

OVERVIEW

VENEZUELA (REGIONAL) 2019–2023 / COMPLEX CRISIS

CRISIS	Response to the situation of refugees and migrants from Venezuela
PEOPLE DISPLACED	7.24 million Venezuelans in the world* 6.10 million Venezuelans in the LAC region*
PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS	6.63 million people , including host communities**
LOCATIONS	Argentina, Aruba, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Curaçao, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, The Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay
PEOPLE SUPPORTED IN THE RESPONSE***	2022 Total supported: 215,540 people Temporary Collective Shelter: 175,423 people Individual shelter solutions: 78,232 people Settlements: 4,341 people Household NFIs: 87,022 people
	2021 Total supported: 284,879 people Temporary Collective Shelter: 255,341 people Individual shelter solutions: 86,736 people Settlements: 8,002 people Household NFIs: 147,438 people
	2020 Total supported: 122,400 people Collective Shelter: 175,551 people Individual shelter solutions: 63,973 people Settlements: 26,891 people



SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE

The complex crisis that Venezuela has been experiencing since 2015 has triggered the departure of more than 7 million people. More than 6 million of them have arrived in Latin American and Caribbean countries, which has forced governments and humanitarian organizations in the region to coordinate to provide adequate and timely assistance to the Venezuelan refugee and migrant population. The regional shelter sector of the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants in Venezuela (R4V), together with the national and sub-regional shelter sectors (multi-sectors) present in 16 countries, coordinate the humanitarian response of the different actors in each country to the needs for shelter and NFIs.

*The Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V), [online dashboard](#).

**The Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V), [Shelter sector](#).

***These figures represent the sum of the beneficiaries of the activities in each month, so there are duplications among people who received assistance for more than one month.



Migrants disembark from a boat in Lajas Blancas, Panama, after walking across the Darien Gap from Colombia. Thousands of migrants from three continents converge in the Darien Gap looking for a better future.



- 2015:** First migratory movement recorded outside Venezuela.
- 1 Apr 2018:** A sharp increase in population outflows from Venezuela is recorded.
- 2 Apr 2018:** Activation of the Regional Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela by the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN).
- 3 Sep 2018:** First R4V coordination meeting takes place in Panama.
- 4 Oct 2018:** Increased UN response inside Venezuela.
- 5 Dec 2018:** 2019 Strategic Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants in Venezuela (RMRP).
- 6 Oct 2019:** International Solidarity Conference.
- 7 Jan 2020:** Creation of the Regional Multisector for Shelter / NFI / Humanitarian Transportation.

- 8 Apr 2020:** Formal definition of the Multisector Shelter / NFI / Humanitarian Transportation.
- 9 May 2020:** First Donors Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants.
- 10 Dec 2021:** Division of the multisector into Shelter and Humanitarian Transportation, with separate co-leaderships.
- 11 Dec 2022:** Strategic Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants in Venezuela (2023 - 2024).
- 12 Mar 2023:** International Conference of Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their host countries and communities.

CONTEXT

Millions of Venezuelans fled their country in pursuit of safety and better living conditions during 2014 and 2015 as a result of the drop in oil prices, economic, institutional, and political turmoil, and a lack of commodities and services. Since then and until the end of 2022, more than seven million Venezuelan migrants and refugees have departed – most of them on foot and facing dangers such as abuse, assault, and obstacles to access basic necessities. More than six million of them have settled across Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador serving as the primary recipient countries. The region was forced to adjust to the situation and act to effectively manage one of the largest humanitarian and integration crises in recent history.

SITUATION BEFORE THE CRISIS

In the LAC – since the middle of the last century – housing assistance initiatives undertaken by governments and international organizations have mainly focused on a development support response. In most countries of the region, large state programs of a social nature were carried out to facilitate access to adequate housing for the most vulnerable populations. Likewise, efforts were made for the improvement of the most marginal neighborhoods or settlements, which lacked comprehensive urban planning. Emergency responses linked to shelter, the delivery of essential Non-Food Items (NFIs) and the setup, management and coordination of collective shelters were typically linked to one-off disasters – such as earthquakes or hurricanes. In these cases, short term assistance was prioritized and concentrated at the time of the event. An exception



Former Lobitos Temporary Collective Shelter in Iquique, Tarapacá region, with capacity for about 300 people in individual and collective tents. Managed by a private company, financed by local authorities in Tarapaga, Chile.

to that would be the case of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, for which the humanitarian Cluster coordination system was activated in a timely manner, under the regional coordination of REDLAC (Regional Group on Risks, Emergencies and Disasters for Latin America and the Caribbean).

SITUATION DURING/AFTER THE CRISIS

Given the political, economic, and physical disparities in each country in the region, the condition and needs of the displaced Venezuelans vary to some extent depending on where they settled after a journey through waterfronts, rainforest, jungle, and hazardous mountains. In some host countries, there is no established migration policy for regularization and the host populations experience severe shortages recurrently. Since there are so many different shelter-related requirements and needs throughout the region, humanitarian organizations are required to consider a wide range of response initiatives.

The impact of COVID-19 reduced people's capacity to access means of livelihood for covering housing costs or basic food basket items. Family debt escalated alongside the risks of eviction, to the point where the population often settled in unsafe places or became homeless. Likewise, pandemic prevention and mitigation measures by governments and response partners forced a reduction in the number of available spots in collective shelters and the relocation of funds for the fight against COVID 19. Additionally, discrimination and xenophobia in the host countries have also increased following the influx, adding additional challenges for refugees and migrants in accessing adequate housing.

COORDINATION

The Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) was created in 2018 by the United Nations Secretary-General, who designated the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as the entities in charge of coordinating the response to the Venezuelan population. A regional coordination mechanism was consolidated, organized in thematic sectors, and working groups.

The first response plan was drafted in 2018 focusing on four areas of intervention, including direct emergency assistance, protection, socio-cultural integration, and capacity building for host governments. Regional sectorial groups were formed based on the existing capacities of the partners. Between 2019 and 2020, a first Shelter, NFI, Collective Shelter Coordination and Management (CCCM), and Humanitarian Transport sector group was established, splitting later in 2021 from Humanitarian Transportation, and currently covering Shelter, CCCM and NFI. The sector has since coordinated an average of 70+ implementing partners who implemented activities in 16 of the 17 countries in which R4V is active (not including Aruba).

The regional sector structure has been reflected at the subregional, national, and, in some cases, local levels in which the Shelter/CCCM/NFI sector is generally unified into a multi-sector of basic needs for greater resource efficiency.

REGIONAL SHELTER/NFI STRATEGY

Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFIs) have ranked within the top three needs of the Venezuelan refugee and migrant population living in the 17 R4V countries regularly since 2019, as per the needs assessments conducted by various partners. In 2022, shelter and NFI needs increased, and ranked first in terms of humanitarian priorities in Uruguay, and second in Ecuador, Argentina, and Bolivia. The sector strategy is reflected in the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) and focuses on the following four objectives:

Objective 1: Temporary Collective Shelter.

The number of people in transit in the region has continued to increase since 2018. With COVID-19-related movement restrictions, border closures, and the economic crisis, travel conditions for refugees and migrants from Venezuela have deteriorated. As a result, the number of people crossing borders irregularly, traveling with very limited financial resources, and prioritizing survival needs such as food increased significantly. The Temporary Collective Accommodation response consisted of the creation of a network of humanitarian infrastructures that provided short-term shelter for people in transit or who had recently arrived at a destination. Due to COVID-19, the collective shelters decreased their capacity and had to house people for longer periods (up to 3 months in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru).



Centro de Atención Integral (CAI), Maicao, La Guajira, Colombia. The center was closed in September 2022.

The main activities linked to the first objective were: staff training, the management and coordination of centers (CCCM), and the opening and improvement of infrastructure. These centers served as places of rest and recovery for families, and offered comprehensive care, ranging from the delivery of NFIs to the creation of savings plans, legal assistance, and exit strategies for integration into the community.



A host community in El Pasito, Riohacha, Colombia, gave part of its land to a group of organizations to build these houses, used as individual accommodations for the displaced Venezuelan Wayuu population.



A view of a hotel room for the refugee and migrant population in Iquique, Tarapacá, Chile.

Objective 2: Individual Shelter Solutions.

Activities in individual shelter/housing solutions focused on achieving durable solutions for refugees and migrants who were at their destination. Likewise, specific support was offered to family groups in transit in areas where there were no Temporary Collective Shelters or where they were oversaturated. In the latter case, the response consisted of booking hotel rooms/hostels for 1 to 15 nights. In exceptional cases, as in Chile, certain hotels/hostels were rented in their entirety by humanitarian organizations, which was considered part of Objective 1.

As part of the R4V strategy to support the integration of the refugee and migrant population in host communities since 2021, the sector sought to strengthen and increase programs that facilitate access to adequate housing, particularly through rental assistance. The activities proposed in the strategy, among which is the delivery of cash transfers, are based on the global framework of access to housing. This includes issues and actions such as: Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) awareness campaigns, the rights and duties of landlords and tenants, a focus on avoiding situations of abuse and/or exploitation, conflict resolution, and housing improvement interventions, among others.

Objective 3: Community improvement in infrastructure and basic services.

The response itself has demonstrated in recent years the need to reinforce a territorial approach (Area-Based/Settlements) for a better integration of refugee and migrant populations in host communities. These approaches promote social cohesion by improving infrastructure and services collectively, with the aim of boosting socio-economic revival and security in marginalized neighborhoods. In 2021, sector partners reported an increase in informal settlements in the region, particularly in countries such as Colombia or Peru.

Objective 4: Distribution of NFIs.

This objective included the delivery of NFI kits and safe transit kits adapted to the climate of the place of transit (e.g., sun protection or warm clothing) at border points, along the migratory route, and in temporary collective shelters. The kits included items for COVID-19 prevention. In countries where the rental support programs had a longer trajectory, furniture, and other household items were also provided for the individual accommodation.



Delivery of safe transit kits to refugees and migrants in transit through humanitarian trucks in Huaquillas, Ecuador (border with Peru).

IMPLEMENTATION

From the regional level, the response primarily focused on coordination tasks, working hand in hand with the national and subregional structures that make up R4V. The work of this structure is reflected in the development of regional coordination meetings, workshops, and specific training, the compilation and dissemination of lessons learned and good practices, support and technical guidance to sectors and partners upon request, and advocacy and fundraising, among others. These activities made it possible to adequately monitor strategy implementation and identify new needs or changes in the context while enhancing the visibility of the housing situation for the Venezuelan refugee and migrant population.

Operationally, despite funding limitations, the Shelter sector was able to successfully carry out specific activities, focusing mainly on two areas:

- i. Capacity building for the partners managing temporary collective shelters, as well as technical support in the creation of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials.
- ii. Development and delivery of tools and technical guidelines for a better articulation of rental assistance programs in urban areas, and awareness of the importance of accessing adequate housing.

To acquire a holistic look at the shelter and NFI response for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, the sector sought to strengthen intersectoral work – particularly with Communication with Communities (CwC) / Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), Health and WASH and Integration.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Remote work and geographic scope. Regional sector coordination work has covered 16 countries and more than 79 partner organizations, which primarily required working virtually with limited travel to allow for individualized follow-up in different countries. This created certain barriers between the local and regional levels. While technology has helped to minimize challenges, much work remains to be done to achieve light and fast communication between the various levels of coordination and with partners in the field.

Diversity of cultural contexts. The LAC region brings together different cultures, ethnic groups, and contexts – mainly determined by the geographical variety and historical background of the region. Defining a shelter strategy that can capture all characteristics of the context has been a major challenge, particularly to reflect the needs of minority groups such as displaced indigenous populations and culturally adapt the response in each local context.

Exit strategies. Sector partners consistently reported that one of the largest challenges at the programmatic level is the sustainability of the programs, heavily impacted by COVID 19 and the reduction of funding in recent years. This implied, for example, that in Temporary Collective Shelters and settlements in Brazil, the indigenous population was stranded for more than three years. Or in Ecuador, where it was required to accept re entry into temporary collective housing for people who had already left and were renting housing. Or also in Peru, where it has been necessary to design rental programs that assume previous payment debts to the landlords.

Coordination. While humanitarian coordination mechanisms have been set up in many countries dealing with conflicts, disasters, or complex crises – the R4V is not a traditional Cluster system and was first set up at the regional level. A lack of understanding of the coordination architecture and procedures for fundraising and reporting



©Marita Leboeiro / IOM

Informal settlement in Alto Hospicio (Tarapacá, Chile), which houses Venezuelan, Colombian and Bolivian migrants, as well as Chileans.



© Marta Leboeiro / IOM

The town of Canaan Membrillo, Darien, Panama. First community to welcome Venezuelan migrants and refugees upon their arrival in Panama, hosting the Emberaa Wounan indigenous population.

posed major challenges for partners, and for the sector co-leaders who worked to define their role within the structure – linking the field level with the strategic and more political aspect of the response.

Lack of funding for coordination and operations. Funding gaps have severely limited the scope of the response. In 2021, only 21 percent of the funds required by the shelter strategy were received. This was reflected in the lack of available quotas in collective accommodation settings and the difficulties in the sustainability of individual housing programs. Due to funding constraints, it was also difficult for the project to acquire appropriate staffing expertise at various levels of the coordination structure – including in Shelter and Information Management.

Diversity of response phases. The continuous movement of the population, mixed flows, pendular flows, and coexistence among affected people who are at very different stages on their way to achieve durable solutions, emphasized the need for a greater diversity of activities in response proposals.

OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

The strategies defined within the Shelter sector guided activities implemented by partners, allowing a transition in the response focus through phases. In 2019, the work focused on emergency assistance – mainly through the delivery of kits. In 2022, efforts were focused on programs to promote access to adequate housing through a territorial lens such as initiatives linked to the evaluation of the rental market or the strengthening of landlord networks and HLP programs.



© Claudio Trindade / IOM

A temporary collective shelter in Brazil, led by the Brazilian government.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Adaptation to urban contexts.** The traditional humanitarian emergency response of planning camps and delivering tents has lost sense in urban settings, where emergencies are increasing. It is required to update programs and assistance modalities to approaches that would transition from emergency shelters to adequate housing, based on markets through an urban lens.
- **Crosscutting synergies.** Joint solutions should be explored between shelter, HLP, CwC, AAP and integration thematic areas to achieve greater social cohesion and security in marginalized areas hosting vulnerable and crisis-affected populations. For example, access to shelter with the registration of a postal address allows for better socio-economic integration of refugee and migrant families, as it gives the possibility to access regularization, documentation and schooling.
- **Inter-agency coordination.** The work developed in Temporary Collective Shelters is just one of the examples that helped to reflect how coordination mechanisms are operationalized in the field. These are comprehensive assistance centers for refugee and migrant individuals and for the community in which they are established. There are shelters where up to 11 partners work on different response types, as is the case in Ecuador.
- **Local coordination structures.** Mirror structures between the regional, national and local levels help to elevate and raise the awareness about the needs from the field, while allowing the correct operationalization of the response following humanitarian standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

The Regional Shelter Sector looks into 2023–2024 with the hope of continuing to strengthen the response at the urban level, in areas of destination of the refugee and migrant population while gradually reducing the need for emergency response for those in transit.



© Factory / R4V

Children play in a temporary collective shelter in Tapachula, Mexico, 2022.



FURTHER READING ON SHELTER PROJECTS

On Venezuela: [A.10 / VENEZUELA 2020](#)

On Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Region: [A.4 / HAITI 2010](#); [A.39 / ECUADOR 2016](#); [A.3 / HURRICANE SANDY 2012](#)

On coordination: [A.17 / NEPAL 2015–2019](#); [A.16 / UKRAINE 2016–2021](#); [A.7 / NIGERIA 2017–2020](#)