



Mixed
Migration
Centre

Waning welcome: the growing challenges facing mixed migration flows from Venezuela

A field assessment study in Colombia and Peru

Summary report

MMC Research Report, September 2019



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Since 2017, the number of Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Brazil has increased a lot. Every day about 600 people cross the border into the northern Brazilian state of Roraima, the main gateway for migrants and asylum seekers into Brazil. They are fleeing the economic and social crisis in Venezuela and seeking better living conditions. MSF is providing care and support in four shelters in Roraima, both in the state's capital, Boa Vista and in the town of Pacaraima. Two of these shelters host exclusively Venezuelans from indigenous communities. MSF teams are also helping with technical support to improve sanitation and water supply in these facilities, providing mental healthcare services and running health promotion and community engagement activities for people living both inside and around the official shelters. Outside the shelters, MSF is also providing medical consultations to assist the most vulnerable people, including those sleeping on the street or in abandoned buildings, who are forced to live in unacceptable conditions.

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Introduction and summary of key findings

Venezuelans accounted for the second largest flow of new international displacements worldwide last year, outnumbered only by Syrians.¹ According to the latest figures, approximately 3.3 million Venezuelans are now in other Latin American countries, up from 700,000 in 2015, and overall 4,296,777 people have left Venezuela.² The United Nations (UN) expects the number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela in Latin America and the Caribbean to exceed five million by December 2019.

Most Venezuelan refugees and migrants head to Colombia and either settle there or continue their journey south towards Ecuador, Chile and Peru. A field assessment study that was conducted recently in Colombia and Peru is the basis for this summary report. This report describes the key migration drivers of Venezuelan mixed migration flows and details the main migration routes, and profiles of those leaving Venezuela. It then highlights the protection risks Venezuelans face in different parts of their journey, the living conditions they encounter at their destinations, and their aspirations for the future

A note on terminology

Mixed migration refers to cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have different legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often travelling irregularly and wholly or partially assisted by migrant smugglers.

MMC uses “refugees and migrants” when referring to all those in mixed migration flows, unless referring to a particular group of people with a defined status within these flows.

1 UNHCR (2019) *Global Trends – Forced Displacement in 2018*, p. 6.

2 See R4V, <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform>

Key findings

- Venezuelans feel compelled to leave their country mostly due to a widespread lack of access to basic services such as food and healthcare and the grim future they see for themselves and their families in Venezuela. Loss of purchasing power and the collapse of public services are commonly identified as the main source of this feeling of frustration and helplessness.
- Most Venezuelan refugees and migrants have very limited financial resources, and travel in precarious conditions, which puts them at risk of protection incidents during their journeys, including robberies, physical assault and sexual gender-based violence (SGBV).
- As the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru – as well as their humanitarian needs – grew exponentially since 2017/2018, perceptions of and attitudes towards Venezuelans in transit and destination countries have hardened. Increasing racism and xenophobia have triggered discrimination, hostility, and, in some occasions, physical violence.
- After initially adopting an open-door policy towards refugees and migrants, in something of a domino effect, countries in South America began successively to introduce stricter immigration measures, establishing requirements that are often impossible to meet for most Venezuelans. As a result, more Venezuelans resorted to either applying for asylum or entering irregularly.
- One of the consequences of closing borders has been an increase in the demand for and supply of migrant smuggling services. Smuggling dynamics are, in general, not as structured as in some other regions of the world, where highly organized and sophisticated transnational networks organize all aspects of irregular movement across countries. In Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, smuggling services mostly focus on facilitating irregular border crossings. Private companies presenting themselves as travel agencies are also involved in facilitating movement out of Venezuela and across the region, providing services that often seem to constitute migrant smuggling rather than legitimate travel services.
- More restrictive immigration policies limit access to regular immigration status for Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Irregular immigration status obstructs access to many kinds of services and exposes Venezuelans to an increased risk of exploitation.
- There is currently no sign that mixed migration out of Venezuela will stop or even decrease soon. This implies a need for long-term planning by the countries of destination of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, with a focus on local integration.

Methodology

The field assessment study was conducted in May-July 2019 by an external consultant. It consisted of desk research and field visits to Colombia (Cúcuta, Riohacha, Maicao, Barranquilla, and Bogotá) and Peru (Tumbes and Lima) to meet relevant international and national actors involved in mixed migration from Venezuela, as well as people on the move themselves. In total, interviews were conducted with 33 key informants from 27 organizations and public institutions, and 38 refugees and migrants from Venezuela (20 individual interviews and one focus group discussion with 18 participants).³

The assessment employed qualitative research methods and is based on a limited number of interviews, and focused only on Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru as countries of transit and destination. Therefore, findings are meant to provide indicative trends that should not be generalized to the entire population of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Drivers of Venezuelan migration

When asked why they left their country, most Venezuelans interviewed for this study referred to “the situation” or “the crisis” at home. Many said they felt compelled to leave their country due to a widespread lack of access to basic services, such as food and healthcare, and the grim future they see for themselves and their families in Venezuela.

Since 2013, Venezuela’s Gross domestic product (GDP) has continuously contracted. Coupled with hyperinflation, this has caused citizens’ purchasing power to drastically drop: while in 2017 some 89% of respondents in a survey said they earned too little to afford food, in 2018 more than 94% of the population was living in poverty and more than 60% living in extreme poverty.⁴

Many of the refugees and migrants interviewed described how food was either unavailable or unaffordable in Venezuela. One woman explained she decided to leave the country with her children after several people in her village died as a consequence of severe malnutrition. According to the woman, even farmers struggle to get adequate access to food in Venezuela because other people, out of hunger, steal their crops before they are ripe.

For respondents who had health concerns – or their family members had – the decision to leave Venezuela was often directly linked to the precarious hygiene and infrastructure conditions in Venezuelan hospitals, where even the most basic things are unavailable. The country’s healthcare infrastructure has deteriorated due to a lack of medicines and equipment, as well as a dearth of health professionals, many of who have left the country.⁵ This has had a severe impact on the health of Venezuelans, including an increase in maternal and child mortality.⁶ Human Rights Watch reported in November 2018 that “Venezuela is now routinely experiencing outbreaks of diseases that are preventable through vaccination and had been previously been eliminated in the country,” including measles.⁷

Some of the respondents also cited general insecurity as one of the reasons that led them to leave Venezuela. A Venezuelan woman interviewed in Colombia recounted: “The security situation was terrible, people would steal to then sell the stolen goods and buy food. They would do it out of necessity. Crime was out of control; people were desperate. You would walk on the street and people would even try to steal your shoes.”

3 32 Venezuelan people on the move were interviewed in Colombia and six in Peru. As for key informants, 23 were interviewed in Colombia and 10 in Peru.

4 United Nations (2019) Venezuela: Panorama de las Necesidades Humanitarias Prioritarias – Borrador para uso interno, pp. 7-8 and 10.

5 United Nations (2019) Venezuela: Panorama de las Necesidades Humanitarias Prioritarias – Borrador para uso interno, p. 12.

6 Human Rights Watch (2019) [Venezuela’s Humanitarian Emergency](#)

7 Human Rights Watch (2018) [The Exiles - A Trip to the Border Highlights Venezuela’s Devastating Humanitarian Crisis](#)

Gallup's Law and Order Index designated Venezuela – which had the highest homicide rate in Latin America in 2018⁸ – as one of the least secure countries in the world in the last two years, ranking slightly worse than Afghanistan based on its citizens' sense of personal security and their personal experience with crime and law enforcement.⁹ Last year, 42% of Venezuelans reported having had property or money stolen.¹⁰

Another key driver of migration is the tense political situation in Venezuela. Demonstrations against issues such as rising food prices and shortcomings in the education system have proliferated since 2017 and have often resulted in violent confrontation with state authorities, and there has been an increase in human rights violations against political opponents.¹¹ A report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) highlights how “the Government and government-controlled institutions enforced laws and policies that have accelerated the erosion of the rule of law and the dismantlement of democratic institutions” and have adopted measures “aimed at neutralizing, repressing and criminalizing political opponents and people critical of the Government.”¹²

Reliable statistics are difficult to obtain, but according to the OHCHR report “persecution on political grounds” is forcing many Venezuelans to flee and seek asylum. According to informants interviewed for this study, people fearing political persecution are either activists, public sector workers who expressed disagreement with government policies and former military officers who deserted because they do not support the current government.

Venezuelans' main migration routes

Virtually every country in Latin America and the Caribbean is witnessing the arrival of Venezuelan people. Approximately eight out of every ten Venezuelan refugees and migrants stayed in Latin America and the Caribbean, while the rest settled mostly in North America and Southern Europe. Colombia and Peru are the largest recipients of Venezuelans in the region, followed by Chile and Ecuador.

8 Dalby, C. & Carranza, C. (2019) [2018 Homicide Round-Up](#) InSight Crime.

9 Gallup [2018 Global Law and Order](#) and [2017 Global Law and Order](#); Ray, J. (2018) [Peace, Security Still Out of Reach for Many Worldwide](#) Gallup.

10 Gallup [2018 Global Law and Order](#), p. 3.

11 Human Rights Watch (2019) [World Report 2018: Venezuela](#); Amnesty International (2019) [Venezuela: Hunger, punishment and fear, the formula for repression used by authorities under Nicolás Maduro](#).

12 OHCHR (2019) [Human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela](#).

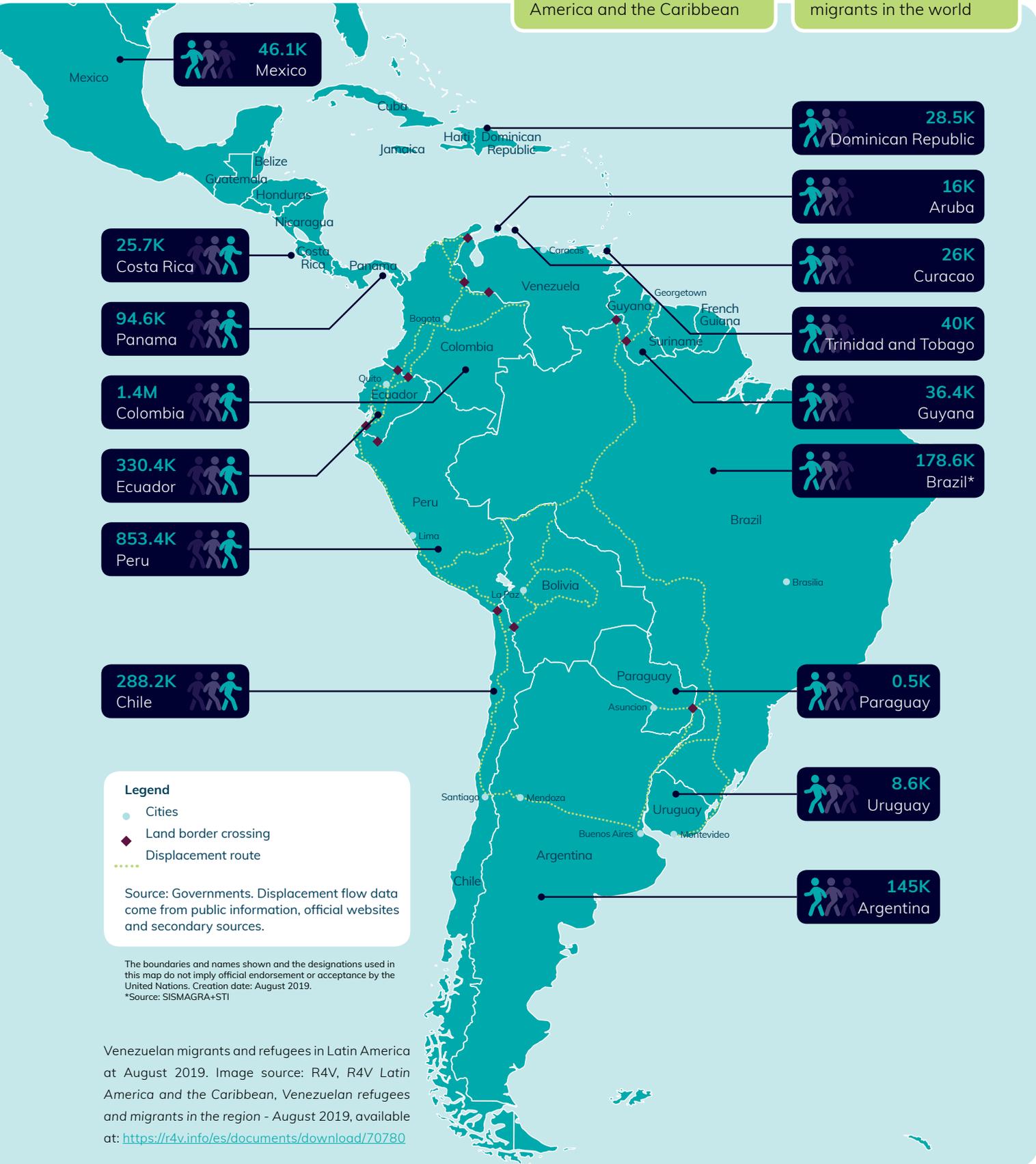
Mixed migration flows out of Venezuela

Latin America and the Caribbean

Venezuelan refugees & migrants in the region

3.5M
Approx. Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean

4.3M
Total approx. Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the world



Legend

- Cities
- Land border crossing
- Displacement route

Source: Governments. Displacement flow data come from public information, official websites and secondary sources.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Creation date: August 2019.
*Source: SISMAGRA+STI

Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Latin America at August 2019. Image source: R4V, R4V Latin America and the Caribbean, Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region - August 2019, available at: <https://r4v.info/es/documents/download/70780>

Most Venezuelan refugees and migrants enter Colombian territory through one of two locations: the area near the town of Maicao, in the La Guajira department, or the city of Cúcuta, in the Santander North department.

The majority of Venezuelans stay in Colombia. Some arrive with the idea of settling but cannot find protection and stability, so they decide to move onwards. Others enter Colombia already knowing that they will only be in transit, as they already have plans to reach another destination. Onward movement of Venezuelans mainly happens because relatives or friends are already living in another country and are waiting for them, or because they heard from other refugees and migrants that the situation there is better.

According to the informants interviewed in Colombia, the main destination for onward movement mentioned by Venezuelans is Peru, followed by Ecuador. After Colombia, Peru is the country that is hosting the largest number of Venezuelans.¹³ As of August 2019, UN data reported that the number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants who settled in Peru had risen to more than 800,000 and this is expected to exceed one million by the end of 2019.¹⁴ Ecuador has been mostly a transit country for people moving south, towards Peru and Chile, rather than a final destination. As of the beginning of May 2019, the number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants who had entered Ecuador had reached 1.3 million, of whom only 250,000 remained in the country.¹⁵

Profiles of Venezuelan refugees and migrants

According to the primary data collected during this assessment, the people who left Venezuela come from all over the country and all social statuses. Key informants, both in Colombia and Peru, were unanimous in identifying three phases in movements out of Venezuela:

1. First phase: The first to start leaving Venezuela, already as of 2005-2006 were business-people and professionals – people with a high education level, strong professional qualifications and ample financial resources. They started worrying about the looming political and economic situation in the country, the potential negative impact on their businesses and careers, and decided to leave the country before things worsened. Some had already secured a job in the country of destination before their arrival.

2. Second phase: Starting around 2016/2017, the middle class started leaving Venezuela. Mostly people with technical degrees and young people with a university education but no professional experience, they left the country once the economic crisis started affecting them, in order to look for better employment opportunities abroad. Most of them still managed to migrate regularly, but obtaining a job in their professional field started to become more and more difficult. Many ended up accepting formal but unskilled jobs, for instance as waiters and waitresses in restaurants and bars. This phase also included several political opponents and human rights activists who, persecuted by the Venezuelan government, fled the country and applied for asylum elsewhere.

3. Third phase: Since the Venezuelan economy completely collapsed between 2017 and 2018, most people leaving Venezuela belong to the lower economic classes. Most have achieved a low level of education, and have few professional skills and no financial resources. The numbers leaving the country have increased exponentially in this phase.

The key informants reported an important change that occurred since the second half of 2018; increased prevalence of families (often single-headed households, consisting of a mother and several young children) leaving Venezuela, compared to before when flows consisted primarily of adult men travelling alone or of adult couples. One of the reasons behind this change is that many of those who are leaving Venezuela now are travelling to reunite with a relative who had already migrated in previous years; mainly women who are on the move with their children to join their partner, the children's father. In other cases, grandparents and uncles or aunts are traveling with their nieces and nephews to join the children's parents.

Key informants also noted that in the third phase there has been a much greater number of Venezuelans refugees and migrants with acute and chronic medical conditions, and, to a lesser extent, elderly people. Pregnant women have been leaving the country because they fear giving birth in unsanitary conditions and in facilities where childbirth complications may prove fatal. One humanitarian worker in Columbia described these arrivals as “people who did not plan or did not want to leave the country, but in the end saw no other option”.

13 R4V (2018) [Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](#), p. 67.

14 R4V (2019) [R4V América Latina y el Caribe, refugiados y migrantes venezolanos en la región - Agosto 2019](#) R4V, RRM RP, p. 66.

15 El Comercio (2019) [Ecuador extiende al 31 de mayo de 2019 emergencia por flujo migratorio de venezolanos](#).

Organization of migration journeys and smuggling

The Venezuelan mixed migration flow has been characterized to a large extent by self-organized movement. With borders in the region relatively easy to cross, Venezuelan nationals would simply collect basic information online, gather the little money they could, and leave. Key informants in this study indicated that social media has played a fundamental role in the organization of migration journey. Venezuelans planning to leave the country mostly obtain information regarding the migration route and the conditions at destination from fellow nationals who have already left the country, mainly through Facebook or WhatsApp groups.¹⁶ This trend is in line with the findings of UNHCR protection monitoring exercises in Peru: 34% of respondents indicated “talking to fellow nationals” as source of information, while 24% and 21% mentioned WhatsApp and Facebook, respectively.¹⁷

Many Venezuelans can afford migration only by selling their possessions,¹⁸ including the vast majority of the refugees and migrants interviewed for this assessment. Key informants in both Colombia and Peru stated that people with financial resources and families with small children opt, where feasible and affordable, for what they consider a safer method to organise their migration journey, by hiring the services of private companies presenting themselves as “travel agencies”.

However, unlike in some other regions of the world, in mixed migration flows out of Venezuela there is little evidence of structured and hierarchical smuggling dynamics, nor of highly organized and sophisticated transnational networks that manage all aspects of irregular movement across countries, nor of the recklessness, risk and the violence that often leads people on the move to meet violent death or to suffer other serious human rights violations. In the case of Colombia, for instance, smuggling networks remain quite informal, and sometimes (as is common in many parts of the world) smugglers are young Venezuelans who themselves are in need and seeking some form of income.¹⁹

The line between smuggling and offering legitimate travel services is often rather blurred, according to several key informants. Private companies presenting themselves as “travel agencies” selling “tourism packages” offer Venezuelans packages that include transportation to one’s chosen destination, which can be the Colombian

border, a Colombian city, the border between Colombia and Ecuador, or all the way down to Lima. Moreover, their “VIP packages” appear to entail bribing corrupt border officials to evade established administrative procedures. Key informants in Cúcuta recounted how, in the last few years, they noticed the sudden opening of many “travel agencies” offering transportation from Villa del Rosario or Cúcuta to other Colombian cities, or all the way down to the border with Ecuador.

The smuggling economy saw a sudden increase following border closures and implementation of restrictive immigration policies. When the Simón Bolívar International Bridge – a main crossing point between Venezuela and Colombia – was closed in February 2019, the business of smuggling Venezuelans became so profitable that the criminal and armed groups started fighting for its control, causing an increase in violence in the area.²⁰ Similarly, in Peru, the smuggling economy peaked following the implementation of pre-screening for asylum seekers at the border.

Protection risks for Venezuelan refugees and migrants

Those who left Venezuela during the first two phases had the logistical and financial means to migrate regularly, either by plane or by direct bus. Venezuelans who left the country over the last year and a half faced more challenges. Many of them never had a passport as they had never left Venezuela before, and lack the financial resources to obtain one now. As a result, they travel in more precarious and dangerous ways, having to split their journeys into several legs, in many cases covering at least part of it on foot.

People on the move face several protection risks when crossing the border between Venezuela and Colombia. Those interviewed for this assessment consistently reported having been either extorted or robbed by Guard officers of the Bolivarian National Guard or by other armed actors, such as criminal groups. Key Informants in Colombia reported that almost all Venezuelan refugees and migrants they assist mention having been robbed. In Ecuador, robberies and physical assault are the type of incidents most frequently affecting Venezuelans.²¹

Furthermore, Venezuelan refugees and migrants transiting Colombian territory to reach either another destination in Colombia or its southern border with Ecuador, have to pass through areas with a presence of

16 Janetsky, M. (2019) [For migrants fleeing Venezuela, social media plays key role in surviving life-or-death situations](#) ThinkProgress.

17 UNHCR, (2019) [Protection Monitoring UNHCR - MIES \(May 2019\) - Ecuador Overview](#), p. 7.

18 Bonilla, L. (2019) [As Venezuela Migration Crisis Worsens, Regional Goodwill and Resources Running Out](#) Voa News.

19 Venezuela Investigative Unit (2019) [Trails Along Colombia-Venezuela Border Are Criminal Enclaves](#) InSight Crime.

20 Venezuela Investigative Unit (2019) [Trails Along Colombia-Venezuela Border Are Criminal Enclaves](#) InSight Crime; Venezuela Investigative Unit (2019) [‘La Línea’ Gang Takes Deadly Hold on Colombia-Venezuela Border](#) InSight Crime; Vargas, N. (2019) [La guerra en la frontera entre Colombia y Venezuela](#) El Espectador.

21 UNHCR (2019) [Protection Monitoring Venezuela Situation – Update #1: January – June 2019](#).

armed actors involved in the Colombian conflict, which increases the protection risks they face.²² According to humanitarian workers interviewed in Cúcuta and Bogotá, refugees and migrants crossing the area – especially children and adolescents – are exposed to enforced disappearances, and there is sexual violence against women and girls.²³ All key informants in Colombia mentioned sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as a major protection concern for people on the move. Sexual violence often takes place during border crossings when female refugees and migrants are unable to pay crossing fees. Humanitarian workers in border areas also mentioned domestic violence as a serious concern: in some cases, migrant and refugee women travel with their abusive partner; in others, it is the trauma of the migration itself as well as the harsh conditions that people on the move face that alters relationship dynamics and leads to domestic violence.

Upon arrival to their destination countries, the living conditions for Venezuelan refugees and migrants can vary greatly due to several factors, the first being their immigration status. As of March 2019, more than half a million Venezuelan refugees and migrants were in Colombia irregularly,²⁴ and these people face especially precarious living conditions, according to the interviews conducted in the field assessment study, because their access to healthcare is limited to emergency care and excludes access to medical evaluation, specialized medical care, therapies and medicines. In Peru, 94% Venezuelan refugees and migrants live in overcrowded conditions, according to UNHCR's protection monitoring exercise,²⁵ and several humanitarian workers interviewed reported that it has become particularly difficult to find housing for those with children, as many landlords no longer want to rent to families.

The safety of Venezuelan refugees and migrants is also threatened by racist and xenophobic incidents. All key informants in Colombia said that xenophobia against refugees and migrants has increased, and humanitarian actors reported widespread negative stereotypes about Venezuelans, including the idea that many of them are

criminals, that they are stealing jobs from Colombians and that all Venezuelan women are prostitutes. Interviews with refugees and migrants confirmed this trend of rising xenophobia: most of them affirmed having either directly experienced xenophobia or having witnessed it or heard about it from friends. Xenophobia has also increased in Ecuador; a series of violent attacks against Venezuelans refugees and migrants took place following an incident in which a young Venezuelan man stabbed and killed his Ecuadorian wife, who was 22 years old and four months pregnant after holding her hostage for more than an hour.²⁶ Amid the outrage that followed, Venezuelan refugees and migrants experienced threats, forced evictions, and physical aggression.²⁷

Response to the Venezuelan exodus

In 2018, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) created a Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform to better organize the humanitarian response²⁸ and appointed a Joint Special Representative for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.²⁹ The platform developed a Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, aimed at “provid[ing] a holistic, integrated, and comprehensive response to the needs of refugees and migrants” from Venezuela, while supporting and complementing the efforts of national governments in the region.³⁰

The main regional response to the Venezuelan mixed migration flow has been the so-called Quito Process: a series of meetings between representatives of 13 Latin American countries. Following the first meeting, held September 2018, 11 out of 13 participating States agreed,³¹ among other things, to accept expired travel documents as valid documentation for Venezuelan people on the move, give Venezuelan refugees and migrants – to the extent possible and depending on their financial resources – access to healthcare and education services, and strengthen their legal frameworks with the

22 Fundación Ideas para la Paz (2018) [Inseguridad, violencia y economías ilegales en las fronteras - Los desafíos del nuevo Gobierno](#).

23 El Tiempo (2018) [Fiscalía busca a 10 venezolanos desaparecidos en el Catatumbo](#); UN OCHA (2018) [Doble afectación en la subregión del Catatumbo \(Norte de Santander\) \(conflicto armado y Flujos Migratorios Mixtos\)](#); La Opinión (2019), [Narcocultivos en Tibú, el imprevisto destino de migrantes venezolanos](#).

24 GIFMM, Colombia - Situational Report – May 2019

25 UNHCR, Monitoreo de protección marzo, p. 11.

26 El Universo (2019) [Diana Carolina, asesinada en Ibarra, había reportado la violencia de su pareja](#); Excelsior (2019) [Asesinato de mujer embarazada desata indignación en Ecuador](#).

27 León Cabrera, J. (2019) [La xenofobia en Ecuador empuja a migrantes venezolanos a salir del país](#) New York Times; Rojas, I. (2019) [¿Qué está pasando con los venezolanos en Ecuador?](#) Proavinci.

28 The platform aims to address “the protection, assistance and integration needs of both refugees and migrants through accompanying, complementing and strengthening national and regional responses of governments, international organisations and civil society”. Jointly led by UNHCR and IOM, it also includes 41 participants including 17 UN agencies, 15 NGOs, five donors, two international financial institutions and the Red Cross Movement. See R4V (2018) [Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](#).

29 UNHCR and IOM (2018) [Joint statement by UNHCR and IOM on the appointment of Mr Eduardo Stein, as a Joint Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region](#).

30 R4V (2018) [Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](#), p. 12.

31 Bolivia and the Dominican Republic did not sign the Declaration. El Nacional (2018) [11 países de América acordaron aceptar documentos vencidos a venezolanos](#).

aim of promoting and respecting the rights of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.³²

Following the second Quito Process meeting, held November 2018, 8 out of 13 participating countries³³ agreed to allow Venezuelan citizens access to regular immigration status and to the refugee status determination system. In the fourth Quito Process meeting, held July 2019, states agreed to adopt measures to facilitate migrants' and refugees' local integration.³⁴ However, many of the commitments adopted through the Quito Process have remained unimplemented.

Moreover, after initially adopting an open-door policy towards Venezuelan refugees and migrants, in something of a domino effect, countries in South America began successively to introduce stricter immigration measures. Peru, the country that at the onset of the Venezuelan crisis had a very open stance to the arrival of Venezuelan refugees and migrants and their local integration, changed its position last summer due to the sharp influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants. In August 2018, the Peruvian government decided to stop issuing the *Permiso Temporal de Permanencia* (Temporary Permanence Permit, PTP), which specifically aimed at providing Venezuelan citizens with a way to regularize their immigration status,³⁵ and began requiring Venezuelans to present a valid passport before entering its territory.³⁶

In June 2019, both Peru and Chile introduced new entry requirements, which make it almost impossible for most Venezuelan on the move to enter the country regularly. Most of the documents now required for visas are extremely difficult to obtain, particularly since the Venezuelan government started creating obstacles for citizens wanting to leave the country. For instance, obtaining a passport in Venezuela can entail not only an extremely lengthy procedure, but also a high financial cost – from a few hundred to several thousand US dollars – in bribes to public officials.³⁷

As Chile and Peru started imposing additional entry requirements for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, the Ecuadoran government began worrying that people on the move would get stuck in its territory and that it would soon become a destination rather than a transit country. This has led the government to announce - in parallel with the regularization of those Venezuelans who are already irregularly residing in the country and have not committed crimes - the introduction of a visa requirement for Venezuelan citizens in order to be allowed entry into Ecuadorian territory.³⁸ This series of restrictions to the movement of Venezuelan refugees and migrants risks having one, or both, of the following consequences: an increase in irregular migration, if people on the move decide to head to these countries regardless of their entry requirements; and/or Colombia will continue to be left carrying the biggest burden of this migration crisis, as effectively closing its border with Venezuela will be difficult.

In Colombia, where the numbers of refugees and migrants arriving have been unprecedented in their scale, the country has taken several steps to respond to the situation. In 2017, the government created a special residence permit, the *Permiso Especial de Permanencia* (PEP),³⁹ specifically aimed at providing Venezuelan refugees and migrants the chance to regularize their immigration status. The PEP allows Venezuelans to remain in Colombia for up to two years with access to basic rights, including employment, health, and education. According to the Colombian authorities, 535,650 Venezuelan refugees and migrants had obtained the PEP by the end of 2018 – roughly half of the Venezuelans nationals in the country.⁴⁰ Venezuelans who have not registered with Colombian authorities do not qualify for the PEP.

32 [Declaration of Quito on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region.](#)

33 The eight countries were Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana del Gobierno de Ecuador (2018) [The II International Meeting of Quito concludes with the signing of the Action Plan on Human Mobility of Venezuelan citizens in the region.](#)

34 UNHCR and IOM (2019) [Países latinoamericanos acuerdan hoja de ruta para la integración de venezolanos](#); ANSA Latina (2019) [Emigrantes, una hoja de ruta Latinoamericana.](#)

35 Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (2017) [CIDH saluda medidas para brindar protección a personas migrantes venezolanas en Perú y llama a Estados de la región a implementar medidas para su protección.](#)

36 Fowks, J. (2018) [Los venezolanos solo podrán ingresar a Perú con pasaporte.](#) El País.

37 El Espectador (2018) [¿Por qué es tan difícil sacar el pasaporte en Venezuela?](#); Olmo, G. (2018) [Por qué es tan difícil conseguir un pasaporte para salir de Venezuela.](#) BBC.

38 El Comercio (2019) [Decreto 826 fija visa para ciudadanos de Venezuela y amnistía para inmigrantes que no han violado la ley en Ecuador](#); El Universo (2019) [Lenín Moreno anuncia dos tipos de visa para los venezolanos, en sesión solemne por Guayaquil.](#)

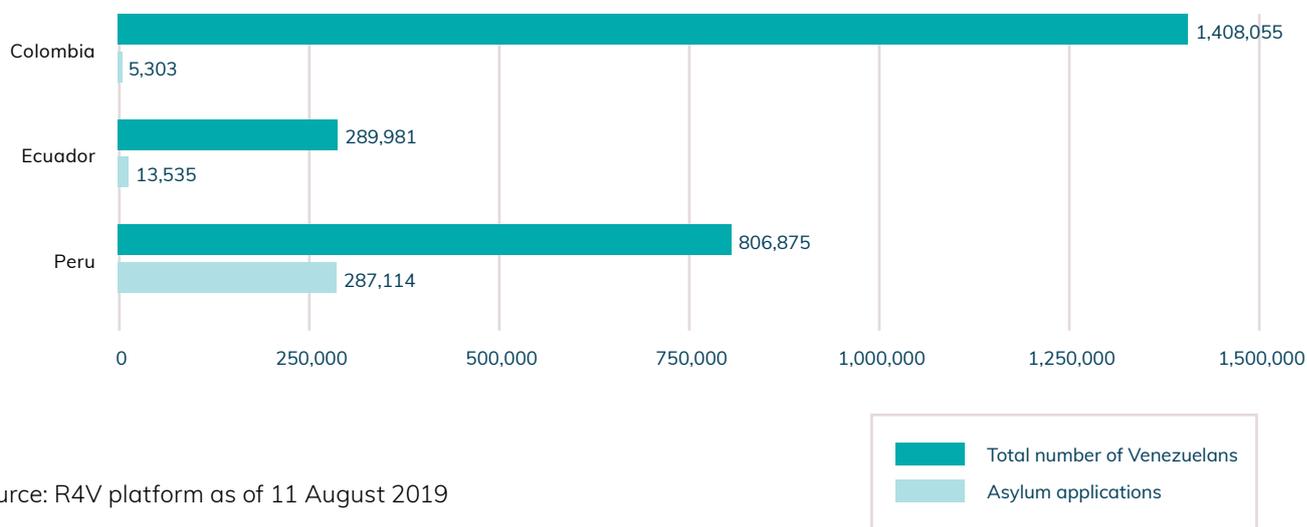
39 Migración Colombia [Todo lo que tiene que saber sobre el PEP \(Permiso Especial de Permanencia\).](#)

40 Migración Colombia (2019) [Venezolanos en Colombia - Radiografía de venezolanos en Colombia al 31 de diciembre de 2018.](#)

Although Venezuelans have the right to seek asylum in Colombia, only a very small percentage applies: the Regional Inter-Agency Platform reports that, as of May 2019, only 5,303 Venezuelans had done so in the country.⁴¹ One of the main reasons for the low number is that, until July 2019, asylum seekers did not have the right to work during their refugee determination process.⁴² On July 12, 2019, the Colombian government created a new type of permit, the *Permiso Especial Complementario de Permanencia* (PECP - Special Complementary Stay Permit), which will be issued to asylum seekers and give them the right to work while they wait for a decision on their application.⁴³ As the new measure had just been adopted, it has not been possible to evaluate its impact in this assessment.

The percentage of Venezuelans applying for asylum in Ecuador and Peru – compared to the estimated total number of Venezuelans in the country - is higher than in Colombia as shown in the graph below. Though the percentage in Ecuador still low, the Ecuadorian asylum system is much more developed than Colombia's, explaining the higher percentage compared to Colombia. In Peru, with fewer and fewer options to access a regular immigration status, an increasing number of Venezuelans started applying for asylum in order to regularise their status.

Total number of Venezuelans in selected hosting countries compared to the number of asylum applications



Source: R4V platform as of 11 August 2019

41 See <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform>.

42 Henao Cardozo, D. (2019) *Prohibición de trabajar se eliminará de salvoconductos que solicitan migrantes*, RCN Radio.

43 Morales C. (2019) *Así funciona el nuevo permiso para solicitantes de refugio venezolanos*, El Tiempo.

Outlook and expectations of Venezuelan refugees and migrants

All the key informants, as well as the Venezuelan refugees and migrants interviewed for this assessment agreed that it is highly unlikely that the Venezuelan crisis will be solved in the short term. According to Venezuelan respondents, while a political change is not on the horizon but could still suddenly happen, a more structural national recovery would certainly take much longer. It would take a long time – at least a few years – for the country to rebuild its economy, infrastructure and institutions. According to most of respondents, this implies that, most probably, mixed migration flows out of the country will neither stop nor decrease in the short or medium term. Several refugees and migrants interviewed stated having family members in Venezuela who are already planning to leave the country soon.

One Venezuelan woman interviewed in Tumbes said that “Venezuela will become a country of old people: they are the only ones who won’t leave because they don’t want to, or they physically cannot”.

All refugees and migrants interviewed for this assessment stated they planned to either settle where they were, or continue their movement toward their chosen final destination and settle there, with the main obstacles they faced in achieving their aims being access to legal status and livelihoods. None of them said they had considered the possibility of returning to Venezuela in the short term. Some Venezuelans are involved in temporary movement between Colombia and Venezuela to visit family members, which does not mean they intend to return permanently.⁴⁴

The two main elements cited as fundamental preconditions for going back to Venezuela are, in general, a change of government and the re-establishment of the country’s economic and social infrastructure. Specific responses vary depending on the profile of the respondent: people who fled political persecution obviously stress the need for political change, without which they risk arbitrary detention and other human rights violations. Those who left for economic or health reasons focus more on the need for an improvement of the national economy and health infrastructure, regardless of who might be in power.

Future intentions also vary depending on the socio-economic profile of refugees and migrants. People from the lower socio-economic classes would be more eager to return in the short term, as soon as the situation in their country of origin improved. Professionals and people with a high education level, on the other hand, take a more cautious stance: they will carefully consider which future perspectives Venezuela offers for their personal and professional life, before deciding to abandon the stability and integration that they hope to achieve in their country of destination.

44 UNHCR, [Protection Monitoring Venezuela Situation – Update #1: January – June 2019](#).

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Hundreds of Venezuelans wait in the customs line in Colombia to stamp their passports and continue their journey. In August 2018, between 3,000 and 7,000 Venezuelans entered Ecuador daily, most of them in transit to Peru. Some families must spend the night at the Rumichaca Bridge, border between Colombia and Ecuador, where temperatures drop to 3 degrees Celsius.



The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa and Yemen, Europe, Middle East, North Africa & West Africa) and a central unit in Geneva. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

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