

General context

UNHCR opened an office in Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 1991 to meet the needs of those who seek international protection.

Refugees arrive to the country mostly from neighboring Colombia. An improved access to the asylum procedures is number one priority for UNHCR and its partners, combined with the delivery of basic assistance and services, as well as of long-term solutions to refugees and local communities.

Due to the long border shared with Colombia (2.219 kms.) and the numerous small communities along it, an increasing access to protection remains a major challenge. In this respect, the low registration renders the provision of humanitarian assistance and raising visibility of the situation more difficult.

Most of the refugees reside in the border states of Zulia, Tachira, Apure and Amazonas under precarious living conditions, ie. lack of water, health services, education. Two-third of families survives on daily wages for casual labor.

UNHCR activities in Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

UNHCR provides the government with technical assistance to improve their protection response. With the support of the European Commission, **we are enhancing the Refugee Status Determination process in 2010** by strengthening the National Commission for Refugees with human resources, equipment, and regular training on standards and procedures.

UNHCR regularly conducts capacity building activities for the military, police and other institutions related to refugee attention.

UNHCR promotes refugee's self-reliance and their income generation capacity through vocational training and micro-credits schemes that benefit refugees, asylum seekers and local communities.

UNHCR promotes local integration through small community projects ensuring they are associated with an activity to reduce tension among the host communities and the Colombians fleeing from conflict.

UNHCR focuses on the most vulnerable groups, including **indigenous communities** and women through periodical participatory assessments

A good second home

In comparison with other countries in the region, Venezuela offers a decent and sustainable integration prospect to Colombian refugees.

In addition to refugees, millions of Colombians have moved in the last decades seeking better living conditions through employment. They have been generously accepted in this country.

UNHCR's main concern is to improve the living conditions of asylum seekers waiting their claims to be processed by the authorities and do not possess any documentation to protect themselves from deportation or arrest.

Legal framework

According to the Venezuelan law, the refugee status determination is a responsibility of the State through its **National Commission for Refugees**.

In 2001, Venezuelan National Congress passed the Law on Refugees and Asylum Seekers, and in 2003 it approved the regulation and the creation of the offices through which the Commission operates in the border area.

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is not party to the 1951 Convention, but it has ratified the Protocol Relating the Status of Refugees of 1967 (May 6, 1986).

It participated in the preparation of the Cartagena Declaration; however, the Cartagena refugee definition is not part of the national legislation yet.

UNHCR presence in Venezuela

UNHCR has **4 offices** in Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.



UNHCR has **34 workforce** both international and national.



© UNHCR/Venezuela

People of concern to UNHCR

PERSONS IN REFUGEE-LIKE SITUATION: **200,000***
ASYLUM SEEKERS: **15,490**
RECOGNIZED REFUGEES: **2,790****

AVERAGE NEW ASYLUM CLAIMS REGISTERED BY UNHCR/ YEAR: **2,000**

* Scientific projection (2007 survey)
** According to the National Commission for Refugees (May 2010)



© UNHCR /Venezuela

The way forward (2010 – 2011)

The number of asylum claims has been stable during the last three years, although the ongoing armed conflict in neighbouring Colombia infers that Colombians seeking safety and/or asylum in the country will increase in the near future.

The possibilities of having more persons of concern crossing to Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela seeking protection remains prominent, because of the particularly volatile security situation in the Colombian border states neighbouring the country.

In addition, the emergence of Colombian new-generation irregular armed groups linked to human and drug trafficking, and sexual exploitation networks that compete over territory and resources in these areas, pose a big challenge to the safety and security of civilians. In these conditions many are forced to flee the country and seek protection.

UNHCR efforts to increase the reach of asylum procedures to **population in refugee-like situation** and -at the same time- strengthen and expedite the Refugee Status Determination procedures and eligibility practices by the authorities, will remain a primary objective for the coming years aiming at delivering effective protection, especially in the border areas.

It is important to highlight that bilateral tension between Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Colombia, along with increasing violence and insecurity in Venezuelan border states where refugees and asylum seekers are mainly located, will continue to impact protection delivery.

Partnerships

Caritas de Venezuela, JRS - Jesuit Refugee Service, Cruz Roja Venezolana, HIAS – Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, National Commission for Refugees, Banco del Pueblo Soberano, NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council, Sociedad Wills Wilde, UN Agencies.

Contact details

UNHCR Venezuela, Branch Office Caracas
Edificio Parque Cristal, torre Oeste, piso 4, Los Palos Grandes. Caracas, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
Teléfono: (58) 212-2863883. E-mail: venca@unhcr.org