

Venezuela

March 2019

- The country was hit by a massive nation-wide blackout on 7 March which lasted five days and was followed by recurrent long power outages throughout the rest of the month. The blackout brought Venezuela to a standstill and interrupted already unreliable water, telecommunications, electronic payment and fuel services. Particularly hit were the western states of Apure, Táchira and Zulia –where most of UNHCR’s prioritised communities lie- and Maracaibo, the country’s second largest city, was ravaged by widespread looting. The outage seriously affected living conditions of people of concern to UNHCR.
- The borders with Colombia and Brazil remained closed throughout the month, forcing people in transit to use increasingly risky and expensive informal crossing routes and impacting negatively on the livelihoods of border communities that have been traditionally dependent on cross-border commuting.
- The political power struggle continued, with opposition leader Juan Guaidó making a triumphal return to the country on 1 March and exploiting the blackout to step up mobilisation against President Nicolas Maduro. The government blamed the blackouts on sabotage by the opposition and technological attacks by the United States, while the opposition blamed it on government ineptitude and corruption.
- The economy of Venezuela ground to a halt, schools and offices remained closed for most of the month and shops only accepted cash, which has been traditionally scarce. The Bolivar has been gradually supplanted by the Colombian peso and the Brazilian real at the borders and by the US dollar in Caracas.

HIGHLIGHTS

TOTAL ESTIMATED HOST COMMUNITIES
BENEFICIARIES

+ 270,000

PERSONS OF CONCERN (GOVERNMENT FIGURES)

Refugees 8,464

Asylum seekers 142

Source: National Refugee Commission Venezuela

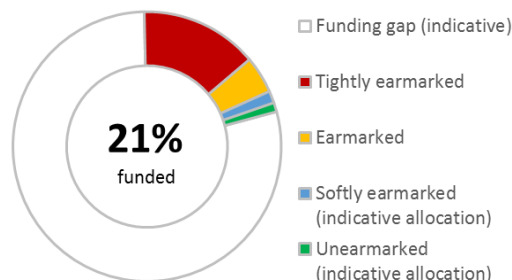
Persons in refugee-like situation: 117,653

Source: INE Venezuela

FUNDING (AS OF MARCH 2019)

USD 12.9 million

Requested for Venezuela



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

77 Personnel:

63 national staff

2 affiliate workforce/deployees

1 national intern

11 international staff

Offices:

1 Representation in Caracas

4 Field Offices in

San Cristóbal (Táchira), Guasualito

(Apure), Maracaibo (Zulia) and

Ciudad Guayana (Bolívar)

1 Field Unit in Caracas



Working with Partners

- UNHCR is implementing community-based activities in 54 prioritised communities in eight states, primarily in the border areas with Colombia, Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago, but also in Greater Caracas and the nearby Miranda state. UNHCR is working with 15 implementing partners (Aliadas en Cadena, AZUL Positivo, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Red Cross Zulia, Luz y Vida, Fe y Alegría, Sociedad Wills Wilde, Fogones y Banderas, Fundación Innocens, Fundación Casa Bonita and Fundación Soy un Guardian), as well as other local actors, including government institutions and NGOs.
- UNHCR coordinates meetings with humanitarian and development actors to discuss the design, and implementation of the protection response for persons of concern and host communities, including identification, provision of humanitarian assistance, monitoring of refugee rights and promotion of durable solutions.
- UNHCR liaises within the United Nations Country Team and with specific United Nations agencies to mainstream protection issues within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, and other shared mechanisms.
- UNHCR chairs the Protection Working Group, an inter-agency space for joint analysis of protection gaps and coordination of protection response and advocacy.
- UNHCR's main Government partners are the National Commission for Refugees (CONARE), the Ombudsperson's Office and Child Protection Councils, as well as community councils.

Main Activities

Community-based Protection

- UNHCR promotes an innovative community-based approach to assess and respond to the protection needs and risks of persons of concern in Venezuela.
- UNHCR is strengthening communication with communities and organizing trainings for community outreach volunteers to enhance the identification and referrals of persons with specific needs.
- UNHCR is working with community structures such as community groups, women and youth networks to engage the community in the implementation of **projects** identified by the communities themselves, seeking to improve community response and ensuring the sustainability of projects and community processes.
- UNHCR is supporting a national protection network providing assistance and counselling to persons in transit, and safe spaces for the attention of sexual and gender-based survivors and children at risk. The safe spaces provide confidential case management, counselling, psychosocial support, medical aid and legal services.
- UNHCR supports two community centres in Caracas and San Antonio in Táchira delivering multi-sectorial services from different actors to provide legal counselling, group information sessions on different topics such as rights and referral pathways, hygiene promotion, HIV prevention, as well as catch-up classes for children out of school and direct support for persons with specific needs.

Asylum and Durable Solutions

- UNHCR supports State institutions in the identification and referral to asylum procedures of persons in need of international protection. UNHCR and partners conduct capacity building activities with government institutions.
- UNHCR Venezuela facilitates and supports the voluntary repatriation of Colombian refugees, ensuring that they are enabled to take well-informed and voluntary decisions and are repatriated in conditions of safety and dignity.

Activities implemented in March 2019

Working with Partners and Authorities

- UNHCR Venezuela held a three-day (27-29 March) meeting and workshop with institutional partner National Commission for Refugees (CONARE) to discuss the details of a joint Work Plan that both sides hope to be able to launch in the near future.

Community-based Protection

- UNHCR Ciudad Guayana met with representatives of the Catholic University Andres Bello (UCAB) to discuss the assessment on forced displacement the UCAB will carry out with the support of UNHCR in the states of Bolivar and Delta Amacuro to identify displacement trends in the region.
- On International Women's Day, UNHCR organized a cinema forum in Ciudad Guayana, showing the film "You are not alone, Sara", a story on gender-based physical and psychological mistreatment. The event was attended by members of the Safe Spaces Network, the Office of the Ombudsperson, the Office of the Public Prosecutor, the Institute of Public Health, the Bolivarian National Police, the Bolivarian National Guard, the Childhood Protection System and other institutions and organisations and NGOs working on the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence. Following the film showing, those present participated in a forum on women's rights and the need to strengthen prevention and protection mechanisms against sexual and gender-based violence.
- UNHCR carried out a joint activity with the Public Prosecutor's Office in the prioritized community of Guanamo, Bolívar state, involving a film forum on gender-based physical and psychological violence and providing information on national law on the rights of women
- The Red Cross in the state of Zulia, in partnership with UNHCR, held a nutritional brigade in the community Gran Sabana where 144 persons were evaluated. During the activity, the Red Cross held an information session on nutrition and WASH with 39 community leaders.
- The Red Cross in Bolivar State, in partnership with UNHCR, organized awareness sessions on HIV prevention in the main bus station in the regional capital Ciudad Bolivar. The Red Cross also provided contraceptives and offered free blood pressure testing.
- UNHCR in the state of Táchira supported two nutritional brigades in the prioritized community of La Tendida. Staff from the regional National Nutrition Institute (INN) office and local walk-in clinic evaluated 148 persons, 19 of whom were diagnosed with a nutritional deficit. The INN also delivered anti-parasitic drugs and vitamins to children under 5 years of age.
- In Amazonas state, UNHCR partner HIAS and INN have launched a nutritional evaluation activity in the community of Sabaneta, examining to date 106 individuals.
- UNHCR delivered the infrastructure work that has been carried out in the Hipólito Cisneros School in the "El Junquito" community in Caracas to improve its electrical system, sports field and sanitary services. The activity will directly benefit the 600 children who attend the school.

Borders, Asylum and Durable Solutions

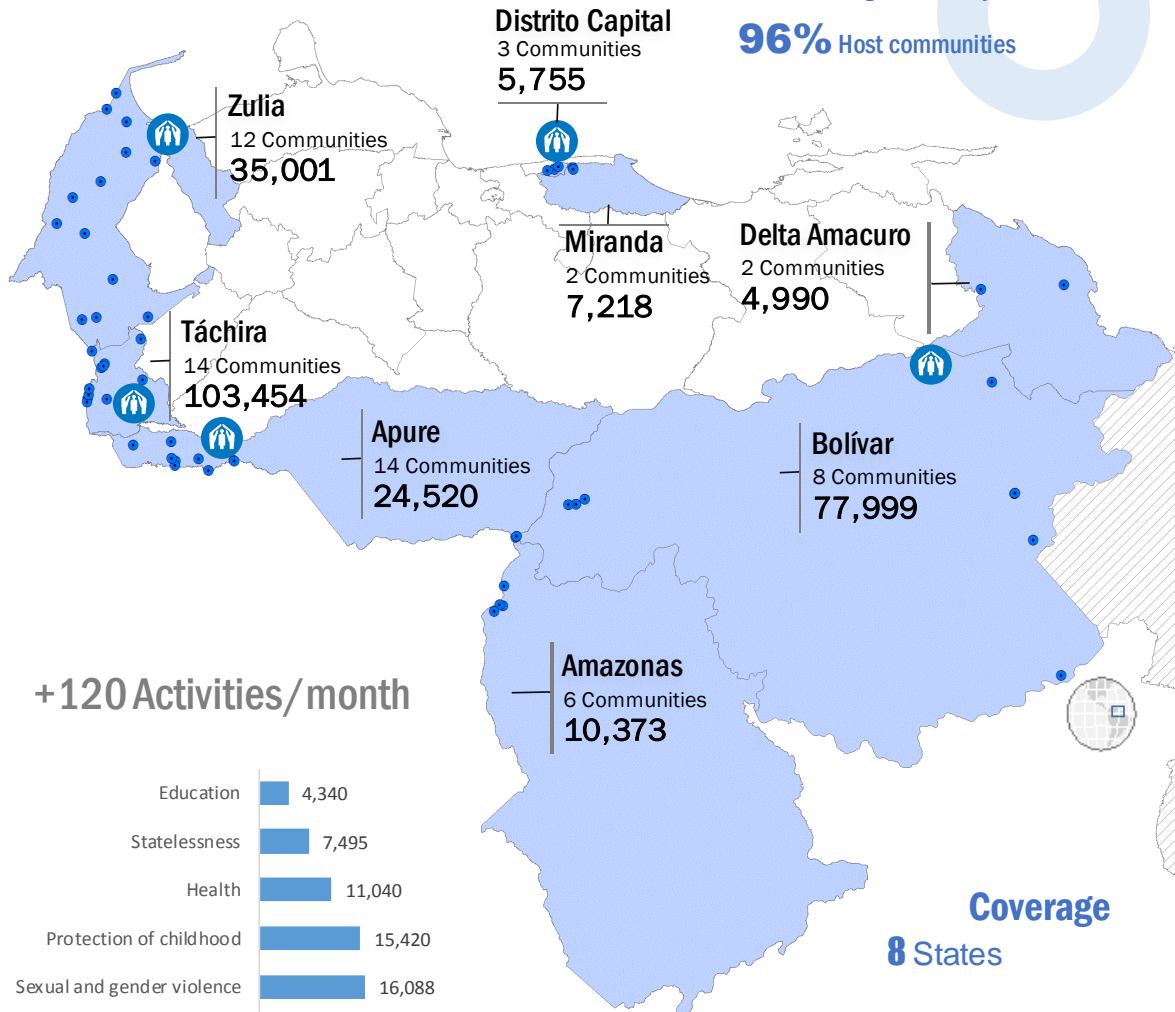
- Throughout the month, UNHCR Field Offices and partners undertook a number of border monitoring activities in the states of Amazonas, Apure, Bolivar, Falcon, Táchira and Zulia to evaluate the impact of the blackouts and border closures on cross-border movements and on the livelihoods of persons of concerns in border communities.

2019 Planned UNHCR Beneficiaries

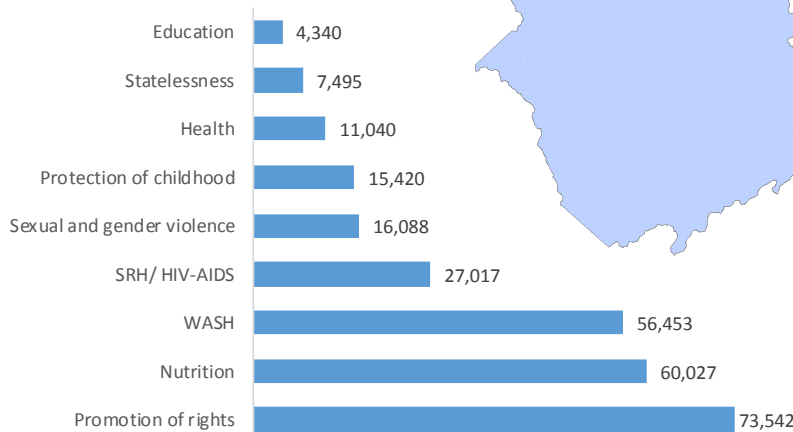
 **+ 271,822** Estimated beneficiaries
 **12** Project Partnership Agreements
 **15** Partners

Activities

4% Refugees and asylum-seekers
96% Host communities



+120 Activities/month



Coverage
8 States
28 Municipalities
28 Parishes
54 Communities

Donors

UNHCR Venezuela wishes to convey a special thank you to its donors –the European Union, Italy and the UN Program on HIV/AIDS – and the following donors of non-earmarked funds: Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and private donors in Spain.

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