



**DTM**

IOM • OIM

THE UN MIGRATION AGENCY



# Venezuelans' Vulnerability to Exploitation, Trafficking and Discrimination

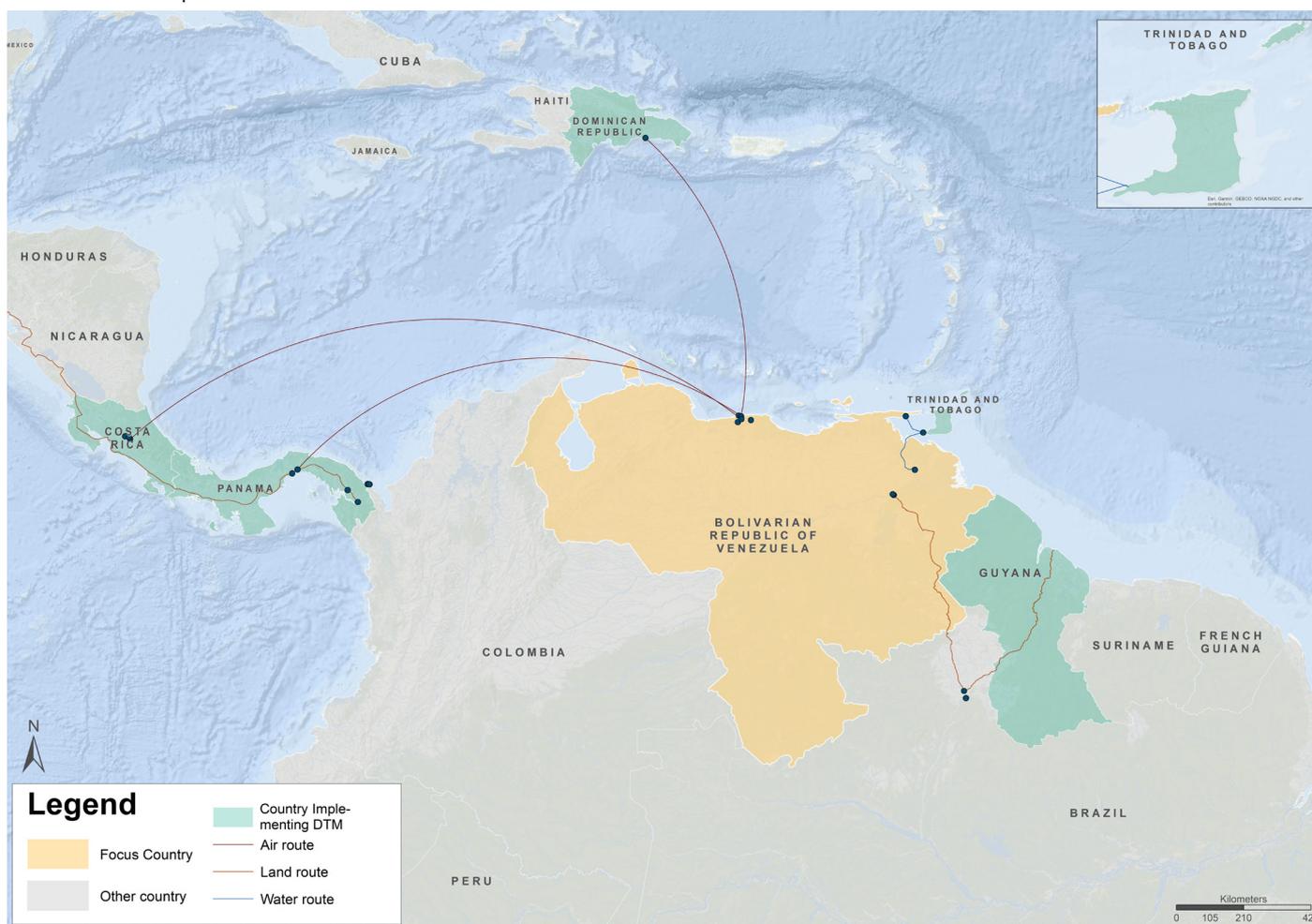
## Central America and the Caribbean

Outflows from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela intensified in the past two years. It is now estimated that the number of Venezuelan nationals worldwide reached over three million. Most of them are hosted in countries from Latin America and the Caribbean.

This situation report seeks to contribute to the knowledge on some of the protection risks that Venezuelans are exposed to, once they leave their country. It offers details about the profile of those who reported discrimination and experiences of exploitation which might amount to human trafficking, based on the information that over 4,000 respondents provided in the context of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) surveys conducted in Central America and the Caribbean. In addition, the analysis illustrates reported needs and gaps in assistance.

The surveys on which the results are based were not aimed at identification of human trafficking cases as defined by international legal instruments, and do not replace protection monitoring or vulnerability screenings. Moreover, they are not statistically representative of all Venezuelan nationals who left their country or of the arrivals in the countries that were surveyed by DTM, but rather provide a snapshot of the experiences of those surveyed. For further information on the inherent limitations for this type of data collection and a correct interpretation of the survey results, see the [“Methodology”](#) and [“Limitations”](#) sections below.

Map 1: Venezuelan flows towards Central America and Caribbean countries with DTM data collection



Source: IOM/DTM

Note: The map does not exhaustively show all countries in which DTM is active. This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

## VULNERABILITIES AND NEEDS

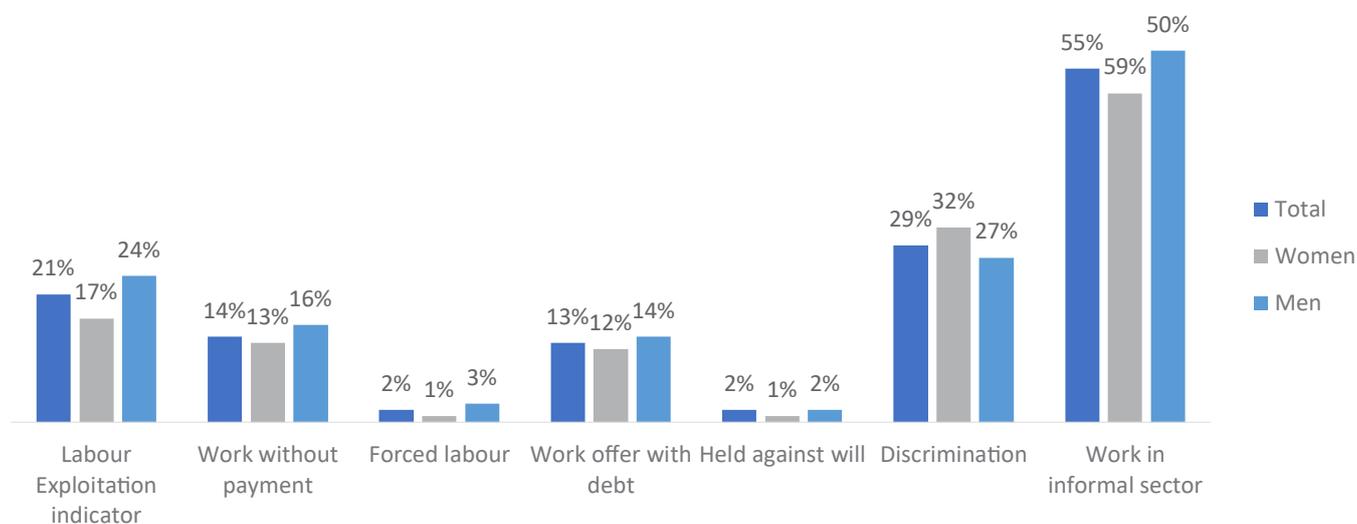
At least 21 per cent of the respondents said that they experienced either forced work, unpaid work or were held against their will since they left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Figure 1 illustrates the way the reported experiences of forced work, unpaid work or being held against their will – which represent a composite indicator of labour exploitation and trafficking for labour exploitation – compare with other individual survey questions. A higher rate of male (24%) than female (17%) respondents mentioned that they experienced either forced labour, or unpaid work, or were held against their will.

At least 23 per cent of the respondents who were single responded “yes” to this indicator of exploitation and trafficking, in comparison with 17 per cent of married respondents. Venezuelans who travelled alone appear to be more affected (16%) than those who travelled in a group (13%).

The average age of the respondents who reported one of these experiences that indicate exploitation and trafficking was 32 years, which was lower than those who did not experience any (who were 34 years old on average). Four per cent of the female respondents who reported one of the aforementioned issues were pregnant, which is in line with the overall rate of pregnant women among all respondents (4%).

Figure 1: Venezuelans' vulnerability to exploitative practices, trafficking and discrimination in Central America and the Caribbean



Source: DTM flow monitoring surveys, July-December 2018

## INDIVIDUAL INDICATORS OF EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING



### • Work without agreed payment

Since they started their journey, 14 per cent of the respondents worked or carried out an activity without receiving the agreed payment.

A higher rate of male (16%) than female respondents (13%) reported this issue.

Those who experienced this issue were younger (32 years old on average) than those who did not have any challenges of payment for their work; they were 34 years old on average. Four per cent of the female respondents who carried out an unpaid activity were pregnant, which is the same as the overall percentage (4%) of pregnant women among all female individuals interviewed. Most of the respondents who worked without receiving the agreed payment (81%) left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela between 2016 and 2018.

### • Forced labour

Two per cent of the respondents said they were forced to work.

Three per cent of male respondents and one per cent of female respondents reported that they experienced forced labour. They were aged 32 years on average, while those who did not experience forced labour were 34 years old on average. Seven per cent<sup>1</sup> of female respondents who were forced to work were pregnant, which is higher than the overall rate of pregnant women among the female respondents (4%). Most of those who said they performed an activity against their will left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 2016 (41%) and in 2017 (32%).

<sup>1</sup> This percentage was calculated from a total of 27 female respondents, who said that they were forced to work against their will



- Held against will

Since they left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, two per cent of the respondents said that they were kept at a certain location against their will by persons other than the authorities of the country.

The percentage of male respondents (2%) who were held against their will was twice as much as that of female respondents (1%). Individuals who reported that they were kept against their will were 30 years on average, whereas those who reported that they were not in this situation were older - 34 years on average. Seventeen per cent of the female respondents who were held against their will were pregnant, while the overall rate of pregnant women is lower, at four per cent. Most of the respondents forcibly held had left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 2016 (27%) and in 2017 (41%).



- Work offers with debt

Twelve per cent of respondents who received an offer of work abroad were approached before leaving the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Some of these respondents (13%)<sup>2</sup> reported that the work offer included repayment of costs at a later stage. Work offers made to populations at a time of an emerging economic and political crisis, which involve debt accrued prior to departure from the country of residence, indicate potential debt bondage.

A slightly higher percentage of male (14%) than female (12%) respondents received work offers with debt. Approximately one fifth of those whose work offer included repayment of costs were then not paid as agreed, and ten per cent of those who had to make repayments were then forced to work.<sup>3</sup>



## DISCRIMINATION

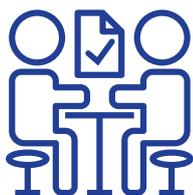
Since they started their journey, nearly one third of the respondents said that they experienced some form of discrimination. The majority of Venezuelans (93%) reported that they were discriminated because of their nationality<sup>4</sup>.

A higher rate of female (32%) than males (27%) reported that they were affected by this issue. Venezuelans affected were 32 years old on average, whereas those who did not disclose experience of discrimination were aged 34 years old on average. Most of the respondents who said that they were discriminated left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 2018 (32%) and 2017 (30%). Twenty-seven per cent of those who said they were discriminated also carried out an activity without receiving the agreed payment. Five per cent of those discriminated were also forced to work. Five per cent of the female respondents who were discriminated were pregnant, which is slightly higher than the rate of pregnant women among the female respondents interviewed (4%).

<sup>2</sup> This information is only available on Venezuelans surveyed in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Costa Rica and Panama.

<sup>3</sup> This indicate the debt may have been used as a means of control.

<sup>4</sup> The information on the main reasons of discrimination was not collected in Panama.



## INFORMAL ECONOMY

A third of the respondents received an offer to work outside of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, most (87%) after they left their country. Trade and business were the main sectors in which respondents received a work offer in the country in which the survey took place; 34 per cent of respondents were offered a job in these sectors.

Fifty-five per cent of the surveyed respondents<sup>5</sup> said that they worked in the informal economy in the country of survey.

A higher rate of male (59%) than female (50%) respondents reported to work in the informal sector. Approximately two thirds of respondents who were either not paid as agreed, or were forced to work, or were held against their will also said that they worked in the informal sector in the host country.



## REPORTED NEEDS

Forty-six per cent of respondents reported legal assistance as their main need, followed by access to employment and income generation (17%), and by medical care (12%). Seven per cent of respondents said that practical information on hospitals, transportation, and reception and transit centers were their priority needs, while five per cent reported safety and security as their main concern.

In terms of the main challenges faced by the respondents

since they left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, more than 70 per cent reported that they faced economic difficulties, followed by challenges with documents (58%), insecurity and theft (21%), and lack of information (21%). Some respondents also mentioned arrests, detention, discrimination and xenophobia.

The respondents were also specifically asked about access to healthcare. Over half of Venezuelans (58%) reported having no access to health services since they left their country. Slightly more female (58%) than male (57%) respondents reported the lack of healthcare access. A third of the pregnant individuals interviewed reported not being able to access health services.

Figure 3: Respondents' main needs



Figure 4: Main difficulties faced by respondents during their journey



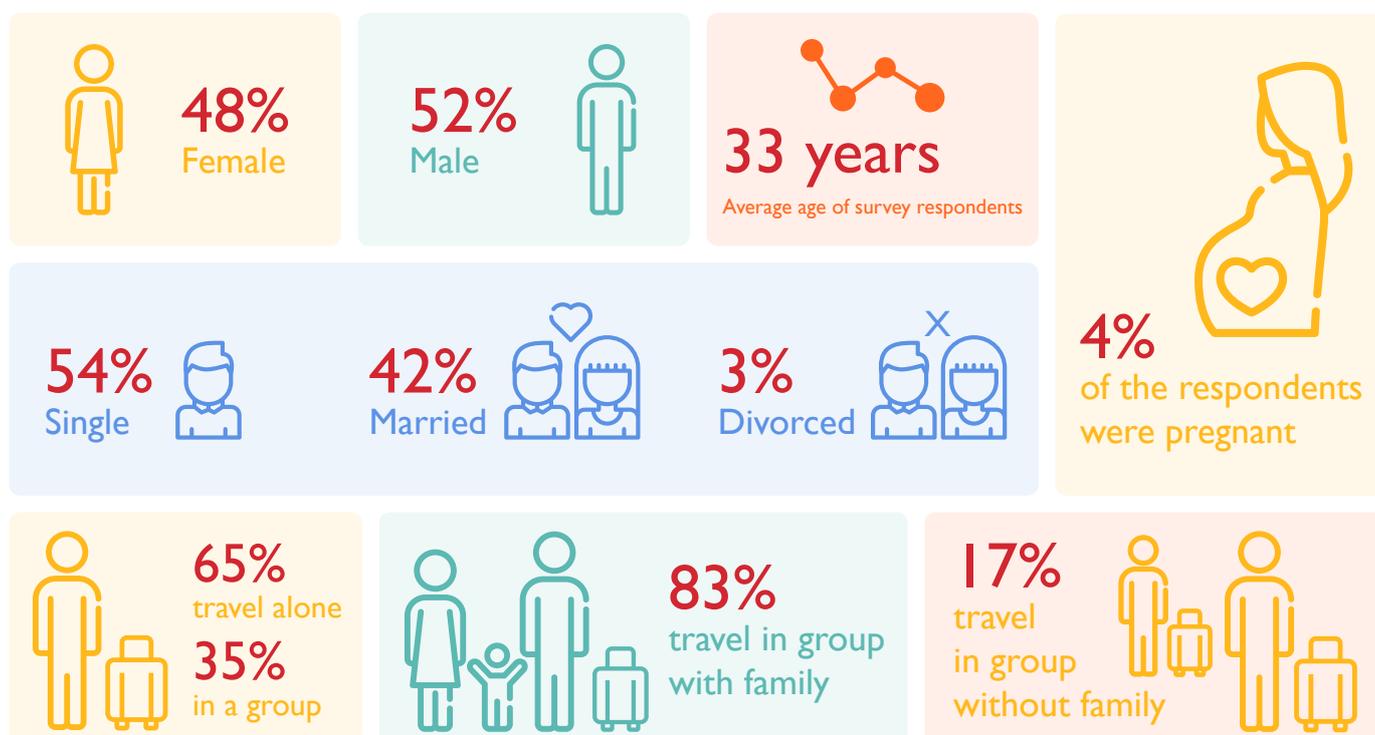
<sup>5</sup> This information was collected only in Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ALL SURVEYED RESPONDENTS

This section provides details about the survey sample on which the results are based (July-December 2018).

Most individuals interviewed (93%) started their journey between 2015 and 2018, with the two highest peaks in 2017 (24%) and 2018 (44%). Most respondents (92%) reported they intended to stay in the country of the survey<sup>6</sup>. For example, ninety-eight per cent of Venezuelan

nationals surveyed in Costa Rica reported intending to stay there, and 98 per cent of those surveyed in Dominican Republic and in Guyana reported that the country where they were interviewed was their final destination. Similarly 80 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago reported their intention to stay in the country in which they were surveyed<sup>7</sup>.



Source: DTM flow monitoring surveys, July-December 2018

Male (52%) and female (48%) respondents were almost equally represented in the sample. Fifty-four per cent of all respondents were single, 42 per cent were married or cohabitating, three per cent were divorced, and one per cent were widowed. Four per cent of female respondents were pregnant.

The average age of interviewed individuals was 33 years old, with the youngest being 14 years old and the oldest

86. Forty-four per cent of the respondents were aged between 14 and 29 years old, 53 per cent between 30 and 60 years, and two per cent were above 60 years.

In Panama and in Trinidad and Tobago, there was a considerable higher rate of male (63% and 64% respectively) than female (37% and 36% respectively) respondents interviewed. On the contrary, the number of female

<sup>6</sup> The information on intentions was not collected in Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>7</sup> The information on respondents' intended country of destination was not collected in Panama.

respondents (60%) outnumbered the number of male respondents (40%). In Costa Rica, Guyana and Dominican Republic, the share of female and male respondents was almost equal: 52 per cent were women in Costa Rica, 57 per cent in Guyana and 54 per cent in Dominican Republic. Sixty-five per cent of the respondents interviewed in

Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago travelled alone.<sup>8</sup> Among those who have travelled in a group, 83 per cent were accompanied by their family, whereas 17 per cent travelled with non-family members.

## METHODOLOGY

The DTM flow monitoring surveys in Central America and the Caribbean were designed to enhance the quality of data on Venezuelan nationals – for example their movements, profile as well as their needs and the risks they face, including trafficking and exploitation.

The surveys were conducted in Spanish and in English between July and December 2018 by IOM field staff in transit and settlement locations of Venezuelan nationals. The analysis is based on 4,600 DTM interviews with Venezuelans, conducted in five countries from Central America and the Caribbean: Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Guyana. Respondents were approached in an ad hoc manner by IOM field staff. Those who gave their consent were interviewed.

The surveys capture information on the socio-demographic and economic background of respondents; their journey after departure from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the routes that they took; their main needs and the challenges they faced since they have left the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; their intended country of destination and who they travelled with. The Protection module of the survey includes questions about perceived discrimination, the types of experiences that may be associated with falling victim to exploitative practices or human trafficking after departure, as well as the types of environments that enable predatory behaviour.

A significant proportion of respondents report direct experiences of discrimination, exploitation or practices which may amount to human trafficking or are associated with falling victim to human trafficking. It must be noted that the experiences captured by the survey questions do

not aim to identify cases of human trafficking as defined by international legal instruments surveys. They are rather used to try to build a more comprehensive picture about the Venezuelan population which recently arrived in Central America and the Caribbean, using a few key questions that can be asked by DTM enumerators in this type of environment.

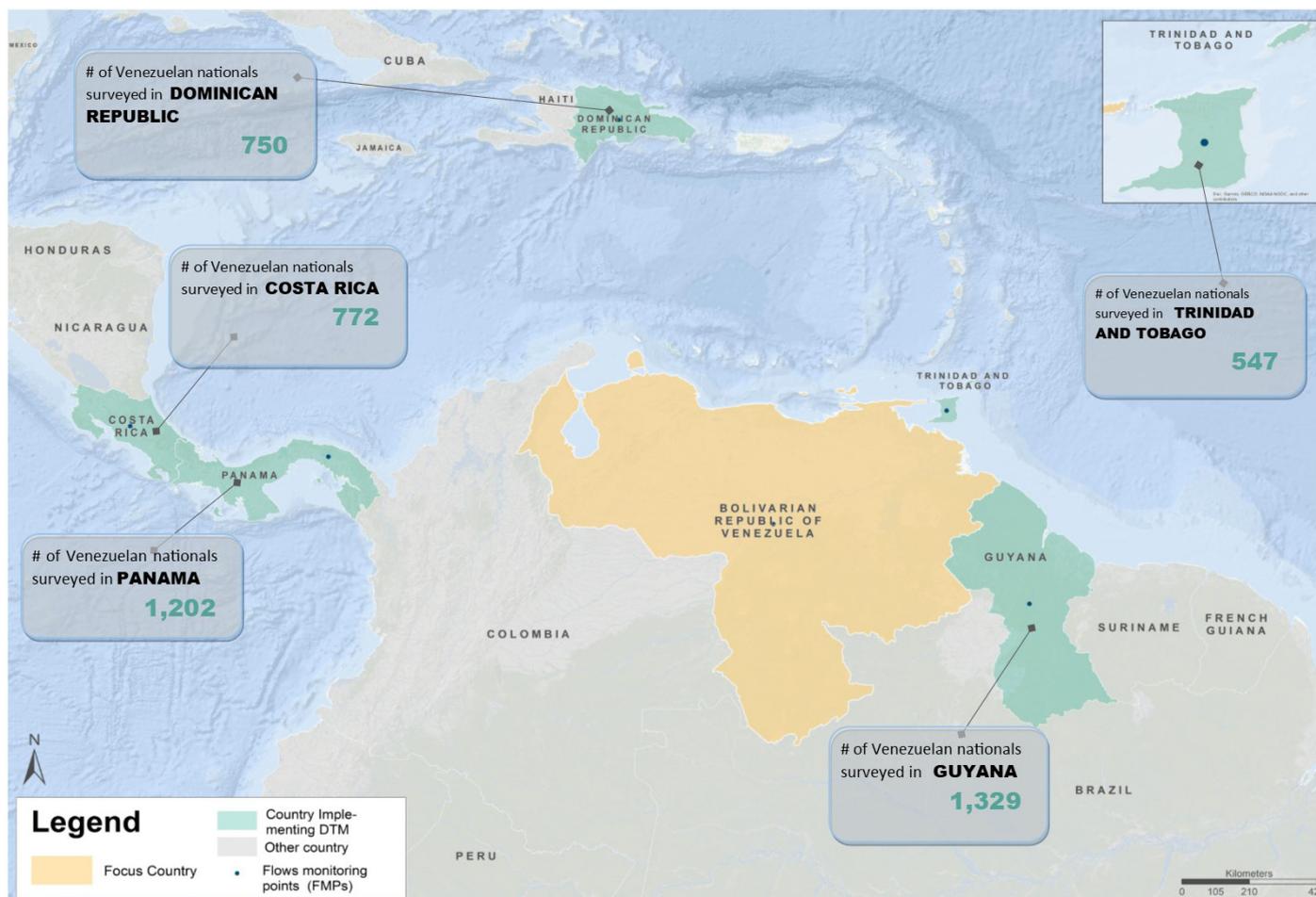
The surveys are fully anonymous and do not collect personally identifying information about anyone, including potential perpetrators, in order to protect everyone involved. They nevertheless provide evidence on the kind of environment within which risks of trafficking, exploitation and other protection issues occur, as well as a picture of the vulnerability of populations on the move and the risks they face.

This report was created by consolidating the data collection efforts of each field mission. Each of the data collection exercises was coordinated with relevant partners, both humanitarian actors and governments at the national and local level.

The respondents' journey from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the country of survey is known to take place in different ways, which should be considered when the results are interpreted. Respondents who travelled from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela into Trinidad and Tobago arrived by boat. The arrivals in Guyana and Costa Rica were mostly by land, while air travel was generally used to reach Panama and the Dominican Republic.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews in Panama did include information on travelling alone or in a group.

Map 2: Number of Venezuelan nationals surveyed by country



Source: IOM/DTM

Note: This map illustrates only the number of interviews conducted which were used for this statistical brief, not all number of surveys conducted by IOM in the region. This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

## LIMITATIONS

While IOM's surveys provide essential, systematic information about some of the risks Venezuelans who recently left their country are exposed to, in Central America and the Caribbean, the limitations need to be acknowledged when the results are interpreted.

The survey questions only indicate vulnerability to exploitative practices and trafficking. They do not show prevalence of human trafficking or labour exploitation, and no victims of human trafficking are formally identified through the surveys.

IOM included indicators of trafficking and exploitation into the surveys, and not questions through which trafficking cases are identified; that would be screening of potential victims of trafficking and would have been done by counter-trafficking specialists instead of DTM data collectors. Data collection on human trafficking, as defined by the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo Protocol)* is difficult to undertake in the context of busy and often chaotic refugee and migrant flows. The act, means and purpose are the three main elements of human trafficking, and ascertaining their presence often requires a wide range of different questions and discussions.

The selection of survey respondents is not done through random sampling. Respondents are approached in an ad hoc manner by IOM to explain the purpose of the survey and obtain explicit consent to be interviewed. Therefore, as with all surveys of this kind, this can lead to selection bias.

The surveys do not cover all experiences that relate to human trafficking and exploitation. They do not ask about sexual exploitation or gender-based violence, which is likely to also affect Venezuelans leaving their country. Human trafficking for sexual exploitation, especially of women and girls, account for a large percentage of identified victims globally. The level of detail provided by the surveys is limited, restricting insight into the contexts in which trafficking and exploitation occur. When respondents report being held against their will by actors other than state authorities, the responses do not specify for what purpose – whether for forced labour or extortion, for instance. The information on risks highlighted in this situation report would benefit from further research.

The characteristics and experiences described above are self-reported. The information on the experiences is provided by the Venezuelans interviewed. Therefore, some of the answers might reflect perceptions and present the same biases as any other similar surveys with refugees and migrants. Accurate results hinge, among other things, on the accuracy of answers from respondents, which in most cases cannot be verified.

Respondents are mostly adults. Due to the nature of the questions and the context of the survey, IOM did not specifically target children as respondents of the survey. Therefore, the risks and needs relevant to children might not appear in the results.

The findings have a regional dimension, but they might not be applicable to all countries in Central America and the Caribbean where Venezuelans are present. It was not possible to collect certain types of information from Venezuelans who travelled in all countries of this region. When information was available for specific countries from the region only, this is clearly mentioned.



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
The UN Migration Agency

**DTM**