

Venezuela Situation

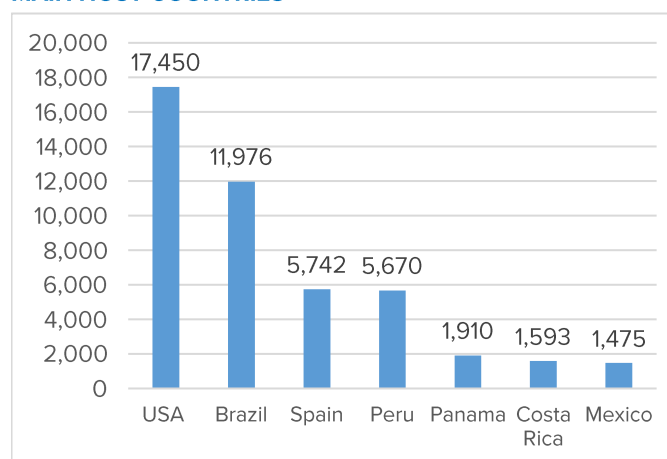
October 2017

The deterioration in the political and socio-economic situation is reducing access to **basic goods and services** for citizens and refugees in the country.

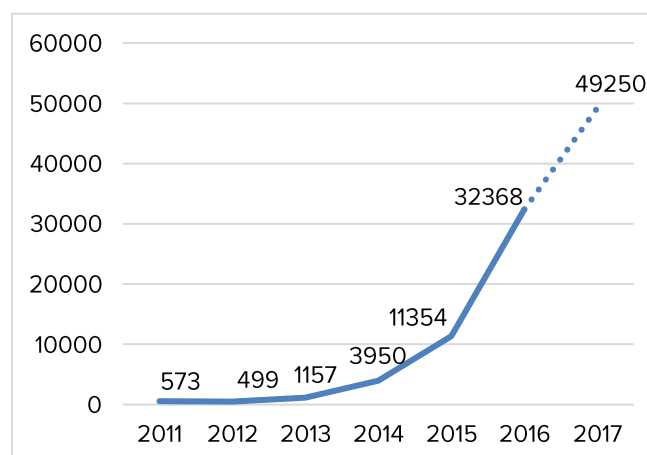
Between 2014 and 2017, over **99,000 Venezuelans** applied for asylum, mostly in the Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Spain and the United States of America.

UNHCR has enhanced **preparedness measures** to respond to the increased outflows of Venezuelans to countries in the region.

ESTIMATED NEW ARRIVALS OF VENEZUELAN IN 2017 IN MAIN HOST COUNTRIES



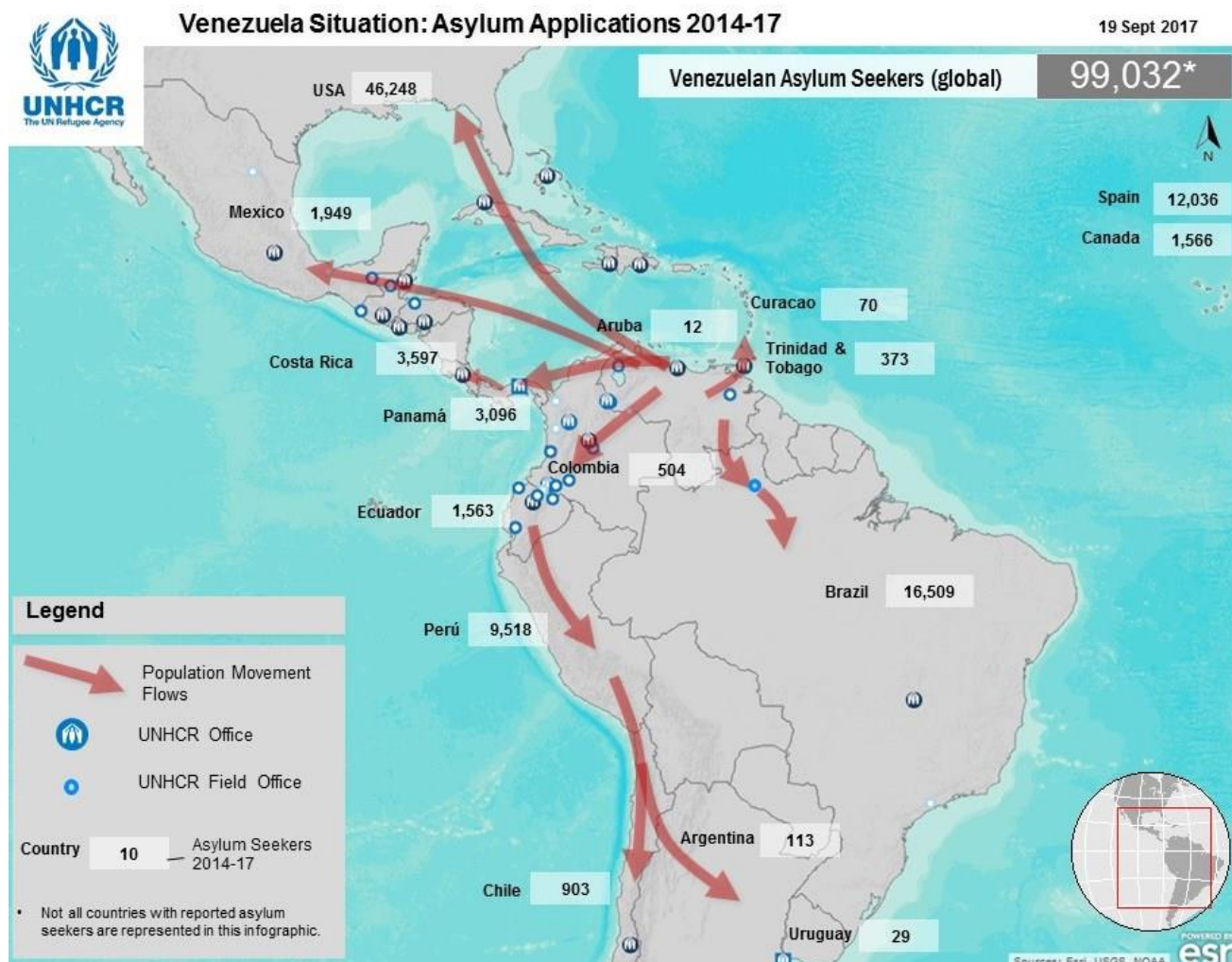
ASYLUM APPLICATIONS (2011 – 2017)



Amid a difficult situation, Venezuelans cross the Simón Bolívar International Bridge from the city of San Antonio into Cúcuta, Colombia. Some buy goods and return home, but increasing numbers are seeking protection outside their country.

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Background



Recent developments in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) have resulted in the growing arrival of Venezuelans in many countries of the Americas and beyond. While there are no reliable figures for the number of Venezuelans in neighbouring countries, estimates range from a few hundred thousand to two million persons.

The number of asylum applications by Venezuelans has dramatically increased in the first half of 2017, having doubled the total number from the previous year. Applications reached over 99,000 in the Americas from 2014 to 2017. The main countries of destination for Venezuelan asylum-seekers are Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Spain, and the United States of America.

To step up a response to the ongoing arrival of Venezuelans, UNHCR has strengthened its presence in border areas of neighbouring countries to better provide basic humanitarian assistance including through multi-purpose cash grants, and to support government registration, documentation, and refugee status determination (RSD) processes, as well as alternative legal pathways with protection safeguards.

In May 2017, UNHCR fielded an advanced preparedness mission from its Headquarters to Brazil, Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago, the three countries bordering Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) that have been receiving a constant flow of arrivals.¹ \$2.9 million² was allocated to respond to the situation from UNHCR's Operational Reserve. In addition, a Venezuela Situation team was established in Bogotá to coordinate preparedness response measures and provide dedicated protection support to operations in the region.

Protection environment and identified needs

There are common protection challenges across countries in the region. They include lengthy and cumbersome asylum procedures; lack of documentation hampering access to basic services such as health, education, and employment; exploitation and abuse in the labour market; adverse coping mechanisms such as survival sex due to lack of livelihood opportunities; child protection issues and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); and xenophobia toward Venezuelan nationals, among others. In **Colombia**, many Venezuelans are settling in insecure border areas, some of which are controlled by organized armed groups. Indigenous groups straddling the land borders of **Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)** have a number of specific needs for which a targeted and differentiated approach is being adopted.

The governments of the region have responded positively to Venezuelan arrivals, showing readiness to find programmatic responses to regularize the stay of Venezuelans in their respective territories. This has been done in the spirit of solidarity and in line with the solid legal framework in the region, providing access to asylum and access to alternative legal stay options to Venezuelans.

Given the fluidity of the situation, the numbers of people leaving Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and the potential this has to create backlogs in asylum systems, UNHCR is advocating for alternative legal pathways with protection safeguards, including temporary stay arrangements and humanitarian visas to enable Venezuelans to regularize their stay in countries while allowing those who intend to do so to seek asylum. Several countries (**Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru**) have adopted such forms of temporary stay arrangements for Venezuelans.

¹ Guyana which has a long land border with Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and rapidly increasing numbers of Venezuelans. Capacity constraints have so far prevented UNHCR from conducting a monitoring mission there.

² All dollar signs in this document denote United States dollars.

UNHCR has deployed several sectoral experts including for shelter (**Brazil and Colombia**), cash-based interventions (**Brazil, Colombia, and the Southern Caribbean region**), Camp Coordination & Camp Management (**Brazil**), SGBV and Child Protection. A regional Safe-from-the-Start deployment will take place in October to give particular emphasis to border regions and focus on establishing and strengthening SGBV referral services and safe houses. UNHCR is working with the respective Ombudsman's



Young Venezuelans lie on the mattress they share. The boys say they don't do much during the day, to conserve energy, as they do not have much to eat. They are being taken care of by a Colombian woman who opened her home to Venezuelans. ©UNHCR/Paul Smith

Offices and other government entities to address certain protection challenges. In **Colombia**, UNHCR is developing a communication campaign to combat xenophobia, in coordination with the Presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Colombia has seen an increasing number of arrivals from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) including returning Colombians—many of whom are people of concern to UNHCR—as well as Venezuelan nationals. The most recent profiling exercise indicates that 43 per cent of new arrivals from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) to Colombia are Colombian nationals, 24 per cent are dual nationals, and 33 per cent are Venezuelans. According to the Colombian migration authorities, some 300,000 Venezuelans are currently in Colombia, many of whom are staying in the same precarious situation as Colombian internally displaced persons (IDPs) or returnees. They face similar protection challenges and risks of new displacement, *inter alia*, as a result of actions by organized armed groups, other forms of violence, crime and widespread shortages. There is an increasing number of Venezuelans who have not officially applied for asylum—due partly to challenges in access to asylum procedures—and are experiencing various protection risks (SGBV, exploitation) due primarily to the lack of documentation.

UNHCR has been actively advocating with the Government of Colombia for a protection-sensitive legal status for this population. On 28 July 2017, the Government issued Resolutions 1272 and 5797 detailing a Special Stay Permit (PEP) for Venezuelans, who entered Colombia legally prior to this date through an official border crossing point and are in possession of a stamped passport. It is estimated that the permit will benefit some 210,000 Venezuelans. However, it does not address the protection needs of

Venezuelans who have entered the country illegally or those who are without proper documentation and are often those with the most critical needs. The PEP is issued for three months and then extended up to two years and provides access to employment and basic social services.

Colombian authorities also established a Border Mobility Card, which allows Venezuelans to cross into the Colombian border provinces of La Guajira, Norte de Santander, Arauca, Vichada and Guainia to purchase basic goods. The card is valid for two years from its issuance. As of 19 September 2017, more than 760,000 Venezuelans have pre-registered to obtain this document. However, the Border Mobility Card does not grant the right to work or obtain residence in Colombia.

In **Brazil** it is estimated that there are between 20,000 and 30,000 Venezuelans. From 2014 to 1 September 2017, over 16,500 Venezuelans have sought asylum. The Government of Brazil adopted Normative Resolution No. 126 of the National Migration Commission, which allows for the grant of a two-year temporary residence permit on humanitarian grounds with the right to work for Venezuelans. Registered Venezuelan asylum-seekers can also opt for a temporary residence permit in order to regularize their status. UNHCR, together with its partners, successfully advocated for a waiver of this residence permit fee (\$100 per person) and acknowledges the good will of the Government to allow those who could not afford to pay the fees to have access to this migratory option.

The office is also supporting the authorities with the simplification of asylum procedures. Interviews conducted by UNHCR with Venezuelan asylum-seekers indicate an increase in claims based on political opinion or membership of a particular social group. Specific protection risks facing the Venezuelan indigenous Warao population are being addressed through a differentiated approach. The Brazilian Government has made commendable efforts at the federal, state, and municipal levels to increase its reception capacity for Venezuelans, including through financial support for local hospitals and reception centres. However, referral and shelter services remain insufficient and the humanitarian situation continues to be precarious. Arrivals have also strained the health systems in border municipalities. An anti-xenophobia campaign is being designed with the Federal University of Roraima.

Several island states in the **Southern Caribbean** directly off the coast of Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)—particularly Aruba, Curaçao and Trinidad and Tobago—are collectively hosting an estimated 65,000 Venezuelans. Arrivals by both air and sea are increasing, and UNHCR is engaged in training and capacity development of local authorities in contingency planning, emergency preparedness, and strengthening asylum procedures. Protection challenges include identifying persons in need of protection; denial of access to territory; denial of access to asylum procedures; detention and deportation.

Venezuelans in Southern Caribbean islands also reported experiencing labour and sexual exploitation, discrimination and xenophobia, and in some cases are resorting to survival sex as the only livelihood

alternative. Regarding access to protection, as there are currently no temporary humanitarian protection alternatives in Aruba, Curaçao, and Trinidad and Tobago, UNHCR's recognition of refugee status under its mandate represents the main—and sometimes only—means by which Venezuelans are protected from *refoulement*, and can gain access to fundamental rights and services. The vast majority of asylum-seekers registered in Southern Caribbean countries have individualized claims of persecution that fall under one of the 1951 Convention protection grounds, with a smaller number fearing generalized violence. There are approximately 1,000 registered asylum-seekers and refugees in Trinidad and Tobago of whom some 322 are Venezuelans; 200 in Curaçao, of whom 75 are Venezuelans; and fewer than ten in Aruba.

As of 30 June 2017, **Costa Rica** hosted 314 refugees and 1,877 asylum-seekers from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). During the first semester of 2017 alone, Costa Rica received 3,156 new arrivals of whom 1,313 were Venezuelans. While Venezuelan asylum-seekers are for the moment being “absorbed” by UNHCR's regular programme, the influx is putting severe strain on the capacity of



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 improve living conditions, including access to clean water and medical services. ©UNHCR

the authorities and UNHCR to respond appropriately to their needs. In particular, RSD procedures need strengthening as well as the capacity to grant of complementary protection for those rejected by the asylum procedure but who are still in need of some form of protection. In addition, Venezuelan asylum-seekers with specific needs require legal aid and humanitarian assistance (mostly provided through cash-based interventions) for health, education, food and housing.

Peru has one of the largest number of Venezuelan asylum-seekers in South America, now numbering over 9,000 people. Venezuelans can also apply for a temporary residence permit called a *Permiso Temporal de Permanencia* (PTP) introduced in February 2017. More than 11,000 of these permits have been granted to Venezuelan nationals to date. Nonetheless, the establishment of the PTP has not relieved strain on the Peruvian asylum system caused by the large numbers of arrivals. UNHCR will

carry out an assessment of the situation, including protection risks for people of concern at Peru's northern border (at Tumbes), where neither UNHCR nor its partner currently have any monitoring capacity.

A UNHCR-funded partner in the border area will not only strengthen UNHCR's presence in Peru but will also allow for improved monitoring and better provision of humanitarian assistance to Venezuelans with specific needs. The Government of Peru is also planning to step up its response to the influx by increasing capacity for registration and RSD. UNHCR is planning to support the response of the Government by contributing to the recruitment of additional eligibility officers and the establishment of a registration database and related equipment.

In **Mexico**, the most significant recent increase in asylum applications is from Venezuelan nationals. According to Government statistics for the first half of 2017, 1,420 Venezuelans applied for asylum, a 2,390 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2015. People of concern from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) arriving in Mexico are generally of urban middle-class background, well-educated and highly skilled, and as such rarely approach UNHCR or partners to request humanitarian assistance. COMAR, the Government's Refugee Commission, applies the extended refugee definition under the Cartagena Declaration to Venezuelan asylum-seekers, resulting in a 99 per cent recognition rate. As of September, 21 per cent of all asylum claims in Mexico and approximately 27 per cent of the backlog correspond to Venezuelans; it is critical to support the Government's RSD capacity through the temporary provision of additional adjudicators.

As of the beginning of August the number of Venezuelans in **Ecuador** was estimated at 40,000. Since then approximately estimated 700 to 800 have entered Ecuador on a daily basis through the main border crossing with Colombia at Rumichaca (arriving by bus to Ipiales directly from Cúcuta, in northern Colombia). The majority are passing through Ecuador on their way to Peru. The ones who remain mostly access alternative legal pathways (e.g. UNASUR visa, *visa de convenio*). Only a small number of Venezuelans actually apply for refugee status.

In **Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)**, UNHCR is re-visiting its strategy to move from an individual case-management approach to a community-based protection approach, particularly where UNHCR has an existing operational presence such as in the border areas.

Operational response and partnerships

In **Costa Rica**, the office has enhanced partner capacity to expand its regular programme to include Venezuelans with specific needs. Subject to additional funding, the office will be in a position to expedite asylum procedures for Venezuelans and advocate for alternative temporary stay mechanisms. The operation would be able to further strengthen border monitoring activities (at the Panama–Costa Rica border crossing), assist cases with specific needs and support livelihoods and local integration initiatives in an effort to promote solutions from the start.



After crossing the Simón Bolívar International Bridge from the city of San Antonio into Cúcuta, Colombia, families from Venezuela wait to pass through the immigration control centre. ©UNHCR/Paul Smith

In the **Southern Caribbean**, UNHCR's cooperation with CARICOM as well as the creation of the Caribbean Migration Consultations in 2016 (involving 20 Caribbean countries) have contributed to better coordination on preparedness and response to increasing refugee flows throughout the region. UNHCR's NGO partner in Trinidad and Tobago, Living Water Community, was supported with additional staff and programme funds to increase protection monitoring activities as well as provide additional shelter capacity and basic humanitarian assistance for all Venezuelan persons of concern and others with specific needs. In Aruba and Curaçao, there are plans to strengthen national Red Cross partners with staff for identification and referral and with additional funds for assistance to persons with specific needs. In addition, UNHCR plans to conduct a follow up to the *Refugee Situation Preparedness and Contingency Planning Workshop*, carried out in December 2016 in Trinidad and Tobago, with the participation of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago to boost the planning capacity of authorities.

Due to the disparity between the numbers of people of concern currently registered with UNHCR and a much larger estimated population of Venezuelans in the Southern Caribbean, activities related to RSD, the development of refugee legislation and progressive hand-over of responsibilities for registration and RSD to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, within the framework Refugee Policy and the Quality Assurance Initiative, need to be complemented by a community-based protection

approach. The approach would support host communities, currently accommodating Venezuelans in Aruba, Curaçao, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. This requires UNHCR to carry out participatory assessments with people of concern and host communities as well as consultations with all relevant stakeholders, establishing new operational arrangements, as well as forging new partnerships with line Ministries, development agencies, civil society (to the extent that such organizations exist), as well as other relevant stakeholders.

In **Colombia**, UNHCR co-leads the Inter-Agency Border Group with IOM, to coordinate the response to Venezuelan arrivals in support of the Colombian Government's efforts. UNHCR's response involves a range of activities as outlined below:

- The office has opened a small presence in the Department of La Guajira to cover the northern part of the Venezuelan border and is supporting the regional authorities in the development of a contingency plan.
- UNHCR is providing technical advice to the Colombian Immigration Office and the National Registry.
- A population profiling exercise is currently being prepared in the border areas and in urban centers such as Medellín and Barranquilla where many Venezuelans, Colombian returnees, and mixed families are settling.
- UNHCR is supporting the second phase of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) strategy in the Departments of La Guajira, Bolivar, Norte de Santander and Arauca to reflect protection considerations and through the procurement of equipment.
- Six emergency reception shelters along the border are being rehabilitated, including the improvement of community infrastructure such as schools, sports centers, and temporary shelters that can be used in case of a mass influx.
- UNHCR is providing small-scale multi-purpose cash grants to vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers through its partner Secretariado Nacional de la Pastoral Social (SNPS).
- Legal assistance is being provided to people of concern through five university legal clinics.
- A communication campaign to combat xenophobia is being developed jointly with the Government.
- UNHCR is providing educational material to asylum-seeker and refugee children on their protection and rights.
- In response to a request from the National Disaster Management Unit, UNHCR is pre-positioning 500 tents and 50 plastic rolls in case of a mass influx from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) to cover emergency shelter needs.

In **Brazil**, the Government and civil society have made efforts to address the needs of Venezuelan arrivals in Brazil's northern states (Roraima, Amazonas State), despite significant needs and challenges. UNHCR is providing technical expertise and advice to the Government as well as humanitarian

assistance to people of concern, including through partners. UNHCR's activities so far include the following:

- Establishment of a UNHCR presence in the respective state capitals of Boa Vista in Roraima State and Manaus in Amazonas State.
- The UN Country Team has been mobilized, and IOM has recently established a presence in Roraima. UNHCR is also collaborating with UNFPA on SGBV matters and FAO and WFP on food and nutrition.
- UNHCR is refurbishing infrastructure at the Federal University of Roraima (UFRR) to establish a referral centre, which will facilitate information dissemination, access to RSD and registration procedures, and allow the Government and UNHCR to collect systematic data on Venezuelan arrivals. Construction and refurbishment should be completed by early December 2017. Pending the opening of the referral centre, UNHCR is providing support to the Federal Police with the mobilization of volunteers for registration activities and the improvement of reception and registration facilities.
- UNHCR submitted preliminary site layouts to the Government for the development and upgrade of three reception centres in Pacaraima, Boa Vista and Manaus.
- Through its partner, Institute of Migration and Human Rights, which has a presence in Roraima State, UNHCR is supporting registration, identification of people with specific needs, as well as provision of subsistence support to people of concern with the most critical specific needs. Two other partnership arrangements are being initiated to provide protection, basic and essential services to Venezuelans.
- UNHCR procured core relief items and hygiene kits which are being distributed to people of concern in Boa Vista. Two industrial drinking fountains were also acquired, which are currently the only source of potable water in the reception centre.
- UNHCR is working with the UFRR to conduct research/assessment to establish the socio-economic profiles of people arriving. The research will also provide data on peoples' intention to remain in Roraima, move to other states, or shuttle between Brazil and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).



Over 500 Venezuelans are living in a shelter in Boa Vista, the capital of Roraima state in Brazil, bordering Venezuela. UNHCR has been working with the authorities and partners to provide better conditions for people arriving. ©UNHCR

In **Mexico**, UNHCR's operational response focuses on ensuring that people arriving from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) have access to appropriate RSD procedures which are fair and efficient. As the responsibility for RSD lies with COMAR, UNHCR's efforts will continue to be concentrated on strengthening its capacity to process the increasing number of claims, but also ensuring that people from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) can access the asylum procedure, in particular when arriving through Mexico's main international airports. In addition to developing the capacity of COMAR, training sessions will also be provided to immigration officials on international refugee law principles and the authorities' responsibilities vis-à-vis asylum-seekers and refugees. Basic and immediate protection assistance is and will continue to be provided for cases with specific needs, as well as protection information and referral to health services or employment opportunities.

In **Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)**, UNHCR has increased its staffing to expand monitoring capacity. The office is planning to scale up its operational capacity in border areas and to re-orient the operation towards emerging protection needs, through a community-based approach in close coordination with national and local authorities.

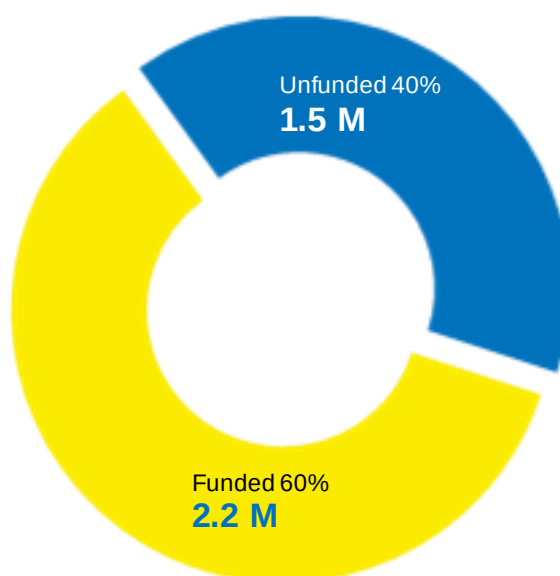


Eighteen-year-old Venezuelan mother Estefani and her son Estheven share a room with several family members at a hostel for Venezuelan refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in the city of Cúcuta, Colombia. ©UNHCR/Paul Smith

Funding requirements

- In April 2017, UNHCR launched a preparedness phase to respond to increased outflows of Venezuelans. Regional preparedness activities until end of 2017 amount to USD 3.7 million.

Venezuela Situation	
Funding Requirements	
Operation	Total
Brazil	783,731
Colombia	1,099,228
Costa Rica	110,000
Regional Activities	463,552
RO ARG (Peru)	69,500
USA/ROWA	615,868
Venezuela	563,483
Total	3,705,362



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United States of America

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Denmark

500,000

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