



VENEZUELAN MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS



Photography: Maria Elisa Ramirez Toro

Highlights

- The closure of borders during the Covid-19 emergency and the deepening of the crisis in Venezuela, have led Venezuelans to cross irregular trails (known as trochas) or take dangerous sea routes to flee their country, thus increasing their vulnerability.
- To date, about 130,000 Venezuelans have returned to their country. However, the reactivation of the economy in countries such as Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador has resulted in a decrease of walkers returning to Venezuela and has reactivated the outflows. About 500 Venezuelans are entering Colombia through irregular paths every day.
- A group of 29 Venezuelans, including 16 minors, were deported by the authorities of Trinidad and Tobago on November 22. They were able to return to the Caribbean country after 48 hours through a Supreme Court ruling.

Key figures



5.4 million

Venezuelan migrants and refugees



224,000

Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the Caribbean



500

Venezuelans enter Colombia daily through irregular paths

46,000

recognized as refugees in Brazil based on the Cartagena Declaration





Migratory flows in the context of Covid-19

- By November 12, 2020, approximately **123,000 Venezuelans returned to their country from Colombia due to the difficulties posed by the pandemic**. According to Migration Colombia, in March of this year, a decrease in the number of Venezuelans in Colombia was observed for the first time in five years due to the phenomenon of returnees. In the seven months of the Covid-19 emergency, the number of Venezuelans in Colombian territory has decreased by 6.2%, going from 1,809,872 in March to 1,715,831 in September. However, the reactivation of the economy in Colombia and in other countries in the region like Ecuador and Peru, has resulted in a decrease of requests for return. Also, most of the requests are no longer from extremely vulnerable people. It is estimated that **around 8,000 Venezuelans have returned to their country from Brazil, bringing the number of Venezuelan returnees to approximately 130,000**.
- **The deepening crisis in Venezuela has pushed many of the returned Venezuelans to re-enter Colombia in recent weeks**. Some of them have done so accompanied by one to three family members, as projected by Migration Colombia. Despite the fact that the border crossings with Venezuela remain closed, the entry of Venezuelans through irregular paths has resumed. By November 12, about 5,345 Venezuelans had entered the neighboring country through unauthorized crossings. While it is not possible to make a precise estimation of the number of people entering through irregular paths, **it is estimated that 500 Venezuelans may be entering Colombia on a daily basis**. By means of [Decree 1550 of November 28, 2020](#), Colombia maintains the closing of borders with Venezuela until January 16, 2020.
- The Office of the OAS General Secretariat for the Crisis of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees began **coordination meetings with Lucas Gómez, Colombian Border Manager**, who took office on October 9. The virtual meeting served to discuss the difficulties faced today by Venezuelans who arrive in the neighboring country. The meeting also served to continue promoting protection policies for migrants, especially for those who cross the border through irregular paths, facing adverse weather conditions and the lack of operational shelters along the way. The commitment of this Office is to work in coordination with the Border Management team so that Venezuelans can be integrated into the host communities and guaranteed safe transit throughout the territory. During the meeting, Colombia's commitment to maintain a policy of open arms with the Venezuelan migrant population and to continue fighting xenophobia was ratified.
- With the closing of the borders and the deepening of the crisis in Venezuela, **it is becoming more and more frequent that Venezuelans risk their lives by fleeing in small boats that will take them to some island in the Caribbean**. On November 22, this Office was notified and alerted about the deportation and subsequent disappearance for 48 hours of a group of 29 Venezuelans, among them 16 minors, by the authorities of Trinidad and Tobago. This group of people was able to return to the island after a ruling by the Supreme Court of this country, as well as statements by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The IACHR [urged Trinidad and Tobago "to guarantee the entry into its territory of Venezuelan persons seeking international protection for urgent humanitarian reasons, as well as to respect the principle of non-refoulement"](#), referring to resolutions 2/18 on forced migration of Venezuelan persons, 4/19 on the Inter-American Principles on the Human Rights of All Migrants, Refugees, Stateless Persons and Victims of Trafficking in Persons, and 1/20 on Pandemic and Human Rights in the Americas.
- On November 28, 2020, **the illegitimate regime of Venezuela coordinated with the government of Trinidad and Tobago the deportation of 160 Venezuelans from this country**. This Office alerts on the risk these persons run by being returned to Venezuela under a regime considered illegitimate and [which is accused of committing crimes against humanity](#), as well as generating the biggest humanitarian crisis in the Western Hemisphere.
- **Venezuela's illegitimate regime continues to violate the right to an identity of Venezuelan citizens** by not guaranteeing the issuance of new passports or passport extensions, which extend the validity of this document. The violation of this human right has worsened in the context of the pandemic, preventing many Venezuelans from being able to identify themselves, mobilize and carry out procedures to regularize their migratory status.



Progress in terms of protection in the context of Covid-19

Costa Rica

- By resolution of the General Directorate of Migration and Aliens [established in Gazette No. 271](#), **Costa Rica creates a special asylum category for Venezuelan migrants**. To qualify for the new immigration status, the applicant must show that his refugee claim was denied, that he or she has no criminal record and that he or she has entered the country between January 1, 2016 and March 20, 2020. The Office of the OAS General Secretariat for the Crisis of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees visited Costa Rica at the end of 2019. After holding meetings with the authorities, refugees and different actors in the field, it was recommended to expedite the creation of the special protection category for Venezuelans, as reflected in the report published on January 25, 2020 on the ["Situation of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees in Costa Rica"](#). The measure will also benefit Nicaraguan and Cuban citizens. It will be granted for a period of two years and can be extended for the same period.

Peru

- The government of Peru has **approved special, exceptional and temporary measures to expedite the regularization of the immigration status of foreign citizens in the country**, through Supreme Decree 010-2020 [published in the official newspaper El Peruano](#). This measure benefits Venezuelan citizens whose Temporary Permit to Stay (PTP) has expired and those who arrived in Peruvian territory without passing through border controls, especially those who did so during the pandemic. Venezuelans have until April 19, 2021 to apply for or renew the Temporary Stay Permit Card (CPP), 180 calendar days from the publication of the decree. The Office of the OAS General Secretariat for the Crisis of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees welcomes this measure, which will allow Venezuelan migrants to enter the labor market and the educational system.

Brazil

- The **number of Venezuelans with refugee status in Brazil amounts to 46,000**, after the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) [granted this status to 7,992 Venezuelans \(7,795 adults and 197 minors\) last August 28](#). Since June 2019, Brazil has been granting refugee status to Venezuelans based on the Cartagena Declaration, which extends the concept of refugees to *"persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order"*. Brazil is currently the fifth largest recipient of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Latin America and the Caribbean (262,475) and the first in the number of Venezuelans recognized as refugees. This Office welcomes Brazil's choice of a "simplified asylum" process, which has allowed to accelerate the approval of refugee applications, as encouraged in the November 2019 report on the ["Situation of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees in Brazil"](#).

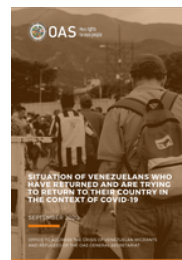


Additional resources



REPORT | "Recommendations to Improve the Situation of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees in the Context of COVID-19"

July 23, 2020
[More information](#)



REPORT | "Situation of Venezuelans who have returned and seek to return to their country in the context of COVID-19"

September 9, 2020
[More information](#)

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