

# Topic 1: Addressing the Venezuelan refugee crisis

*United Nations High Commission for Refugees*

## I. Introduction

The Venezuelan refugee crisis is a huge human displacement where nearly 8 million Venezuelans have fled the country, going on since 2014 due to extreme social, economic and political conditions in the country making it unsustainable to live there. It has been the second largest and most severe migration movement in the world.

UNHCR addressed the crisis by providing legal protection to those governments affected; offering basic humanitarian aid through shelter, education programs and introducing policies to ensure long-term unification.

This has been a topic subject to debate due to the scale and severity of the crisis and the amount of refugees fleeing the country seeking for protection due to the social situation collapsing back in Venezuela. It needs international coordination for those leaving the country, as well as for those host countries receiving them, demanding protection, aid, and access to basic rights which they lack in their own country.

## II. Key Terms

*Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V)* - Made up of 200 organizations that coordinate Venezuela's Refugee and Migrant Response Plan in 17 countries in Latin America. These organizations include UN Agencies, civil society, NGOs...

OAS - Organization of American States

*Cartagena Declaration* - Regional agreement in Latin America that expands the definition of what a refugee is and what qualifies it. Differs from the *1951 Refugee Convention* which is mainly focused on people fleeing persecution, Cartagena Declaration also includes violence, armed conflicts, human rights violations..

*Regional Refugee and Migrant Response plan (RMRP)* - Strategic response plan specifically focused on the needs and the protection of Venezuelan refugees and migrants

*Asylum* - The legal protection granted by a government to foreign nationals who are not able or a willing to return to their home country due to persecution and unstable conditions caused by a variety of reasons. (Race, religion, nationality, political opinion or part of a social group). This protection ensures security, shelter and safety from dangerous situations.

*Temporary Protection Status (TPS)* - A legal permit allowing Venezuelan refugees to live and work in a country for a determined period of time, even if they do not have the full refugee status. Considered like a special type of visa given in emergencies.

### **III. Past International Actions**

There has been much international involvement in the crisis and support has been provided by countries all around;

**R4V Platform** - Over 200 different partners of different NGOs, UN agencies, Civil society organizations have united to provide humanitarian assistance across the Caribbean and Latin America

EU has been essential to the financial support given to Venezuela. €82 million given as a short-term solution to relief the most vulnerable Venezuelan refugees. {Accommodation, medical aid}

€50 million encouraging the unification and integration of refugees on countries receiving Venezuelans {Employment opportunities, programs, social interaction}

2019 - First Solidarity Conference on the Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis

Canada gave support the organisation UNICEF to facilitate the refugees' education with campaigns directed for teachers and for the integration of the children in host countries, Ecuador and Peru.

> A positive result was proved by 4,361 teachers receiving training specialised for displaced children and 6,533 refugees getting introduced to new schools.

The OAS pushed for the situation to be recognized as a refugee crisis under the Cartagena Declaration, whilst also providing with temporary security to ensure a protection status (2019).

Donor Conferences, occurring from 2019 to 2021 reunites some countries like Canada, Spain, the EU who organised conferences in order to mobilize billions of dollars for humanitarian operations and to facilitate the aid given by host countries.

Colombia (2021) approved a 10-year Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for around 2 million of Venezuelans. Parallel to this, many other countries in Latin America provided with temporary visas for refugees; UNHCR dealt with the logistical support of these temporary programs

## IV. Timeline of Key Events

2014/2015 - Protests broke in response to hyperinflation, lack of basic needs and the destabilization of Venezuela's economy and political system. This caused the crisis to intensify leading to the number of migrants to increase. In the short period of 4 months (August to December) 1 million refugees left the country.

2018 - The crisis reached one of the most critical stages, the daily average of people fleeing was around 5,500. Among them, many young women travelling alone with no resources at all.

During this period the figure of up to 3.5 million refugees were recorded.

2019 - Brazil insists on the Cartagena Declaration recognition as refugees for those forced migrants. Once it was officially approved (July 24th 2019) the first 174 Venezuelans got recognised as refugees.

By December 6th, already 21,000 Venezuelans had been given the protection and availability to rights as the state of refugees

2020 - Returns to Venezuela started to be recorded (300,000). UNHCR claims the motivation for return is due to the improvements on certain economic areas back in Venezuela, as well as the difficulties found by the people with the integration and tolerance in the foreign countries.

2023 - Nearly 8 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela, overpassing the figures both from Syria and the Ukraine's crisis.

Early 2025 - More than half of Spain's asylum applications were Venezuela (59%), unlike the past year with 38% of Spain's asylum seekers being Venezuelan. This demonstrates how the amount of Venezuelan refugees choosing Spain as a safe place is increasing.

## V. Current Situation

Venezuela remains in a critical stage of crisis and, despite several improvements in its economic activity, hyperinflation, repression, and social instability continue to outweigh any type of advancement. The economy is in a state of collapse, intensified by the mismanagement of the Venezuelan government. When the currency began to stabilise and showed progress, inflation rose again and brought Venezuela back to being one of the countries with the highest inflation rates in the world. To date, Venezuela's GDP has dropped by over 75–80% since 2014, and it is expected to fall even further, along with a decrease in the minimum wage, now at only 0.90 USD per month.

These factors contribute to future displacement and give Venezuelans more reasons to flee the country in search of a better life.

Host countries have generously welcomed Venezuelans, but after a decade of crisis, they are now starting to implement certain regulations and demand documented refugees and migrants in order to offer them rights and services. Despite the good intentions behind this, these processes require funding and external support to ensure no one is excluded. An example of aid reduction is the UN's World Food Programme halving its operations due to financial cutbacks, leaving it able to actively help only 4 out of 11 states. This leaves thousands of vulnerable people without support. This demonstrates how the crisis is now becoming critical even for countries hosting refugees, and without the required financial support, the situation is becoming unsustainable. Asylum seekers continue to increase, and host countries' capacities are beginning to be overstretched. The Venezuela Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is another aid programme suffering from underfunding, with less than 9% of funds met.

The number of refugees recorded to date is nearly 8 million Venezuelans, making this Latin America's largest displacement crisis. As the diaspora grows, conditions worsen, and improvements stagnate. More than 80% of Venezuela's population is now living in poverty. Among them are children deprived of education, facing food scarcity, and exposed to chronic malnutrition.

Despite the severe conditions refugees are experiencing, there are some demonstrations of positive integration in host countries. Training sessions and workshops have been organised to give vulnerable refugees the opportunity to work in small businesses, along with programmes aimed at cultural exchange and access to the labour market.

## **VI. Major Parties Involved**

Brazil - Pushed for the acceptance of Venezuelan refugees in the Cartagena Declaration, successfully achieved this and recognised more than 20,000. Operação Acolhida created to relocate and place refugees from the dangerous borders to cities, aiming to structure and integrate refugees.

Colombia - Largest host of Venezuelan Refugees, nearly 3 million refugees. Despite struggling with underfunding, it has welcomed the largest number of refugees in Latin America. It also launched the Temporary protection status (TPS) for 10 years.

Peru - Known as the second-largest host of Venezuelans with 1.5 million refugees welcomed in the country. Had greater importance in the Quito Process and how Latin America would be responding to Venezuela's crisis.

Spain - Top European destination for Venezuelans due to the facility and all resources it is offering. Language is a huge advantage for Venezuelans as well as Spain having facilities to access asylum compared to other EU destinations. This is proved by the 650,000 asylum applications Spain received by Venezuelans in 2023 since the beginning of the crisis.

Canada - Huge financial support given to Venezuela and had a noticeable impact on improving its economy. Not only supported Venezuela directly but also helped on various programs launched by different Latin American countries. Something characteristic was the resettlement opportunities it gave.

EU - The EU in general was claimed to be one of the largest collective donors, provided with more than €650 million given for aid due to the displacement. Also supported politically and organized different conferences to coordinate international and global funding.

## VII. Key topics to Debate

- Should wealthier countries outside Latin America take in more Venezuelan refugees or contribute more financially?
- Do Venezuelan refugees have the same right to access food, shelter and healthcare than people in host countries?
- How can the UNHCR avoid programs (e.g RMRP) from being underfunded?
- Is humanitarian aid the most important type of help or should the UNHCR also address the political and economic problems in Venezuela?
- Should host countries provide long-term integration solutions (Permanent residency) or temporary programs with hope for a return to Venezuela?
- How can states balance priority for refugees coming and those host communities already suffering and poor themselves?
- Which is the most effective method to make a real change in the crisis, financial support, development support or food aid?
- Should there be strict border control for Venezuelan migrants?

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