



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

# PROTECTION MONITORING VENEZUELA SITUATION

UPDATE #1  
JANUARY- JUNE 2019

*This report provides a narrative explanation for the findings of UNHCR and its partners' protection monitoring activities, carried out from January to June 2019. The structure of this report mirrors the sequence of the questions asked of participating individuals. This reports is not intended to be a protection assessment, nor does it replace any UNHCR policy or legal guidance. As this is a continuous activity, this report will be followed by six monthly updates.*

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# 1. OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

The size of the outflows from Venezuela sharply increased from some 700,000 in 2015 to over 4 million by June 2019<sup>1</sup>, largely driven by a substantial deterioration of the situation in the country in the last 18 months.

Given the disruption of the functioning of democratic institutions and rule of law, and its impact on the preservation of security, economic stability, health, public peace and the general welfare system<sup>2</sup>, the crisis continues to worsen, and serious human rights violations are widely reported<sup>3</sup>.

The displacement outside Venezuela has mostly affected countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and the southern Caribbean islands. Most governments in the region have made efforts to facilitate access to territory, documentation and access to services, but host countries' capacity to address increasing protection and integration has become overstretched resulting in tighter border controls.

The Quito Process and the Quito Plan of Action are excellent opportunities to promote responsibility-sharing in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees, with a substantial focus on admission, reception as well as meeting needs, supporting communities and socio-economic inclusion<sup>4</sup>.



*Colombia. Venezuelans risk life and limb to seek help*

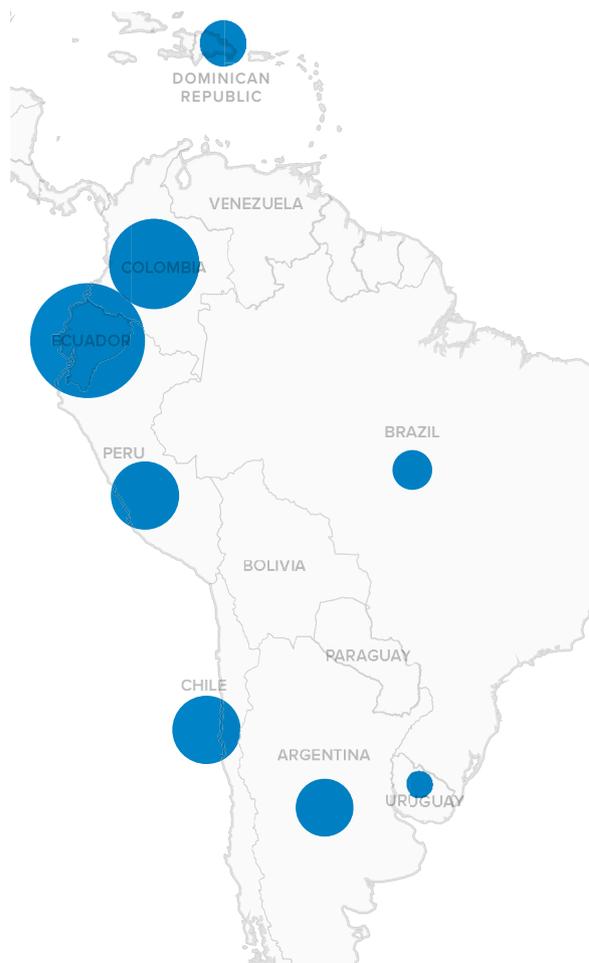
## 2. METHODOLOGY

**Protection monitoring** is a core UNHCR activity which aims at ensuring an adequate and timely understanding of the protection situation of persons affected by forced displacement. The action-oriented nature of protection monitoring allows UNHCR to adapt to the needs and protection risks faced by persons displaced outside Venezuela and informs a broad range of responses.

Protection monitoring is conducted through different methods, including individual interviews, focus groups discussions, and observations of UNHCR and partners in countries of origin, transit and destination. The analysis contained in this report is mostly based on individual/household interviews. The primary data is complemented with information available to UNHCR through other means, including thematic assessments, and reports from partners and other stakeholders.



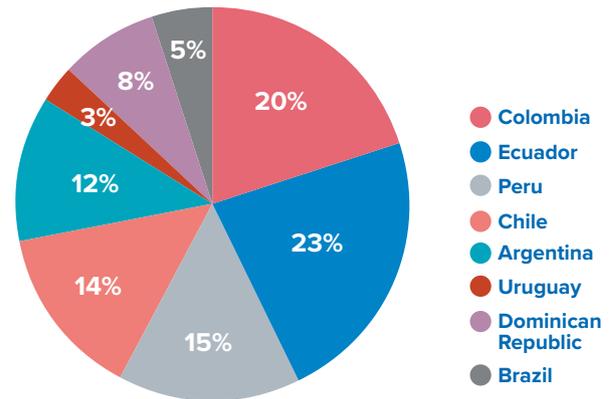
### COUNTRY OF MONITORING



UNHCR and its partners have conducted **7,846 protection monitoring interviews** with Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay from January to June 2019. The questionnaire addressed individuals and their family members (hence totaling over **19,600 individuals**). The interviews were conducted at border points and in urban areas where there was a concentration of persons of concern, including in migration and asylum offices, reception centers and NGO premises.<sup>5</sup>

The distribution of the population surveyed is shown in the map represented by a circle and in the graph:

### INTERVIEWS PER COUNTRY



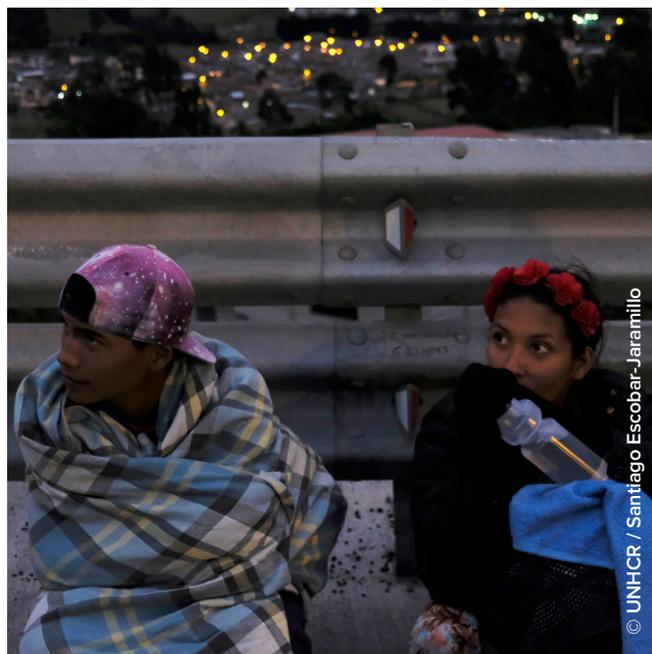
### Protection Monitoring Dashboard



## 3. HIGHLIGHTS

### Persons at risks and protection incidents

- **50.2%** of the families interviewed had at least one member **who were or are at risk due to their specific demographic profile** or because they had to **resort to serious negative coping mechanisms**, including survival sex, begging or sending children under 15 to work.
- **21% of the individuals are persons with specific needs**, including persons with critical or chronic medical conditions (1,838 persons), pregnant or lactating women (1,104), persons with disability (581), unaccompanied or separated children (113), and older people at risk (103).
- **28%** of the respondents reported **one or more protection incident** suffered or witnessed by themselves, and/or his/her family members, of which the most prevalent was robbery (49%), followed by physical assault (19%) and intimidation and threat (17%). In total, **2,432** protection incidents in countries of origin, transit and asylum have been recorded.
- Overall, **46% of the incidents reported took place in Venezuela**, 15% in Colombia, 14% in Ecuador, 10% in Peru and 5% in Argentina.
- Serious protection-related risks were mostly reported in the country of origin, with 95% of incidents related to **abduction and kidnapping** being reported in Venezuela, 78% of the incidents of **arbitrary detention**, **77% of killings** (witnessed or suffered by family members) and 74% of **extortion**.
- **68 incidents of sexual harassment were reported**, 24 of sexual assault, 18 of rape and 9 of sexual exploitation.



*Ecuador. Venezuelan families begin new lives in exile*

## Access to territory and asylum

- **34% of the population surveyed did not have any type of entry or stay permit**, either because they entered irregularly or their temporary permits had expired, 29% said they had a tourist permit or visa, 20% referred to a temporary permit, and only 4% were holding permanent residence permits.
- **15% of those interviewed had applied for asylum.** Among those who had not applied, **26% expressed their intention to apply** either in the country of monitoring (22%), or in another country (4%). Of those who did not apply, the majority were not aware of the existing procedures or entitlements.
- **Asylum systems in the region have been overwhelmed** by the magnitude of the influx and have not been able to cope with the increasing number of applications. **Group-based approaches and prioritization of those with specific needs are encouraged<sup>6</sup> in these circumstances.**
- Recently, there have been increased restrictions on border crossing in Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru as compared with 2018 and the first quarter of 2019. This may have serious negative consequences on access to international protection for those who are, or may be, in need.



*Peru. Venezuelans arrive at Ecuador-Peru frontier*

### Priority needs

- People interviewed expressed these three priority needs: **access to labor, access to housing and regularization of stay.**

#### 1. Access to labor

- **66% of those interviewed said they were either unemployed or working informally.** 20% of them were street sellers. In addition, responses pointed to some **100 incidents when people were obliged to work** against their will or in such conditions that their situation is considered of labor exploitation.

#### 2. Access to housing

- **43% of those interviewed said they had faced problems when looking for accommodation,** mostly due to lack of resources, lack of guarantors, discrimination based on nationality, lack of the required documentation.

#### 3. Legal status

- In 2018 and 2019, Governments in the Americas put in place a variety of residence permits and legal stay arrangements to ensure safe and regular movement of Venezuelans in the region. 60% of those interviewed had a tourist visa, a temporary permit or other form of regular stay. However, **medium- and longer-term solutions are not yet fully in place everywhere, leaving many at risk of irregularity once their temporary permits expire.**



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*Panama.  
UNHCR pilots protection monitoring tool in the Americas*

## 4. LEGAL STATUS

### 1. Type of residence permit or visa

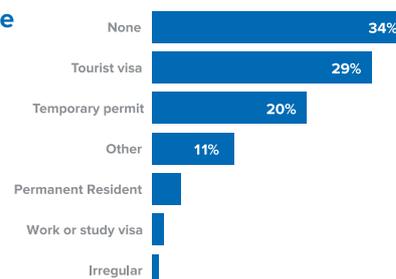
**34%** of the population surveyed did not have **any type of permit**, including people who entered irregularly, as well as those who overstayed their visa or permit.

29% said they held a tourist permit or visa, 20% referred to a temporary permit, and only 4% had permanent residence.

The high prevalence of tourist visas among those interviewed can be explained by the fact that access to territory in the region has been facilitated by the existing agreements, in the context of the Andean Community and Mercosur<sup>7</sup>. In addition, several ad hoc temporary residence permits and legal stay arrangements specifically designed to ensure safe and regular movement of Venezuelans were adopted at the country level, including, among others, in Brazil, Colombia, and Peru.

Venezuelans holding tourist visas are exposed to the risk of an irregular migratory situation once their transitory permits expire. For most Venezuelans holding a tourist visa, it is becoming increasingly complicated to regularize their migratory situation because of difficulties in obtaining the necessary documentation, certified records and fees.

#### Type of residence permit or visa

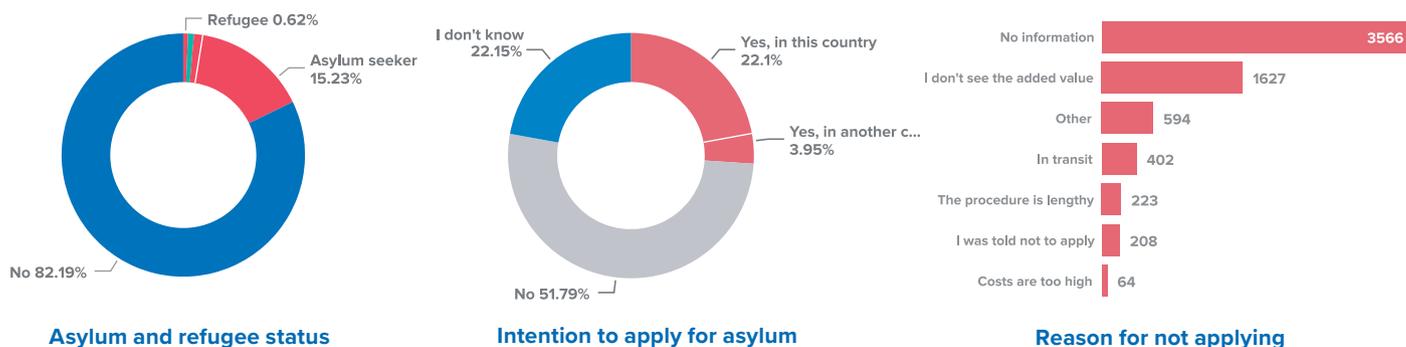


**Longer-term solutions to replace expired temporary permits or stay arrangements are not yet fully in place**, and countries hosting Venezuelans have taken different approaches to the issue<sup>8</sup>. Among those interviewed, people holding a permanent residence permit are mostly residing in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) and arrived mainly by plane directly from Venezuela or via Brazil.



Brazil. Registering Venezuelan asylum-seekers in Boa Vista

## 2. Asylum and international refugee protection considerations



Despite the relatively low percentage of persons who have applied for asylum (**15.2%**), asylum systems in the region are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the influx and face difficulties in coping with the increasing number of applications. Intention to apply for asylum is relatively high among those interviewed, with **26%** planning to apply either in the country of monitoring or elsewhere.

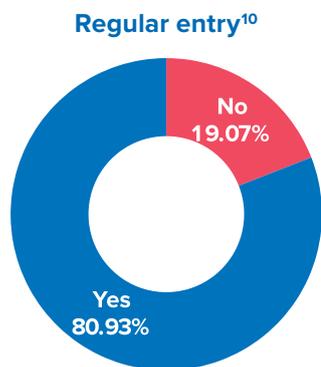
The population interviewed showed very limited knowledge of asylum procedures and their entitlements and very often opted for the quickest and easiest way of legally staying in a country. 208 respondents said they had been advised against applying for asylum and 64 cases referred to the cost as an obstacle.

In line with UNHCR Guidance Note on International Protection Considerations for Venezuelans – Update I, issued in May 2019, the application of group-based approaches for determining refugee status is recommended to address the challenges that the current flows pose. For States that have incorporated the refugee definition contained in the Cartagena Declaration into national law, or are applying it in practice, UNHCR considers that ***“the majority of Venezuelan nationals are in need of international protection under the criteria contained in the Cartagena Declaration on the basis of threats to their lives, security or freedom resulting from the events that are currently seriously disturbing public order in Venezuela”***<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. Regular entry

Venezuela officially closed its borders with Colombia and Brazil from 21 February to 9 June 2019. This had significant consequences for border populations in Venezuela, who are highly dependent on cross-border movements for the provision of income, basic food, medicine and urgent medical treatment.

The informal routes can be extremely **dangerous due to the presence of numerous illegal armed actors** who often fight each other for control of the border areas between Venezuela and Colombia. People in transit are at risk of extortion, violence, theft, forced recruitment, sexual and gender-based violence, and exploitation and trafficking, among others.



Regular entry Colombia January-June

In **Ecuador**, from **January to March 2019**, the number of official entries dropped by half, mainly due to the requirement that people present their certificate for criminal record at the entry point. In addition, the **number of irregular entries are estimated to have increased by 29%**. This restriction exposed persons to additional risks and practices that were not common in Ecuador prior to the measure, such as smuggling and extortion. In late March, Ecuador's Constitutional Court temporarily suspended the restriction.

Regular entry in Peru has been affected by a new resolution which is applicable **as of 15 June, 2019**, under which **Venezuelans will require a visa issued by Peruvian Consular services to be allowed entry** in the territory. In addition, accelerated procedures at the borders have been put in place for those seeking asylum.

Subsequently, on 20 June, 2019, Chile introduced new visa requirements for Venezuelans seeking to enter the country as tourists. Until then, Venezuelans could still enter Chile as tourists without a visa, provided they could prove that they had enough funds to support themselves during their stay. Many tried several times to enter Chile, running out of resources and were compelled to sleep outdoors in Peru with limited access to food. Additionally, some are resorting to irregular

border crossings, through unsafe and mined areas. Despite the fact that Chile considers to have cleaned 92% of the mines along its borders, demining operations continue--particularly at the northern border (Arica), where most of the Venezuelans attempt to enter Chile<sup>11</sup>.

Regular entry in Chile has also been affected by increasing border restrictions. Protection monitoring reports from May 2019 refer to 43 instances of denial of entry, a considerable increase from the 14 cases reported in March, and 5 cases reported in January. Refusal of entry at regular border points often triggers an increase in irregular entries and the establishment of informal smuggling networks, with the associated protection risks.



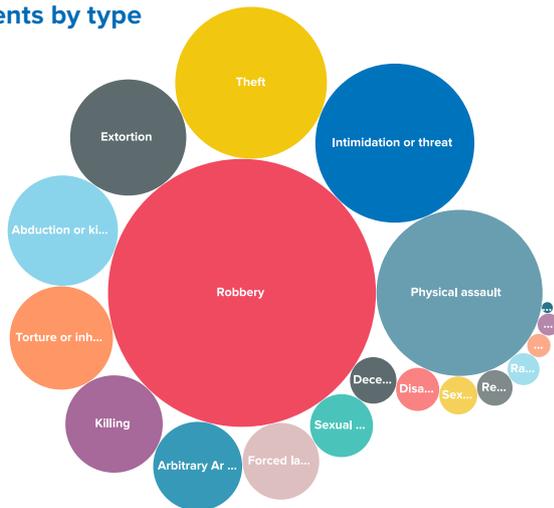
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*Peru. Venezuelans arrive at Ecuador-Peru frontier*

# 5. PROTECTION INCIDENTS

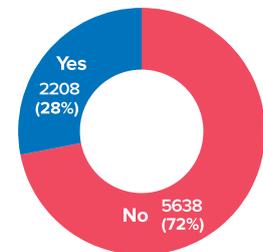
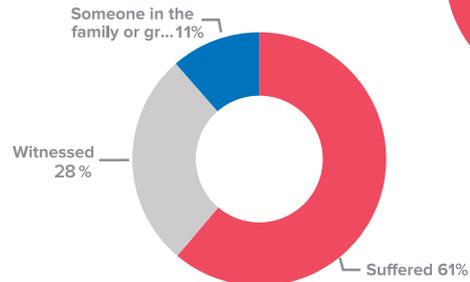
Interviews 7,846 | Incidents 2,412

## Incidents by type



## Families who suffered or witnessed any incident

### Incidents witnessed or experience by self or family member



Persons were asked to report incidents suffered or witnessed by themselves or their family members. **28%** of the families surveyed reported **one or more protection incidents affecting them. In total, 2,412 protection incidents were reported** as suffered or witnessed by persons interviewed and/or his/her family members during the monitoring exercise.

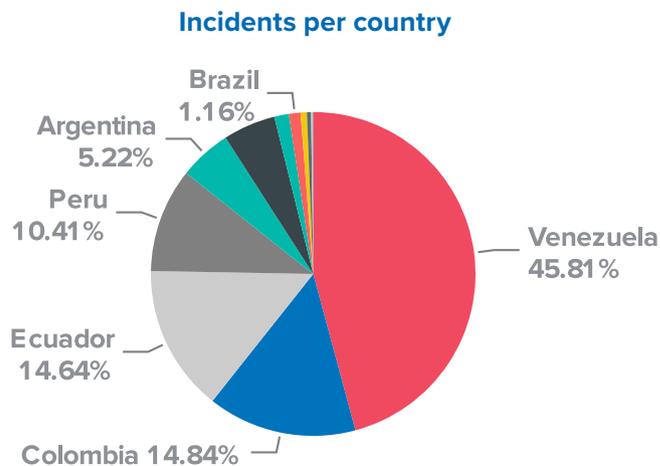
**61% of the incidents reported were suffered by the person interviewed, 27% were witnessed by the person interviewed and 11% were either suffered or witnessed by a family member.**

It should be noted that the number of interviews conducted in countries of monitoring (see methodology) is not directly proportional to the number of incidents reported per country. To illustrate this, it was observed that the highest number of incidents are reported in Venezuela, where interviews have not been conducted.

Overall, the most commonly reported incident was robbery, followed by physical assault, and intimidation and threats. The three types of incidents involve some type of violence and are prevalent across the displacement spectrum, becoming commonly accepted and normalized risks for Venezuelans on the move. Serious protection incidents were also reported, such as witnessing the killing of a family member or other person, abduction and kidnapping and arbitrary detention.

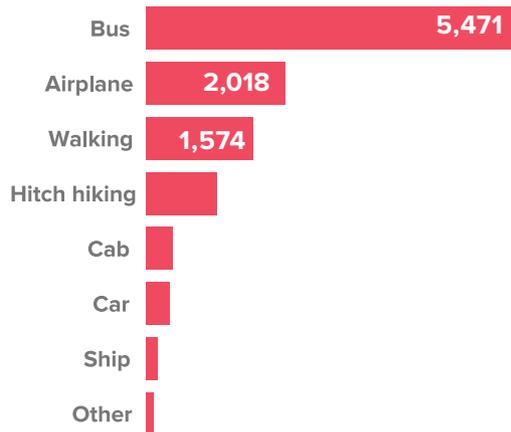
**Out of the 2,412 reported protection incidents, 45% happened in Venezuela** – among these, there were 124 involved the fatal use of force, 192 incidents were related to abduction or kidnapping, 105 arbitrary arrests or detentions, 95 instances of reported torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, 18 incidents of forced recruitment, and 16 of disappearances<sup>12</sup>.

Incidents reported are more prevalent in **Colombia** (15%), **Ecuador** (15%) and **Peru** (10%). In Colombia, killings extortion were among the most commonly reported abuses. Labor exploitation was also significant in Ecuador, being the third most prevalent incident in the country after robbery and physical assault. **Sexual harassment** has also been reported in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia.



## 6. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOVEMENT

### Means of travel

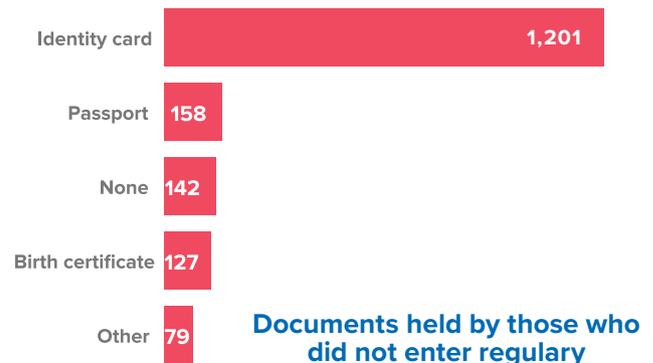


Most of the persons interviewed had travelled by bus, airplane, on foot and/or hitch hiking. Besides walking, the “*caminantes*” often used a combination of modes of transport, including buses and cabs, depending on their economic situation.

With the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions in Venezuela, and the urge to reach a safe destination, UNHCR has observed increased vulnerability among those reaching more distant destinations, such as Argentina, Chile and/or Peru. At the beginning of the protection monitoring, most of those interviewed in Argentina used direct flights from Venezuela, while more recently some of the interviewees had crossed to Brazil by bus or on foot and then flew from Brazil to Argentina.

### Documentation and irregular entry

Regarding the documents held by those who had to cross the border irregularly, most of them said they only held identity cards, birth certificates or nothing at all. After the regional meeting in Quito in September, 2018, countries participating in the process signed a Declaration which included a commitment to allow Venezuelans with expired passports to access the territory. Considered a good practice, this commitment has been successfully applied in some South American countries (i.e. Argentina).



## Documentation and irregular entry

### Passports

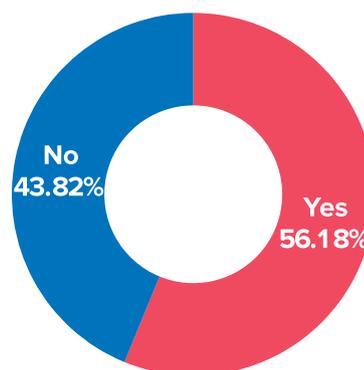
Respondents have described serious problems in obtaining and/or renewing their passports. Under Venezuelan law, passports can be extended by two years, provided the request to extend is made at least six months ahead of the expiration date. However, such a process can be lengthy and and can sometimes prove inaccessible. .

### Travel authorizations for children

Notarized travel authorizations are only issued in Venezuela if both parents are present. If one of the parents is abroad, is required to go to Venezuelan consulate to obtain a document that must then be mailed to Venezuela. Such procedures are lengthy and require an attorney. In addition, children travelling alone or with another person who is not their parent or legal guardian require a notarized authorization from both parents. Family separation is one of the most common consequences of displacement.

**56%** of the respondents said they have been separated from one or more members of the family with whom they were living in Venezuela. The reasons for the separation include family members left behind due to their physical or socio-economic conditions, family members looking for opportunities in several countries along the route, and, in some cases, separation due to protection incidents affecting family unity, like domestic and intimate partner violence, arbitrary detention and/or arrest.

Family size changed due to displacement

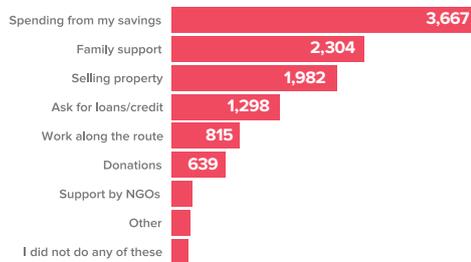


Brazil. Life in Pintolandia refugee camp

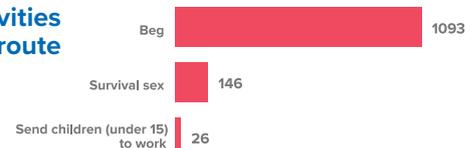
## Negative coping mechanisms

**Coping mechanisms related to displacement** include spending savings, requesting family support, selling property, asking for loans, and begging along the route. **14%** of those interviewed **said they had begged** to cover the expenses of their journey (1,093 persons) and **2% referred to resorting to survival sex** (146). As previously reported by several stakeholders, the risks connected with survival sex and exploitation are extremely high for the Venezuelan population. Contributing factors include: I) the precarious economic situation of families or single women prior to departure, II) the inability to cover the costs of the trip, III) the limited availability of formal employment, IV) the temporary nature of residence permits issued to Venezuelans and V) the stigma associated with Venezuelan women, girls and people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)<sup>13</sup>.

### Coping mechanisms on the route



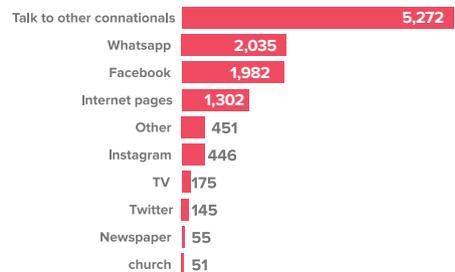
### Risky activities on the route



## Access to information

Regarding the type of information used to plan the trip, 5,272 persons reported that their main source of information was talking to fellow nationals along the route, followed by WhatsApp (2,035) and checking Facebook (1,982), Internet browsers and Instagram. These results are important for planning and conducting Communication with Communities (CwC) interventions, and referrals to the Regional Safe Spaces Network (RSSN)<sup>14</sup>, particularly in regard to alerting people about the risks, providing information on procedures and essential services for SGBV survivors, children at risk and victims of trafficking, as well as for countering misinformation and fraud.

### Information source used for the trip



# 7. PRIORITY NEEDS

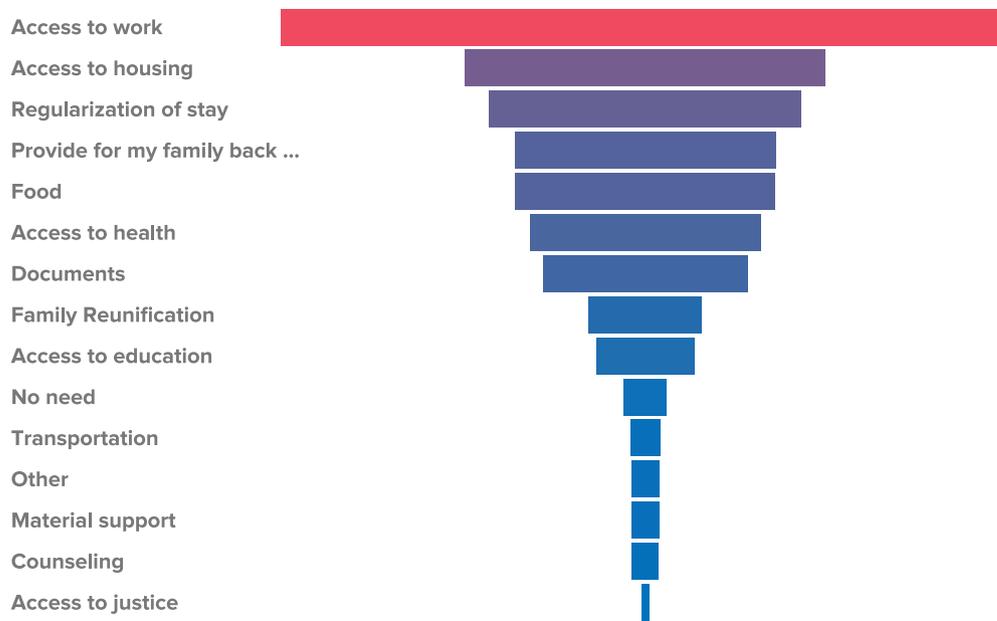
**Access to labor markets** was the top-priority need for respondents across the region. Respondents also reported widespread unemployment or work in the informal sectors and also said their skills and competencies were routinely overlooked.

**Access to housing** is the second priority need. Although most of those interviewed were able to find rented accommodation in the host countries, there are still substantial obstacles to finding decent housing,

and limited support available to vulnerable populations. Interviewees mentioned discrimination based on nationality as one of the major obstacles faced.

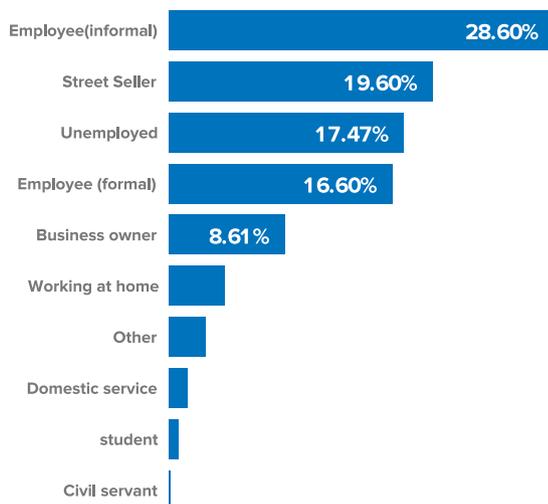
**Regularization of stay** is the third priority need. It is deeply interconnected with the others, as the current arrangements contribute to a high level of uncertainty, as well as exposing people to the risks associated with irregular entry or irregular stay, including exploitation and trafficking.

## Priority needs



## 8. EMPLOYMENT

### Current employment



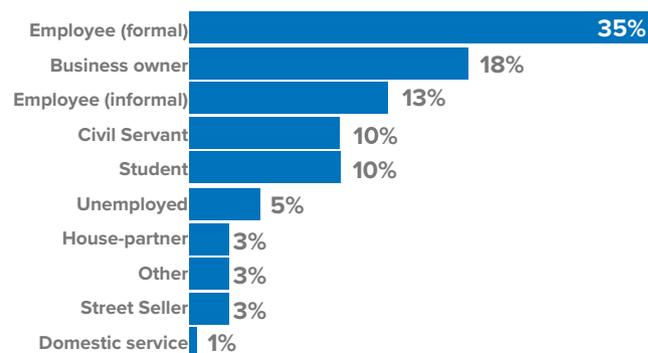
**48%** of those interviewed confirmed that they are employed informally – of these, **19%** are street vendors. In addition, **18%** were unemployed at the time of the interview. Altogether this makes **66%** of the persons interviewed, who are **either unemployed or in a precarious work situation**.

Reported risks related to **labor exploitation** (See section on *Protection Incidents*) are often connected to the type of documentation held by Venezuelans, the educational and professional profile of those interviewed and the number of months they have stayed in the host country.

Respondents were asked about their profession in country of origin, and **64%** of the sample used to be either **formal employees (35%), business owners (18%) or civil servants (11%) in Venezuela prior to departure**. Comparing the types jobs they typically get in host countries with the kinds of jobs they held in their country of origin, it is evident that displacement has a negative impact on skilled workers' access to the labor market.

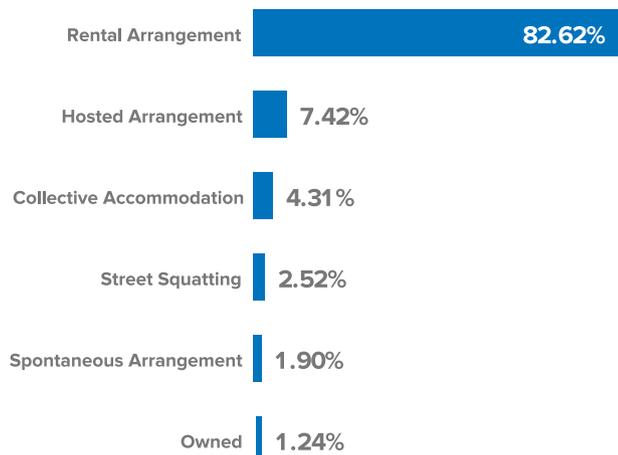
**Access to decent employment for Venezuelans has proven to be an area where stronger interventions are needed.** In line with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) “whole of society approach”, a multi-partner effort is required to identify opportunities, match the needs of the labor market with the capacities of asylum seekers and refugees and create opportunities and synergies.

### Employment in country of origin



## 9. HOUSING

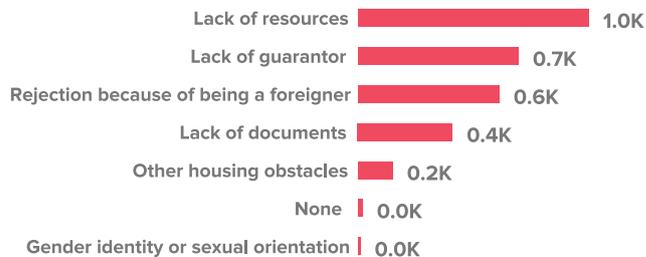
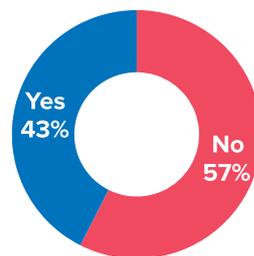
### Housing type



**82%** were in a **rental arrangement**, **8%** reported being hosted in a house or apartment and **4%** said they were staying at collective centers. **2%** had to resort to living on the streets and **2%** had to find spontaneous places to sleep when possible. **95%** of those in accommodation have regular access to **water and electricity**.

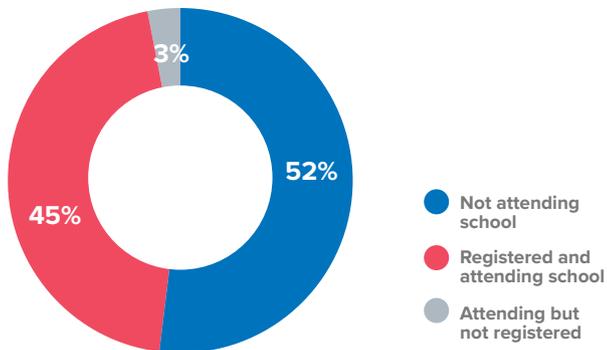
However, **43%** reported having faced obstacles during their search for accommodations, mostly due to lack of resources or guarantors, discrimination based on nationality, and documentation among others. In Peru, Venezuelans reported that landlords tend to prioritize families without children..

### Obstacles to finding a house



Brazil. Life in Pintolandia refugee camp

## 10. EDUCATION



**52%** of the children represented in the sample were not in school at the time of the interview. Contributing factors include the fact that they'd only recently arrived in their host country or were still in transit, that they were missing documents necessary to enroll, the lack of space in public schools or an inability to pay school fees. Strengthening national systems to respond to the education needs of these children is encouraged, including on certification. Support for alternative education models for children on the move, such as those piloted by humanitarian organizations in North and Central America, for instance, is also recommended.

In Ecuador, where monitoring was conducted together with the Ministry of Socio-economic Inclusion, it was observed that admission to or inclusion in the education system increases over time, going from 23% of children registered during the first three months they were in the country, to 65% after a year.

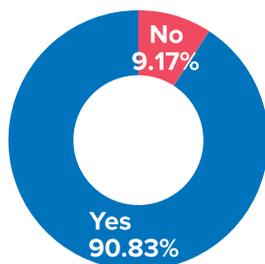
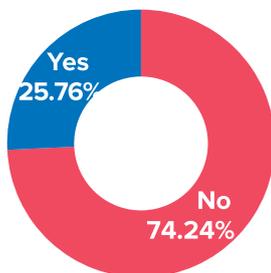
The reasons why access to education in Ecuador remains a challenge are diverse and reflect both social and economic difficulties faced by Venezuelan citizens. Those difficulties include scarce resources, missing documentation as well as an incomplete understanding of enrollment procedures. The State requires additional support to meet the challenge that the increasing arrival of children in school age poses, and to facilitate the enrolment of children arriving during the schoolyear, and to enable what is often limited space to accommodate children in schools. UNHCR is working in coordination with other members of the Platform to strengthen the Ministry of Education's planning and response strategy to address the education needs of Venezuelan children.



*Brazil. São Paulo empowers refugees with shelter, school and work*

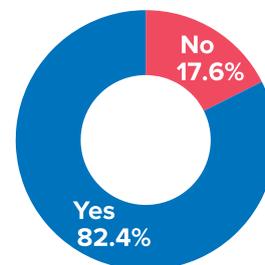
# 11. HEALTH

Had a health issue since arriving to country



Received medical attention

Have you gone to a health facility



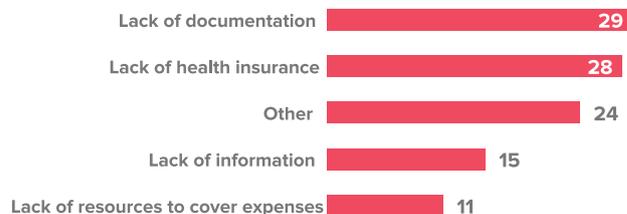
**26%** of the persons interviewed said they had some health-related issue during their stay. Out of those, **82% went to a health facility**, and **91% received some sort of medical attention**.

However, in some cases, Venezuelans had to pay in order to receive treatment or they resorted to other members of their community.

Some of the obstacles to accessing medical attention mentioned by respondents include lack of health insurance, missing documentation, and lack of information, among others.

Given the very limited access to medical services in Venezuela, there are groups that are at heightened risk and need urgent treatment after their departure (i.e. HIV, chronic renal conditions, etc.). In this exercise, 1,838 persons with critical or chronic medical condition were identified, 1,104 pregnant or lactating women and 581 persons with disability. The services available in countries of transit and asylum are also often insufficient and unable to cover all those needs.

## Obstacles accessing medical attention

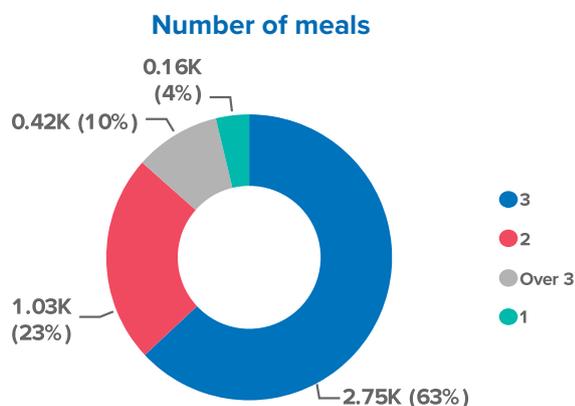


## 12. FOOD SECURITY

The respondents were asked about their average food daily intake. **63%** said they had an average of **3 meals a day**, **23%** two meals a day, and **4%** just one meal a day.

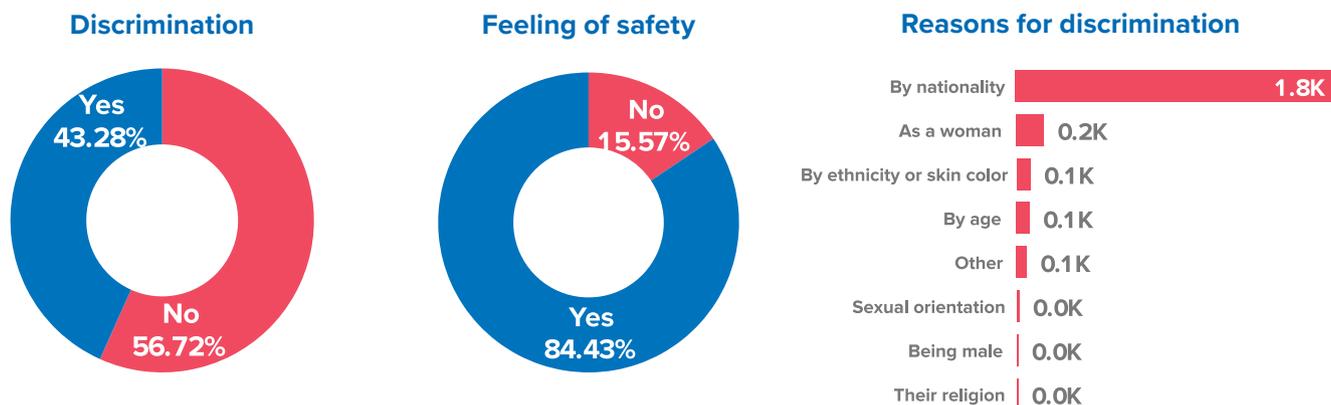
In 1,274 cases, it was reported that the adults of the family had decided to reduce their food intake and prioritize their children and 1,658 reported having borrowed money to purchase food and basic goods.

Most of the respondents commented that their access to food changed dramatically after their departure from Venezuela. The average food daily intake and the ability to cover basic needs substantially improves over time, and after displacement.



Colombia. Venezuelans risk life and limb to seek help

# 13. PERCEPTION OF SAFETY AND DISCRIMINATION



**85%** of the respondents said they felt safe where they live and **80%** evaluated that their relationship with local community as very good or good. However, **43%** of the sample said they had felt discriminated against in country of transit or asylum, mostly due to their nationality, and in some cases for being a woman.

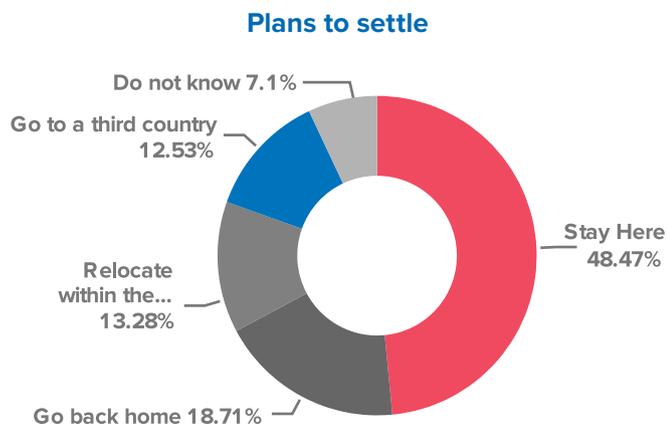
It was observed that in most cases, people’s answers referred to the neighborhood where respondents lived, and/or their work environment and relationship with their workmates. Their answers to questions about discrimination often grew out of specific negative experiences and/or a general atmosphere, in some cases fueled by media and social media reactions.

UNHCR and partners have observed that Venezuelan women often face multiple discriminations, often with sexual connotations, which automatically associates them with negative coping mechanisms such as survival sex.

# 14. INTENTIONS

**48%** of the respondents said they would like to stay in the place where they were interviewed, **19%** wanted to return to Venezuela, **13%** were planning to move on or return to another country and **13%** wanted to relocate within the host country.

Of the 19% who expressed a desire to return home, it should be noted that during the interviews, many expressed hoped that the situation in Venezuela would improve substantially after February, 2019, allowing them to return. In addition, some of the interviewees are involved in circular movements, especially to and from Colombia, and return to Venezuela to visit family members who they left behind.

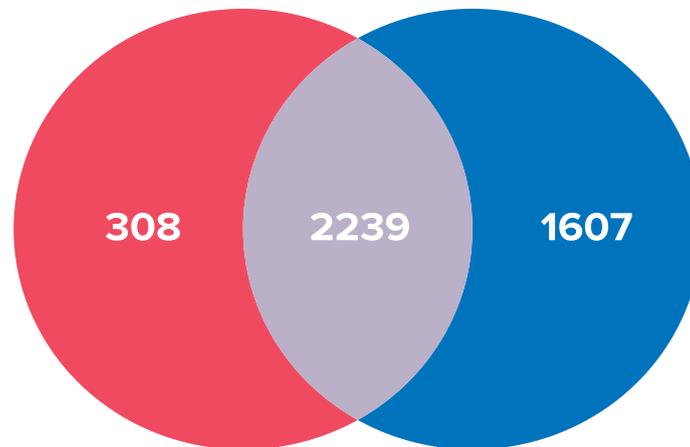


*Brazil. São Paulo empowers refugees with shelter, school and work*

# 15. POTENTIAL RISKS UPON RETURN

When asked about the risks they could face if they returned to Venezuela, respondents most often cited a combination of potential risks, including violent incidents they feared could affect them personally, their families, or their communities. They also referred to serious obstacles to achieving a minimum standard of living, including access to health, food and labor. The graphic shows the links between those risks, as expressed by the interviewees themselves. It shows that deterioration of the situation in Venezuela is multi-faceted and affects most aspects of the lives of individuals and communities, including safety.

Risks upon return



Legend ● Violence related risks 3,000 58% ● Access to rights risks 4,000 88%

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