios and La Fría communities which included mobile information points to provide counselling and information on ways to community

empowerment. The brigades benefitted 182 people, including PoCs and host community members. Of the 116 individuals evaluated, 40 were diagnosed as suffering from nutritional deficit.

- In Caracas, UNHCR partner Acción Solidaria conducted an informative session on sexual and reproductive rights with teachers and community leaders of Antonio Jose de Sucre community, with the aim of raising awareness on non-discrimination and prevention of violence. The idea is that teachers of the UNHCR-supported community centre El Colibri will use the knowledge sustain conversations with students and improve safe spaces for all beneficiaries and their families.
- Field Unit Caracas had a meeting with the Directorate for the Protection of the Family and Defence of Women of the Prosecutor's Office on the status of women's rights and the main challenges to child protection in the capital. The sides agreed on a joint calendar of community activities and the elaboration of an information brochure on gender violence prevention.

### **Borders, Asylum and Durable Solutions**

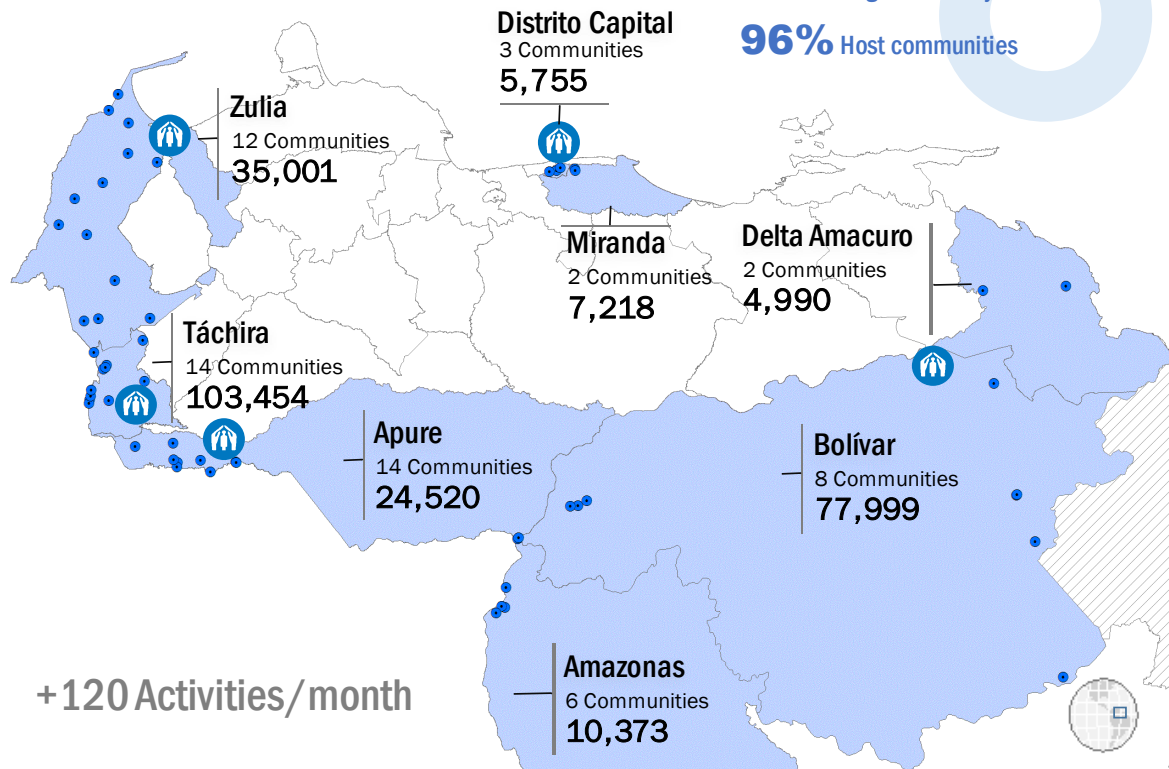
- UNHCR in Ciudad Guayana met with IOM to assess human trafficking and other protection risks in Bolívar and Delta Amacuro states, agreeing to exchange information and evaluate a possible joint security verification mission in the Mining Arch with the participation of UNICEF and UNDSS.
- UNHCR visited three prioritized communities in Zulia state and was informed that since December 2018 there has been a sharp increase of persons leaving the country due to deteriorating socioeconomic conditions. According to community leaders in Villa Bolivariana I, 18% of the residents left (242 persons) had left in the past two months alone.
- The Red Cross in Falcon state informed UNHCR of two cases of Venezuelans who were detained in Aruba and were facing deportations procedures even though they stated their intention to seek asylum in the country. UNHCR in Maracaibo has referred the cases to UNHCR Aruba for follow up. UNHCR also provided individual counselling to a Venezuelan person of concern seeking information on asylum in France on account of alleged persecution on political opinion grounds.
- UNHCR in San Cristobal, Táchira state, supported the voluntary repatriation of a Colombian family of two, who were accompanied across the Simon Bolivar international bridge by partner HIAS and received at the border by UNHCR Colombia.
- UNHCR in Zulia was approached by a Syrian family seeking advice on voluntary repatriation to Syria on account of their dire socioeconomic situation in Venezuela, coupled with lack of documentation and access to schools. The family has been granted Venezuelan nationality four years ago but, despite UNHCR and partner's repeated advocacy efforts, the SAIME immigration authority has to date refused to provide them with identity cards. UNHCR advised the family on the precarious security situation in Syria, but they have already purchased the tickets to return home in a month, convinced that they will have better access to education and health in comparison to Venezuela.
- UNHCR in Zulia met with CONARE to discuss why SAIME authorities are not processing refugee ID cards and visas, allegedly on account of a system connectivity breakdown. UNHCR is seeking the support of CONARE and the Office of the Ombudsman to organize a meeting with the local SAIME Director. There is also concern that the closure of all Colombian consulates in Zulia may negatively affect the situation of Colombian and Venezuelan persons of concern.

## 2019 Planned UNHCR Beneficiaries

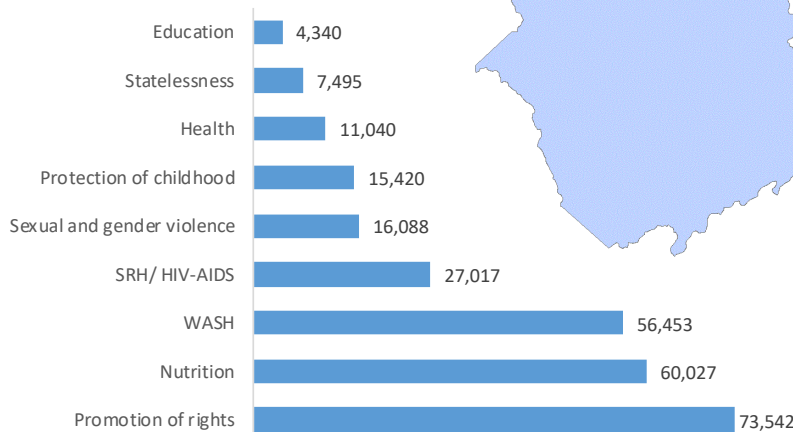
 **+ 271,822** Estimated beneficiaries

 **12** Project Partnership Agreements

**15** Partners



**+ 120 Activities/month**



**Coverage**

**8** States

**28** Municipalities

**28** Parishes

**54** Communities

### Donors

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