

# Venezuela Situation

September 2017

The number of **Venezuelans seeking asylum** has **increased yearly** since 2014. Between 2014 and 2017, around **99,000 asylum claims** were lodged, half of which in 2017 alone (as of September).

The **primary receiving countries** of Venezuelan asylum seekers in the region between 2014 and 2017 have been: USA: 46,000, Brazil: 16,500, Peru: 9,500; Costa Rica: 3,300 and Panama: 3,000.

Considering the evolving situation in Venezuela, it is projected that **people will continue to leave** the country over the coming months. **UNHCR** is **stepping up** its response accordingly.

## POPULATION OF CONCERN

- It is estimated that between **20,000 to 30,000 Venezuelans** currently live in **Brazil**. Over **11,800 asylum applications** have been lodged in 2017 and **932** temporary residence permits issued.
- In Colombia, it is believed that over **440,000 Venezuelans** are living in the country. Over **63,000** have requested a Special Stay Permit, which allows those who met certain criteria to work and reside lawfully in the country, and around **500** asylum cases have been registered since 2014.
- Over **1,500 Venezuelans** have applied for asylum in **Ecuador**. More than **62,000** are estimated to live in the country, of whom some **40%** have obtained temporary residence permits.
- At least **60,000** Venezuelans are estimated to be dispersed across several countries in the Southern Caribbean, including (but not limited to) Aruba, Curacao and Trinidad and Tobago. Some **370** have registered as asylum-seekers since 2014; followed by Curacao with **70** and Aruba, with around a dozen seeking asylum.

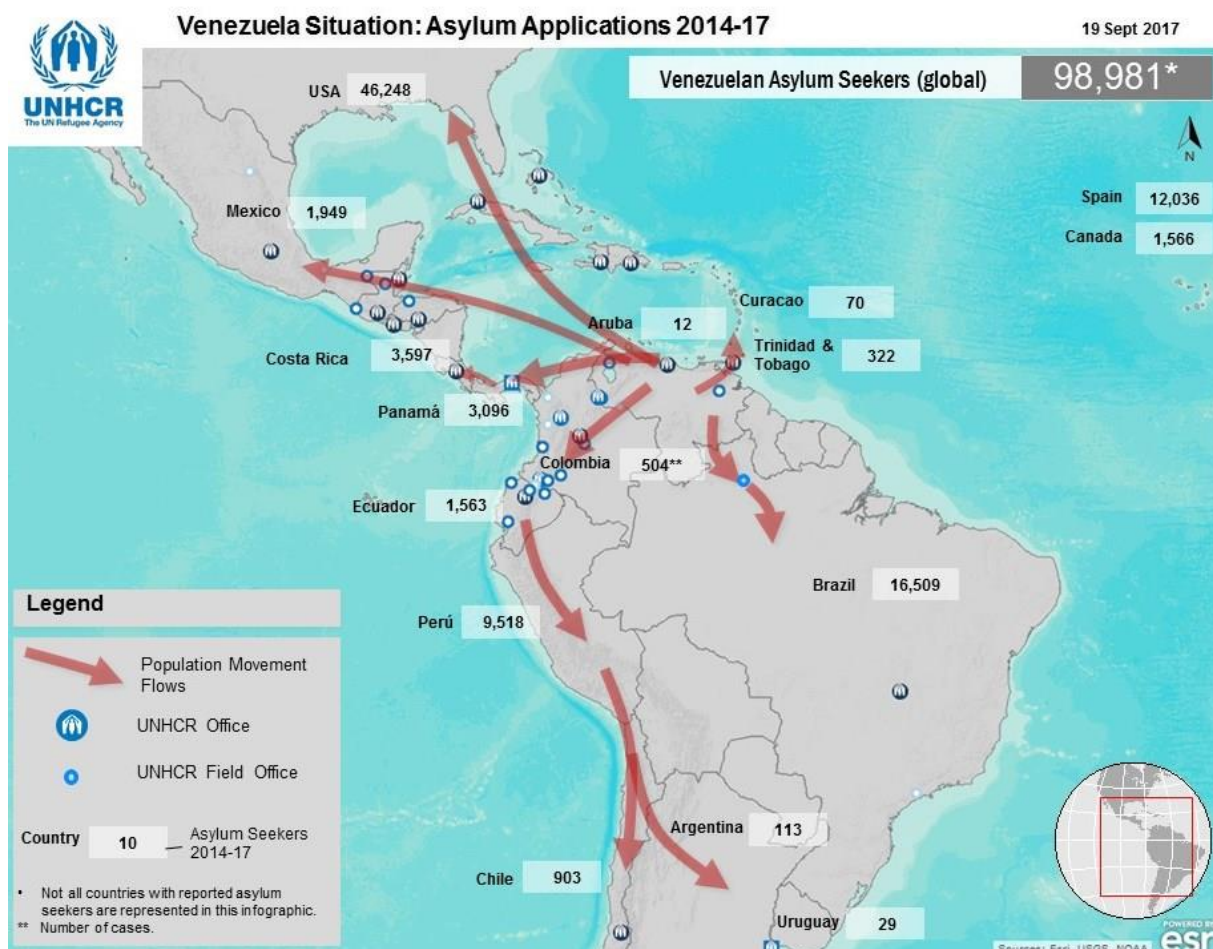


Venezuelans rest outside the shelter in the Boa Vista border city in Roraima state, Brazil. The indigenous Warao prefer sleeping in hammocks, so some have set up their spaces outside the shelter's walls. UNHCR has been working with authorities and partners to establish better living conditions, including access to clean water and medical services. ©UNHCR

## CONTEXT INFORMATION

After four months of political tensions and civil unrest, demonstrations in Venezuela ceased following the installation of the National Constituent Assembly (ANC). Both the Government and the opposition parties (not acting as a coalition) are preparing for regional elections on 15 October. International mediators offered to provide support to negotiations between the Venezuelan Government and opposition parties. While the Government agreed to join these efforts, the opposition coalition (known as MUD) decided against it, stating that the Government should comply with specific minimum requirements before restarting the dialogue. Meanwhile, the political, social and economic situation in the country continues to deteriorate. Venezuelans continue to leave the country seeking protection and access to basic needs in neighboring countries.

UNHCR's monitoring activities, as well as interviews with Venezuelans arriving throughout the Americas, indicate that they are leaving the country for a variety of reasons. Venezuelans flee insecurity and violence in the areas where they reside, or specific threats against them by armed groups in the country. A number of persons interviewed reported having left due to fear of being targeted on account of their political opinions, real or perceived. Others are leaving due to a lack of food and medicine, loss of income, and lack of access to essential social services.



## Operational Context

### Brazil

- Venezuelans are entering Brazil through Roraima state, which has put pressure on local authorities to provide a response that meets their specific needs. An inter-ministerial task force under the leadership of the Presidency's Casa Civil, with UNHCR participation, visited the area to analyse the needs. As a result, the municipalities of Boa Vista and Pacaraima will issue a decree of "Social Emergency" to facilitate receiving federal funds. UNHCR has also been working with the Government to design a voluntary relocation program for Venezuelan nationals arriving in Roraima, as its absorption capacity is limited.
- As hundreds of indigenous Warao people are entering Brazil from Venezuela, UNHCR funded a qualitative analysis of the population to inform the operational response. The study revealed that the main challenges the Warao are facing include access to proper shelter, documentation and income-generating activities. Among the reasons they mentioned for leaving their country included governmental neglect towards indigenous people and lack of public services (mainly education and health).

### Colombia

- Between 1 and 23 September, the Unified Command Post<sup>1</sup> reported a net increase of 62,000 Venezuelans staying in the country, as well as a net increase of 78,000 in August. The pace of arrivals is placing increasing pressure on public services, particularly in areas that have historically faced challenges providing services to their own populations. In the same time period, 47,040 Colombians returned to Colombia from Venezuela, with a daily average of approximately 2,000 people a day. This is more than triple the daily average of returns in August, which stood at 650 people a day.
- Meanwhile, over 850,000 Venezuelans have applied for the Border Mobility Card, which allows Venezuelans to temporarily enter Colombia to access basic goods and services.

### Ecuador

- Approximately 700 Venezuelan nationals entered Ecuador on a daily basis through the Rumichaca International Bridge at the border with Colombia during the month of August.
- It is estimated that between 2016 and 2017 (31 August), some 236,000 Venezuelans entered Ecuador, of whom about three-quarters continued their journey South, leaving a net migration of some 62,000 people in the country.
- Venezuelans have access to residence permits such as the UNASUR visa contemplated in the February 2017 Human Mobility Law, a visa under a bilateral Ecuador-Venezuela agreement, and under professional and family reunification categories. About 40% of Venezuelans in Ecuador have been able to obtain such resident permits.
- In August 2017 the number of asylum claims from Venezuela peaked at 222 new applicants.

### Southern Caribbean

- A number of powerful hurricanes hit the Caribbean throughout September, resulting in humanitarian attention and resources being redirected to relief and recovery efforts.
- Venezuelans who lack valid visas and are not registered as asylum-seekers with UNHCR remain under threat of detention and deportation from several countries in the Southern Caribbean, where temporary protection measures have not been adopted for Venezuelans.
- The Foreign Affairs Minister of Guyana publically stated that Guyana was willing to assist Venezuelans fleeing the “crisis” in their country. He also noted, however, that Guyana had not received “an influx of any significant quantity” of Venezuelans to date, and that the country lacked any legislation governing refugee status, which could pose “some restrictions.”

## UNHCR Response

### Main Objectives

- With authorities and partners, provision of legal support and social assistance, where appropriate, to Venezuelan arrivals.
- Access to proper registration and documentation, to ensure both the safety of those arriving and their access to basic services and livelihoods.
- Effective and efficient asylum systems.
- In cooperation with governments in the region, strengthened response plans with a protection focus.
- Enhanced protection of children and other persons with specific needs.

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<sup>1</sup> The Colombian President activated the Unified Command Post –PMU- (July 2017) in Cucuta to oversee and provide a response to the impact of Venezuelans entering Colombia. The Post is composed by OCHA, representing the UN; local and national authorities who have relevant mandates to respond to the situation, most notably the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Risk Disaster Management Unit (UNGRD). The Colombian Red Cross and IOM are also present due to their role as implementers of the Government's programs.

- Greater use of alternative legal pathways that have a positive impact on the livelihoods of Venezuelans and their host communities.
- Implementation of solidarity campaigns with authorities, partners and host communities to combat discrimination and xenophobia.



### **Brazil**

- UNHCR has been closely monitoring the implementation of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in Roraima state, where since 1 August, Boa Vista's Child and Youth Court made 49 referrals to the local Public Defender's Office, which is taking measures to regularize the migratory status of these children and, where possible, establishing provisional custody.
- UNHCR signed a Project Partnership Agreement with Caritas to support Venezuelan nationals in Manaus (Amazonas state). The partnership focuses on: (a) supporting the indigenous Warao population to achieve self-reliance, through the development of income generating activities; and (b) to provide assistance to the non-indigenous population with regard to documentation procedures, subsistence allowance and referrals to specific services.
- UNHCR undertook a needs assessment exercise with Venezuelan women engaged in survival sex. The women's main concerns were employment, access to the formal labour market, and prevention of xenophobic and violent reactions from the local population. UNFPA and the Federal University of Roraima supported this activity.

### **Colombia**

- Towards the end of September, UNHCR supported a mission of ombudsmen of the Catatumbo area, in the border state of Norte de Santander, to Bogota, where they discussed the situation of violence and displacement in Catatumbo with national authorities, UN-Agencies and international partners. The ombudsmen reiterated their concern that some Venezuelans are facing dire conditions in the area and are being left with no other option than to work for criminal and armed groups involved in the drug trade, adding that in some cases young Venezuelan men are being recruited into these groups. Another grave concern is the increase of involvement of vulnerable Venezuelans, particularly women, in the sex trade. This is worrying both from a protection and a public health perspective, as many are forced to engage in especially risky behaviour.
- The Inter-Agency Border Group, co-led by UNHCR and IOM, is updating its response matrix for the Venezuelan influx. The matrix consolidates the proposals of over 20 UN-Agencies and civil society organizations to support the Government's response to Venezuelan arrivals, both with regard to current arrivals, as well as a possible mass influx. UNHCR's leadership in protection issues will continue to drive the inter-agency response.

### **Ecuador**

- UNHCR strengthened its monitoring of the Rumichaca Ecuadorian-Colombian border to observe access of Venezuelans to the territory. No legal or administrative barriers to entry and no cases of arbitrary rejection at the border have been registered.

### **Southern Caribbean**

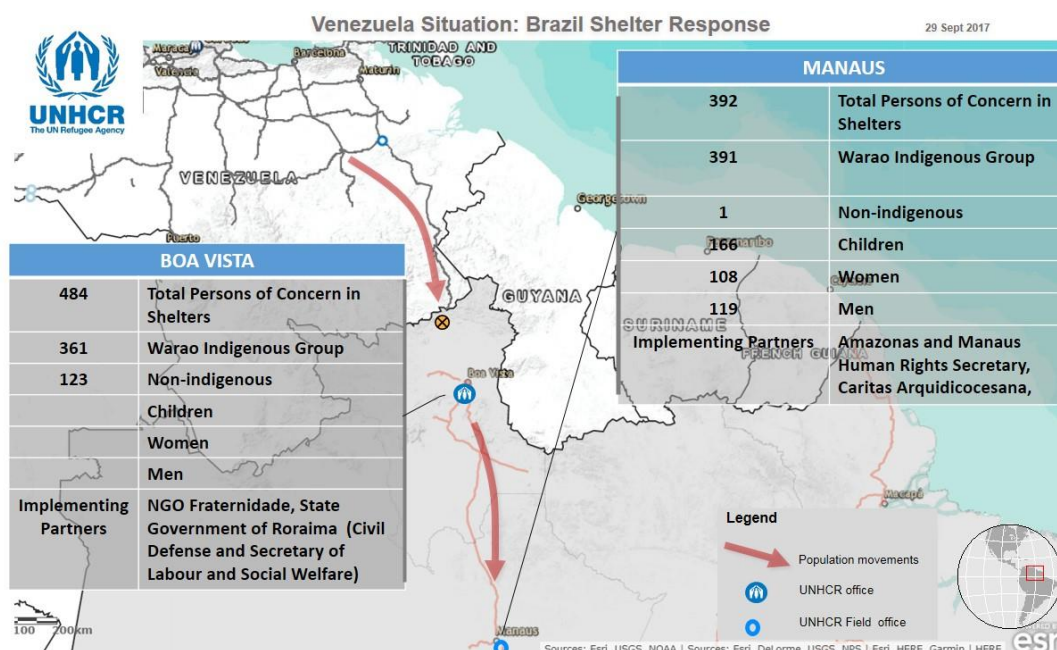
- In Trinidad and Tobago, UNHCR has been working with the Refugee Unit of the Immigration Division of the Ministry of National Security to ensure that Venezuelan asylum-seekers have access to

alternatives to detention, through Orders of Supervision allowing them to remain at liberty while their asylum applications are pending.

- UNHCR is also working with its partner, Living Water Community, to provide emergency assistance to newly-arrived Venezuelan families and children with urgent needs, including for housing and psycho-social support.
- UNHCR worked with the Ministry of Justice and Police in Suriname to prepare for a Dutch language training on international refugee law and asylum procedures that will be hosted in the country. UNHCR will facilitate the course for representatives of several governments in the Southern Caribbean that are hosting significant numbers of Venezuelans, including Aruba and Curacao.


**Shelter**
**Brazil**

- The shelter response in Brazil is being deployed in three areas: Pacaraima town, Boa Vista capital city of Roraima state, bordering Venezuela; and Manaus capital city of Amazonas State. The response locations correlate with current displacement trends, as persons of concern enter Brazil through Pacaraima (approx. pop. 10,000), continue around 200 Km south to Boa Vista (approx. pop. 300,000) and then approx. 750 Km south to Manaus city (approx. pop. 3,000,000).



\*The number of persons of concern in Manaus refer to those living in the shelter and the 5 houses rented by the Municipality.

**Pacaraima (Roraima state)**

- The Municipality of Pacaraima began construction of a temporary shelter, with UNHCR providing close technical support.

**Boa Vista (Roraima state)**

- The authorities managing the Boa Vista shelter accepted UNHCR's proposed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for entry control and registration. Under these SOPs, all beneficiaries of the shelter will have an ID-card to access the shelter and other services. UNHCR has begun the registration process as a step towards the provision of this documentation.

- UNHCR held a participatory assessment with Warao women in the Boa Vista shelter. The majority of women stated that they would not return to Venezuela and expressed their desire to secure access to sources of income.

#### Manaus (Amazonas state)

- UNHCR facilitated workshops on shelter management for local authorities and counterparts in Manaus (Amazonas State) and Boa Vista (Roraima State). It was an important opportunity to highlight good practices developed in Manaus and to show the importance of coordinated efforts between State and municipal authorities for a successful operation.

#### Colombia

- UNHCR, the Local Coordination Team, the WASH Cluster and the Migrant and Refugee Centre in Maicao are working to structure a response to meet the needs of 800 Venezuelans living on the streets of Maicao (Guajira), following a request from the Government. UNHCR will provide support for medication, hygiene kits, transport and food (in coordination with the World Food Program). It will also expand the capacity of the Migrant and Refugee Centre to host a larger number of Venezuelans by building a second wing, doubling the number of beds from 80 to 160.

### Main Challenges

- In spite of important progress and commendable efforts in the region, gaps remain in the legal and institutional frameworks that are needed to provide effective protection for persons of concern. There is still a great need to strengthen asylum systems and enhance alternative legal pathways.
- While data collection and profiling exercises are underway, more work is needed to better understand the needs of Venezuelans leaving their country so as to provide an adequate response.
- Despite positive developments, the shelter response across the region must be strengthened, particularly in border regions. While there have been some advancements, particularly in Brazil, people continue to live in precarious conditions.
- Response plans need to be strengthened, so that governments and other partners are able to respond to future arrivals.
- Livelihood alternatives for Venezuelan arrivals remain limited, increasing the risk of forced recruitment by armed groups or criminal gangs, as well as exploitation. In the case of the Warao, this is of particular concern, with many resorting to begging to survive.
- In countries of asylum, the capacity to provide adequate protection to children, unaccompanied and separated children and other people with specific needs requires reinforcement.
- While there has been progress in the provision of documentation, efforts must continue to guarantee proper registration, documentation towards regularization and inclusion.
- Collaboration with authorities and partners must also continue to ensure access to basic services for persons of concern.

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