

Venezuela Situation: Brazil, Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago

19 May 2017

Between 2011 and 2016, more than 45,000 Venezuelans applied for asylum worldwide; there were over 27,000 asylum seekers in 2016.

While there is no reliable data, returns of Colombian nationals from Venezuela have increased in the last few months.

Considering the evolving situation in Venezuela, it is projected that persons will continue to leave the country.

Mission to Venezuela Situation Countries

In view of an increasing number of arrivals of Venezuelan citizens, UNHCR fielded a mission to Colombia (4-11 May), Trinidad and Tobago (11-14 May) and Brazil (15-19 May). The mission reviewed the overall operational capacity of UNHCR and its partners to support governments at the various levels to effectively respond to increased arrivals. The mission considered recommendations for further action, including on:

(a) Protection, especially on specific thematic areas such as SGBV, AGD, AAP, Communicating with Communities, PSEA, registration, documentation, child protection, **(b)** Core sectors such as WASH, shelter, coordination, CRIs, **(c)** Supply, procurement, logistics, HR and administrative requirements, **(d)** Cash-based interventions (CBI), **(e)** Security, programme criticality and business continuity, **(f)** Partnerships, **(g)** Capacity development, **(h)** Communications and **(i)** Other technical areas relevant to the context.

The mission was comprised of staff from the Emergency Section and the Americas Bureau, with separate specialist missions on shelter and CBI.

Protection Issues

Colombia:

- There is a lack of access to documentation, basic services and livelihood opportunities. There is a growing backlog in undetermined asylum claims of Venezuelan nationals.
- Due to the evolving crisis in Venezuela, the Colombian authorities are issuing a Border Mobility Card, a document, which is meant to help manage the number of people entering the country from border states in Venezuela. Persons entitled to apply for the card do so on the *Migración Colombia* website and attach identity and other documents.

- According to Colombian immigration authorities, nearly 55,000 people cross the border between Venezuela and Colombia daily. Since 1 May, more than 150,000 Venezuelans have applied for the Border Mobility Card.

Brazil:

- UNHCR is advocating for the simplification of asylum procedures and an exemption of a residence permit fee for Venezuelans (USD 100 per person). Profiling exercises have shown an increase in asylum applications based on political opinion or membership of a particular social group.

Trinidad and Tobago:

- **Trinidad and Tobago** is confronted with a situation of over 40,000 Venezuelans currently present in the country. The majority of those registered (140 persons) have Convention-related claims and already constitute the second country of origin of persons in need of international protection.

Key Figures

Trinidad and Tobago is confronted with a large influx (over 40,000 arrivals).

- According to estimates from the State Government of Roraima, which is on the border with Venezuela, there are currently between 20,000 and 30,000 Venezuelans in **Brazil**. Since April 2017, the Federal Police in Boa Vista, Roraima State has registered an average of 150 claims per day.
- In **Colombia**, the immigration authority reports that 100,000 Venezuelans arrived in the past six months. Public sources estimate the number of Venezuelans in Colombia to be between 1 and 1.2 million, including those who have lived in the country for many years and are not necessarily in need of international protection.

Operational Context

- Despite the situation in Venezuela, it is difficult to predict whether there will be massive cross-border movements of persons. Nonetheless, the “drip-drop” arrival of Venezuelans has now become a steady flow; current trends suggest that out-flows are unlikely to subside in the near term.
- It is important to note that statistics for the number of Venezuelan arrivals are estimates in the three countries. In Colombia, the authorities speak about “a crisis of figures” when referring to the lack data on Venezuelan arrivals.
- There are no consistent efforts to register the number of Venezuelan nationals either entering or remaining in the three countries. Due to application obstacles, including long waiting periods and fees, many Venezuelans opt to remain in an ‘irregular’ situation instead of using asylum or migratory procedures to regularize their stay. The borders are also long and porous.
- All three countries have initiated response plans. The Colombian and Brazilian Ministries of Foreign Affairs have met to compare plans and discuss harmonized approaches. UNHCR is proposing practical alternatives to camps, especially along border municipalities.
- International protection and physical security considerations, including lack of documentation, SGBV, exploitation and abuse, lack of access to basic rights and services are major challenges in all

border/receiving areas in the three countries. In certain areas, armed groups and illicit trade interests exploit both newly arrived persons of concern and the local population.

- The situation is also displacing indigenous groups that live along the Venezuela/Brazil and Venezuela/Colombia borders. Particular attention to the rights of these communities as well as a differentiated and targeted protection and humanitarian response is required.
- All three countries requested UNHCR's technical and resource mobilization support if and when required. UNHCR has indicated to the concerned States that it stands ready to provide such support, with a focus on geographical and sectoral priorities related to shelter, CBI and targeted assistance for persons with specific needs.
- Partnerships need to be either expanded or new ones created to address the emerging needs of persons of concern.
- Although migration from Venezuela started several years ago, the reasons for leaving the country have become more varied recently. The mission observed an increase in the number of persons with international protection needs in the three countries. Persons with specific needs are particularly vulnerable, especially in border areas, where illegal activities present practically the only means of subsistence.
- While UNHCR technical support was welcomed by the governments, their planned responses remain centered on assistance and in general lack a protection focus.
- In each country, UN agencies are ready to support government responses.
- Increased knowledge of protection-related refugee emergency issues was requested in the three countries by governments and other key stakeholders.

Operational issues:

- In **Brazil**, UNHCR is fully engaged with the authorities at the national, state and municipal levels, civil society organizations, academia, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the National Public Defender's Office. The meetings held at the Casa Civil, together with assessment missions to Roraima (Boa Vista and Pacaraima) and Amazonas (Manaus), demonstrate interest in discussing a comprehensive response to the situation of Venezuelans.
- In **Colombia**, UNHCR is strengthening its presence in border areas, including with the opening of a small, temporary presence in Riohacha on the Atlantic Coast. The operation will assist the authorities step up registration and profiling efforts, reinforce reception capacity and provide basic humanitarian assistance to asylum seekers facing specific critical needs.
- In **Trinidad and Tobago**, UNHCR will submit a proposal that includes capacity development for immigration authorities and promote systematic identification of persons in need of international protection.

Achievements and Impact - Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps



PROTECTION

BRAZIL

Achievements and Impact

- Adoption of Resolution 126 (National Commission for Migration) granting temporary residence to Venezuelans. However, prohibitive fees prevent more Venezuelan nationals from opting for this migratory alternative.
- The Federal Government disbursed additional funds to the States of Roraima and Amazonas for health and social assistance for Venezuelan nationals.
- With UNHCR support, the Federal Police deployed additional staff to Roraima State to assist with the registration of asylum claims in Boa Vista.
- The Federal Government established a call centre service in Spanish to receive cases of Venezuelans who want to report human rights violations in Brazil.
- UNHCR, through a national partner, is providing funds to cover some activities carried out by civil society organizations in Boa Vista, Pacaraima and Manaus.
- In Manaus, a group of Warao indigenous persons from Venezuela, who are staying at the bus station, are being accommodated in a shelter (former school) with capacity for 300 people for approximately 12 months. The State of Amazonas will provide shelter and security as well as rental costs and the Municipality of Manaus will provide food, maintenance and staff.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Child protection issues within the Warao indigenous community. Most children lack documentation and are involved in generating income or asking for hand-outs on the street. Recently, two Warao children died in Manaus from pneumonia and chicken pox respectively.
- Lack of sufficient housing/shelter. A shelter mission provided technical expertise to plan shelter to meet current demand and potential increases in arrivals.
- In Boa Vista, a gymnasium with a capacity for 200 persons, is sheltering 400 Warao indigenous persons. However, living conditions remain precarious in terms of accommodation, health and WASH facilities in particular. No major outbreaks of infectious diseases have been registered so far.
- In Pacaraima and Manaus, the Warao are living in the open, on the street and close to bus stations without adequate shelter.
- The Federal Government is planning to establish a settlement with temporary shelters in Pacaraima, provided by the Civil Defense, for the Warao indigenous community.
- There are non-indigenous women who have no alternative but to engage in survival sex.
- Non-indigenous Venezuelan asylum seekers appear to be invisible to the authorities.
- Pastoral Care of Migrants has assisted 481 individuals in 2016 and 140 so far in 2017.

COLOMBIA

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR is preparing to step up its capacity to provide basic humanitarian assistance, including through multi-purpose cash grants, to Venezuelan asylum seekers with critical specific needs.
- UNHCR has carried out interviews of Venezuelan arrivals to establish protection needs.
- UNHCR supports two immigration centres on the border with Venezuela. Preparations are underway to increase the reception capacity of one of the centres, as well as explore the possibility of opening a third.
- UNHCR continues to carry out regular training of government officials and partners on international refugee law to enhance the capacity of the authorities and civil society on asylum issues.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Registration and profiling.
- Support to asylum seekers, while their claims are being adjudicated.
- Basic household needs and livelihood opportunities.
- Addressing incidents of xenophobia affecting Venezuelans through public information campaigns.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Achievements and Impact

- Assisting the Government of Trinidad & Tobago to progressively assume registration, issuance of documentation and refugee status determination.
- Follow-up on Regional Refugee Situation Planning Workshop facilitated by UNHCR in December 2016.
- Strategic engagement with national and regional actors such as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).
- Strategic engagement with the UN system.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Training of authorities, including the Army, the Coast Guard, Immigration, Customs and the Police, but also other institutions and civil society on international refugee law, including on access to territory and *non-refoulement* amongst others.
- The Government will require additional capacity at official ports of entry, including with the upgrading of premises and to increase staff at sea ports.
- Technical capacity to be provided to Government authorities responsible for taking the lead on a potential response.
- Access to rights and justice for persons of concern to UNHCR: Advocacy for refugee rights and alternative protection mechanisms, including the involvement of the Children's Authority.
- Collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and ILO to be further explored and strengthened.
- Addressing incidents of xenophobia affecting Venezuelans through public information campaigns.

Working in partnership

■ **Colombia:**

- UNHCR, together with IOM, leads the inter-agency planning to support the authorities in a response. Given strong humanitarian coordination on IDP issues in Colombia and an estimate that up to 70% of people arriving from Venezuela are Colombian nationals, the inter-agency humanitarian response will be managed within the Humanitarian Country Team (UNCT), in close coordination with the Government of Colombia.
- UNHCR undertakes advocacy efforts concerning the importance of continuing to ensure protection of Venezuelans. Effective access to protection requires the adoption of measures to facilitate documentation to remain in Colombia, access to basic services and livelihood options.

■ **Brazil:**

- While Ministries have developed sectorial plans of action, the Federal Government does not yet have a comprehensive response plan. The Casa Civil has asked UNHCR to assist it to consolidate sectoral component needs. The Casa Civil includes the Executive Office of the President and, *inter alia*, has functions related to coordination, integration, evaluation and monitoring of activities implemented by Federal Government organs and entities of public administration, as well as legal verification of Presidential acts and draft bills.

■ **Trinidad and Tobago:**

- UNHCR sent a letter to the authorities offering to provide technical support with planning and requesting the Government to indicate the type of assistance required from UNHCR and its partners.

Financial Information

- Should additional arrivals increase dramatically, requiring the significant scaling up of country responses, dedicated donor support will be necessary.

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