UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Intentions to Return to Venezuela

MARCH 2026

1,288
Individuals

Venezuelans interviewed

ECUADOR	347
PERU	268
COLOMBIA	223
BRAZIL	202
CHILE	151
GUATEMALA	97

Number of interviews per country

67%
FEMALE

33%
MALE

38
YEARS

Average age of respondents

Objective

In light of recent developments in Venezuela, a preliminary assessment was conducted in five major host countries in the Americas, and additionally in Guatemala. The objective of this assessment is to analyze return considerations and intentions among Venezuelans who left the country at least six months ago and are currently residing in these host countries.

The assessment seeks to better understand short- and medium-term return dynamics, including the motivations, perceived risks, structural conditions, and support needs influencing decisions to remain in the host country, return to Venezuela, or pursue alternative mobility pathways.

Key Findings

1. Among respondents, 35% expressed an inclination to return to Venezuela: 9% with immediate intent (within 12 months), 10% considering the move, and 16% expressing a general preference for repatriation.

2. Family reunification drives return aspirations, but most respondents indicate that return would require major economic and political stabilization in Venezuela.

3. Access to employment and income opportunities in host countries remains the primary factor influencing respondents' decision to stay.

4. 75% have not taken concrete steps to prepare for return, and 60% lack sufficient information to make an informed decision, highlighting critical preparedness and information gaps.

Methodology

This assessment is based on data collected between 27 January and 4 March 2026 across six countries using a common questionnaire, while applying context-specific data collection approaches adapted to operational realities in each location. Data collection modalities varied by country and included face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, or mixed approaches, depending on access, security conditions, and available resources.

The sample is not statistically representative of the broader displaced population in each country. Findings reflect the distribution of interviews conducted and are presented using percentages to allow for comparison across contexts. No statistical weighting has been applied to adjust for population size or sampling differences. Results should therefore be interpreted as indicative of patterns observed among respondents rather than generalizable to all Venezuelans in the region.

Background and context

Recent developments inside Venezuela have signaled potential political and institutional change. While significant uncertainty remains regarding the political outlook, the prospect of reform — including the release of political prisoners, economic and social measures, and a possible transitional phase — is being closely followed by Venezuelans both inside and outside the country. Regular exchanges with Venezuelan refugees and migrants, their diaspora organizations, and community leaders indicate an increasing openness among some Venezuelans abroad to consider the possibility of return in the near future.

As of November 2025, an estimated 6.9 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants reside in Latin America and the Caribbean[1], representing one of the largest displacement situations in the region's history. Despite the generous welcome extended by many host States and communities, more than 4 million people continue to require assistance to support their integration, access protection, and secure essential services[2]. Many continue to face barriers to sustainable integration, including socioeconomic insecurity, lack of documentation, limited livelihood opportunities, and structural obstacles such as the non-recognition of professional qualifications and reliance on informal labor markets.

Cross-border movements continue to follow established seasonal patterns, with arrivals remaining stable and consistent with historical trends for this time of year.

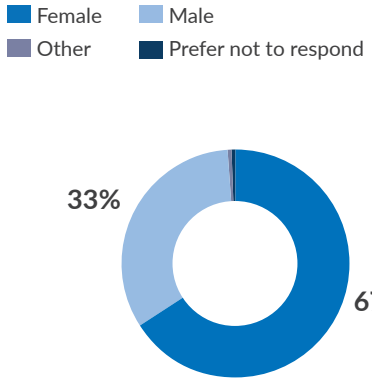
While large-scale return movements have not materialized, returns to Venezuela continue and a growing share of recent returnees report an intention to remain. Perceptions of forthcoming political, social, and economic improvements, combined with the persistent challenges many continue to face in host countries, could accelerate spontaneous returns in the coming months. Recognizing that refugees and migrants are best placed to evaluate risks and make informed decisions on matters that directly concern them — including return — understanding how Venezuelans abroad interpret the current situation is essential.

Against this backdrop, the assessment seeks to generate a more comprehensive understanding of short- and medium-term return dynamics, examining the motivations, perceived risks, structural conditions, and support needs influencing decisions to remain in host countries, return to Venezuela, or pursue alternative mobility pathways.

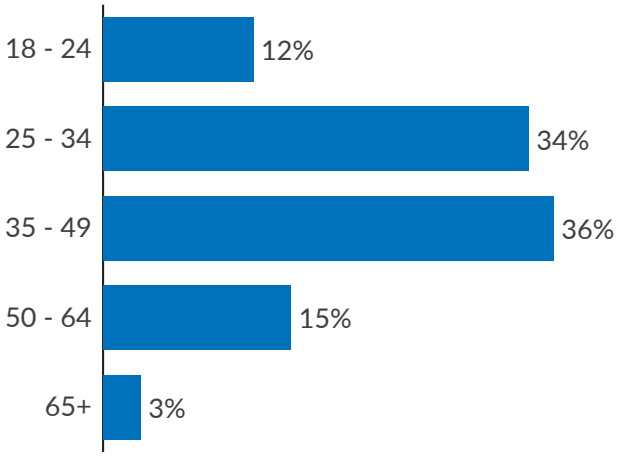
1 Refugee Data Finder. UNHCR, 2025, https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/. Accessed 2 Mar. 2026.
2 RMRP 2026: Refugee and Migrant Response Plan. R4V Inter-Agency Coordination Platform, 2025, https://www.r4v.info/en/rmrp2026. Accessed 2 Mar. 2026.

Demographics

Gender



Age group



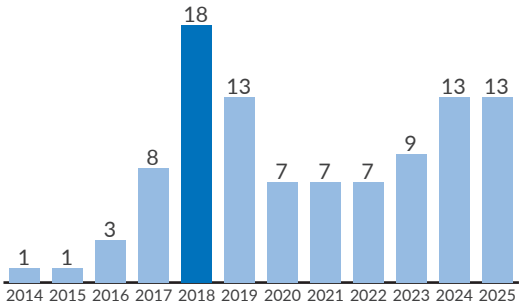
The regional respondent profile is predominantly composed of working-age adults, with most born between the mid-1980s and early 2000s. Older adults represent a smaller share of respondents. While Ecuador and Peru show a slightly younger profile compared to Chile and Brazil, the overall age structure is broadly consistent across countries.

At the regional level, women represent approximately 67% of respondents, while men account for about one-third. This pattern holds across the five main host countries, where women constitute the majority of respondents, with Guatemala being the only exception, showing a male majority.

Across countries, colleagues emphasized that women's greater availability, caregiving responsibilities, and higher reliance on protection services naturally increase their representation in surveys, shaping the demographic profile captured by the study.

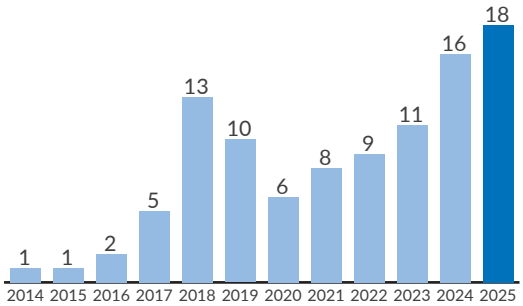
Year of departure from Venezuela (%)

Peak departures in 2018



Year of arrival in host country (%)

Increasing arrivals reported in 2024—2025



Regionally, departures from Venezuela and arrivals to host countries follow two major waves. The first, from 2017 to 2019, corresponds to the period of highest outflows of Venezuelans across the region, with 2018 standing out as a particularly significant year across operations. A second rise begins in 2023, partially influenced by onwards movements culminating in 2025 as the peak year of arrival.

Patterns vary across countries in ways that reflect distinct mobility dynamics influenced by opportunities to access territory, status and documentation, through a range of alternative stay arrangements that States have implemented in the last years. Colombia shows a dual-peak pattern: the initial 2017–2019 crisis period and a second increase linked to the introduction of the Temporary Protection Statute, which created incentives for new arrivals beginning in 2022. Ecuador's more recent surge, particularly in 2025, reflects circular mobility, with individuals returning after unsuccessful integration attempts in other countries. Meanwhile, Brazil exhibits a comparatively stable profile, without the pronounced post-2023 spikes observed in other operations.

Socio-economic profile and legal status

Education

65%

completed secondary or higher education

23%

hold higher education degrees

Documentation

95%

hold Venezuelan identity documents

3 in 5

have a legal status in host countries

2 in 5

remain without regular status

Employment

55%

currently employed

30%

actively seeking work

15%

not employed or seeking work

Across the six host countries, the Venezuelan population demonstrates varied educational profiles. Chile and Brazil report higher shares of tertiary-educated respondents, reflecting earlier human mobility waves with more skilled profiles. Colombia and Peru display more heterogeneous educational levels, with larger proportions of respondents with primary education, particularly among those accessing protection services. These differences in human capital, however, are compounded by structural barriers to formal integration: regionally, 41% of respondents lack regular legal status, with Ecuador, Chile, and Colombia showing the highest irregularity.

Labour market participation is common but marked by widespread precarity. Just over half of respondents report being employed, while nearly 30% are actively seeking work and a further 15% are inactive. Importantly, employment frequently corresponds to informal, low-wage, or unstable arrangements rather than secure economic integration, suggesting that legal status and educational background do not necessarily translate into meaningful labour market inclusion. Respondents in Chile, Peru, and Guatemala report relatively higher employment rates.

Taken together, these findings reveal that despite differences across host countries, economic precarity, limited access to legal status and documentation, and structural barriers to formal employment remain common features shaping Venezuelans' living conditions and long-term integration prospects.

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Return aspirations and intentions

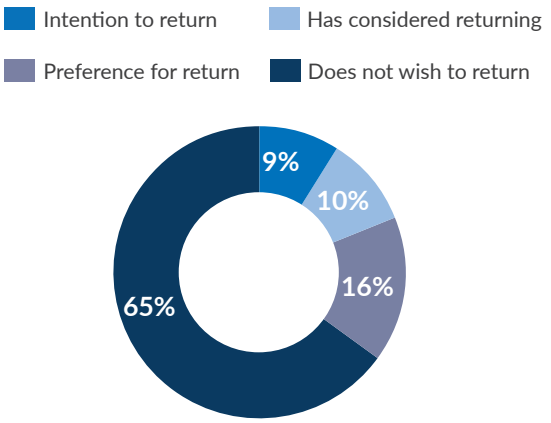
Return to Venezuela remains part of respondents' decision-making landscape, but immediate return intentions are limited. Across the region, 9% of respondents have concrete plans to return within the next 12 months, underscoring that short-term return continues to feature as a relevant option across all six host countries covered by the assessment.

Although this percentage may seem limited, it could translate into a potentially large number of individuals when considered against the scale of displacement, with millions of Venezuelans currently being hosted in countries across the region.

At the same time, return persists primarily at an aspirational level. A portion of respondents report having recently considered returning but ultimately deciding not to proceed, while others express a broader preference to return within the next five years. These findings suggest that return is generally conditional and forward-looking, driven more by hopes for future improvements than by immediate feasibility.

Some country-level differences help contextualize these aspirations. Respondents in Chile, Colombia, and Peru show comparatively higher medium-term preferences for returning, indicating that the idea of returning remains somewhat more active in their planning horizon. In contrast, respondents in Guatemala and Brazil express stronger preferences for remaining in the host country or moving elsewhere, aligning with their generally lower consideration over the past year.

A clear majority across the region indicate that



they do not wish to return, preferring instead to continue building their lives in the host country or exploring mobility options elsewhere. This reinforces the understanding that, for many individuals, the trajectory of displacement has shifted toward long-term settlement outside Venezuela.

Among the smaller group intending to return, most anticipate doing so after several months rather than immediately. Planning is also predominantly family-based: roughly half of those intending to return expect to do so with their entire household, underscoring that return decisions are shaped at the family level rather than by individuals alone.

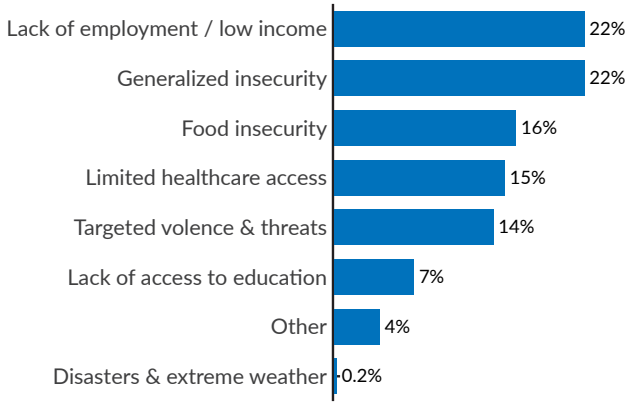
Overall, the findings indicate that while return aspirations remain present, immediate return is not a dominant trend. Intentions are cautious, medium-term, and heavily dependent on broader structural conditions—both in Venezuela and in host countries. Across all contexts, the decision to return is shaped by a combination of emotional ties, perceived risks, and the need for meaningful improvements before return is seen as a viable or safe option.

Drivers of displacement and barriers to return

58%
Fear returning to Venezuela

Reasons for fearing return to Venezuela

% of total responses (multiple responses permitted)



Departure decisions are shaped by a combination of socio-economic pressures and protection-related concerns. Respondents report leaving Venezuela due to overlapping factors, including insecurity and violence, limited access to essential services, and deteriorating economic conditions. It should be noted that many respondents left during a period of acute economic hardship, when hyperinflation, food shortages, unstable income, and the breakdown of basic services were part of daily life, making economic deterioration a tangible driver of mobility.

Lack of employment and income, food insecurity, and reduced access to health services are among the most frequently cited reasons for departure. At the same time, concerns about violence and personal victimization also feature prominently, underscoring that movements were not driven by economic factors alone but reflected broader conditions affecting safety, stability, and well-being. These pressures appeared often interconnected, with insecurity, weakened institutions, and declining public services reinforcing one another and shaping the decision to leave.

Fear of returning to Venezuela reflects the same interconnected pressures that drove departure. Unemployment and income insecurity, and general violence and insecurity are the most cited barriers to return, each accounting for 22% of responses, followed by food insecurity (16%), lack of medical access (15%), and personal victimization (14%). Notably, 58% of respondents express fear of returning, indicating that the majority do not anticipate safe or viable conditions for return in the near term. Economic precarity and protection risks function as co-equal deterrents to return, consistent with the interconnected pattern observed in departure motivations.

Determinants of stay and return decisions

Family reunification

Main driver for return

Employment and income stability

Main driver for staying

Economic recovery and political stabilization

Key conditions for return

Decisions to remain in host countries are primarily shaped by economic stability. Income security (81%), healthcare (75%), and employment opportunities (75%) are the strongest factors encouraging people to stay, while access to education and adequate housing also play an important supporting role. These factors serve as key anchors, offering stability and predictability in daily life, even as labour market access remains constrained. This pattern holds across the region, though in countries such as Brazil and Colombia economic factors carry even stronger weight, while in Guatemala they appear less influential.

In contrast, family reunification is the most consistent factor encouraging return, cited by 35% of respondents — more than any other driver. Many express a strong desire to reconnect with relatives or re-establish their family life in Venezuela. Yet this motivation is frequently outweighed by concerns related to insecurity, violence, economic uncertainty, and limited access to essential services. As a result, even those wishing to return for family reasons often consider current conditions not yet conducive to doing so. Guatemala stands out as a notable exception, where family reunification carries considerably less pull toward return than elsewhere (11%).

When considering return under improved conditions, respondents emphasize the need for substantial and visible structural change. Labour market recovery (85%), stable prices (83%), political transition (83%), dependable basic services (82%), and improved security (78%) are widely viewed as essential preconditions.

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These expectations are broadly shared across countries, even if perceptions of host-country conditions vary somewhat between contexts. The regional direction of influence remains consistent: strong “stay” factors, limited “return” drivers, and a shared view that return can only be considered if Venezuela undergoes deep, systemic transformation that meaningfully improves everyday living conditions.

Return Preparedness and Assistance Needs

75%

have not yet taken concrete steps to prepare for return

Return assistance

Required by most respondents

Information and legal support

Priority needs in host countries

Information and planning

Primary preparation activities reported

Employment and income generation

Priority needs upon return to Venezuela

Across the region, return preparedness remains limited. Most respondents who express return considerations have not taken concrete logistical or financial steps to operationalize return plans. Where preparation occurs, it is generally preliminary in nature, focused on gathering information or discussing potential plans within the household rather than undertaking formal administrative procedures.

Assistance needs are substantial both prior to departure and upon arrival. In host countries, respondents highlight the importance of access to reliable information, legal guidance, and support with documentation, including the renewal and acquisition of personal documents and legal permits, as well as clarity on how return may affect the legal status acquired in host countries.

Upon return to Venezuela, economic reintegration emerges as the primary concern. Employment opportunities and income generation, alongside support for internal transport, are consistently identified as the most critical forms of support, followed by temporary shelter, access to health services, and assistance navigating administrative systems. The findings reinforce that return is not only conditional on macro-level change but also dependent on structured reintegration support at both ends of the mobility process.

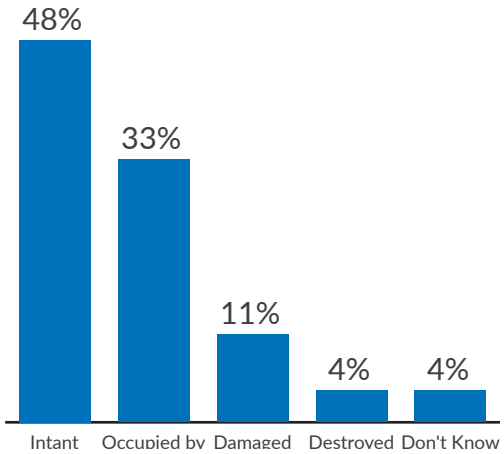
Housing, land & property

33%
report owning housing in Venezuela

71%
report having legal documentation for their property

Approximately one-third of respondents report owning housing in Venezuela. Among these property owners, a considerable share state that their homes remain in good condition; however, many also report that their houses are either occupied by third parties or damaged or destroyed, raising the likelihood of housing, land, and property (HLP) disputes upon return. Although most owners indicate that they possess some form of legal documentation, a substantial minority lack formal registration, which could complicate efforts to reclaim property or secure their rights during reintegration.

Current condition of housing



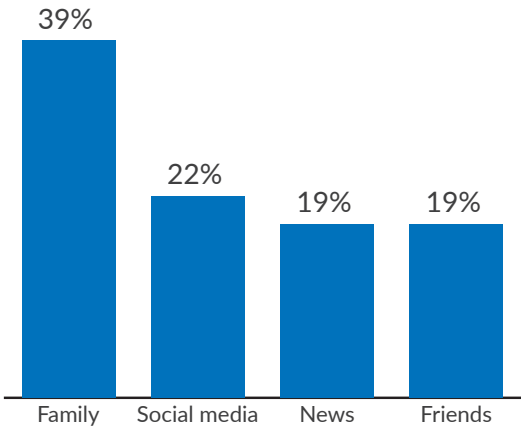
When these housing conditions are viewed together with people's intention to return, an important pattern emerges. Owners whose homes are conserved are much more likely to express an intention to return, whereas those whose properties are occupied or damaged show much lower return intentions. This suggests that the physical state of the home—and the degree of confidence that it can be recovered or used again—directly influences whether people perceive return as feasible.

Information and decision-making

59%
do NOT feel they have sufficient information

A majority of respondents (60%) report lacking sufficient information to make an informed decision about return. This pattern is consistent across most countries, where between half and two-thirds of respondents indicate information gaps. Guatemala represents an exception, with a majority reporting sufficient information.

Sources of information



Family members constitute the primary source of information, followed by social media, friends, and news media. The strong reliance on informal networks suggests that return perceptions are shaped largely through personal and social channels rather than institutional or verified sources.

Exploratory visits and recent Return

89%
have NOT returned to Venezuela in the last 12 months

39% of respondents report having considered conducting a temporary visit to Venezuela before making a decision about permanent return, while 61% have not considered such a visit. This indicates that exploratory mobility is present but not widespread.

Interest in exploratory visits varies significantly across countries. Chile and Brazil show the highest levels of consideration, while Colombia and Guatemala report markedly lower levels. These differences may reflect varying levels of integration, mobility capacity, or perceived feasibility of cross-border travel. Low rates of exploratory visits largely reflect financial, logistical, and documentation barriers rather than lack of interest. Respondents in Peru, for example, face transit visa requirements, lack valid passports, and risk not being able to re-enter the country, making exploratory travel practically unfeasible. In Colombia, exploratory visits are more common due to geographic proximity, yet remained limited among surveyed respondents, likely due to resource constraints.

Conclusions

The findings of UNHCR's return intentions assessment, piloted in the Americas, indicate that return remains a live option for many Venezuelan refugees and migrants. While only a minority currently plans to return, many keep the option open, particularly in connection with family ties and the possibility of improved conditions in the future.

Return considerations are closely tied to expectations of improved conditions in Venezuela. Respondents highlight the importance of factors such as economic recovery, access to livelihoods, price stability, reliable public services, improved security, and broader structural developments. These elements are seen as key enablers that could further strengthen confidence in return as a viable and sustainable option over time.

At the same time, the survey points to a significant information gap that limits informed decision-making: a majority of respondents feel they do not have sufficient information to make an informed decision about return. This underscores the importance of access to reliable information, legal guidance, and support with documentation, including the renewal and acquisition of personal documents and legal permits. Clarity on how return may affect the legal status acquired in host countries is also a key consideration, alongside the potential role of logistical and financial assistance to facilitate voluntary, safe, and dignified returns.

Importantly, for those who choose to remain in host countries, continued efforts to secure access to protection, legal stay, documentation, and socioeconomic inclusion remain essential. These measures not only support stability but also enable longer-term integration outcomes, ensuring that solutions are responsive to different intentions and evolving circumstances.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of a complementary and forward-looking approach to solutions. Supporting conditions for voluntary, informed, and dignified return, while continuing to strengthen inclusion and protection frameworks in host countries, will be key. Sustained collaboration with host governments, partners, and development actors, alongside continued monitoring of trends, will help ensure that responses remain adaptive and aligned with the aspirations and realities of Venezuelan refugees and migrants across the region.

UNHCR intends to conduct return intention surveys among Venezuelan refugees and migrants on a regular basis, in order to monitor evolving trends as conditions continue to change both in the country of origin and in host countries.

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