



VENEZUELAN MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS



## Highlights

- The Covid-19 pandemic worsened the Venezuelan refugee crisis in 2020. The number of Venezuelans fleeing decelerated due to border closures and mandatory lockdowns, but these measures increased the difficulties faced by Venezuelan migrants and refugees and, therefore, the challenges of assistance, protection, and integration.
- Venezuelans continue to flee through irregular paths and their vulnerability is increasingly critical when arriving in host countries due to the deepening crisis in Venezuela.
- The remains of 33 Venezuelan migrants, including minors, have been found on the maritime border between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago.
- If the borders are reopened in the first quarter of next year and Venezuela's illegitimate regime remains in power, there could be as many as 7 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees by 2021.

## Key figures



**5.4 million**

Venezuelan migrants and refugees

For 2021, number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees is expected to rise to

**7 million**



**33**

Venezuelans died in shipwreck between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago





## Migratory flows in the context of Covid-19

### 2020 in Review

- Before the pandemic hit, about 5,000 Venezuelans were fleeing daily. **The closure of borders and the lockdown measures throughout the region implied a change in the migration dynamics from March 2020.** The outflow through regular routes stopped, the number of migrants entering through irregular paths increased and, between March and September, **more than 140,000 Venezuelans returned home** from Colombia (134,000) and Brazil (8,000) when they lost their livelihoods in host countries and wanted to be close to their families due to the pandemic.
- **As the Covid 19 crisis brought economic activity to a near-standstill and countries imposed tight restrictions on movement, the difficulties faced by Venezuelan migrants and refugees increased.** Therefore, the challenges of assistance, protection, and integration of this vulnerable population have been exacerbated. Soup kitchens closed, shelters stopped receiving more people, certain humanitarian aids stopped arriving, and some regularization procedures were postponed or canceled. Within this context, this Office [published a document with recommendations to improve the situation of Venezuelan migrants and refugees during the COVID-19 crisis](#) in conjunction with 63 Venezuelan civil society organizations established abroad. Recommendations were indicated in the following areas: health, education, livelihoods, protection, food safety, and living place.
- **Many of the returned Venezuelans were stigmatized and criminalized by the illegitimate regime of Venezuela,** and suffered cruel and degrading treatment upon their return, as evidenced by the report on the ["Situation of the Venezuelans who have returned and seek to return to their country in the context of the COVID-19"](#). Many other Venezuelans had their right to return to their country of origin violated by being stranded for months in different countries around the world without being able to access repatriation flights due to the discretionary closure of airspace by the illegitimate regime.
- **With the reactivation of the economy in several countries of the region, since September the outflow of Venezuelans has resumed and some Venezuelan returnees have begun to re-enter Colombia.** As the borders remain closed, hundreds of Venezuelans are crossing irregular roads on foot (known as *trochas*) or taking dangerous sea routes to flee, which increases their vulnerability, as warned in the [situation report of November 2020](#).
- To date, **it is estimated that between 500 and 700 people may be leaving daily through irregular routes (*trochas*) to Colombia. The number of Venezuelans in Colombia increased for the second month in a row,** after a decrease of 6.2% in the number of Venezuelans from March to September due to the phenomenon of returnees. As of November 2020, Migration Colombia counted 1,721,195 Venezuelan migrants in the country, an increase of 3,843 with respect to last month (0.28%).



A group of Venezuelan migrants who returned home sleep on the floor of a crowded quarantine center in Venezuela (April 2020)



# Migratory flows in the context of Covid-19

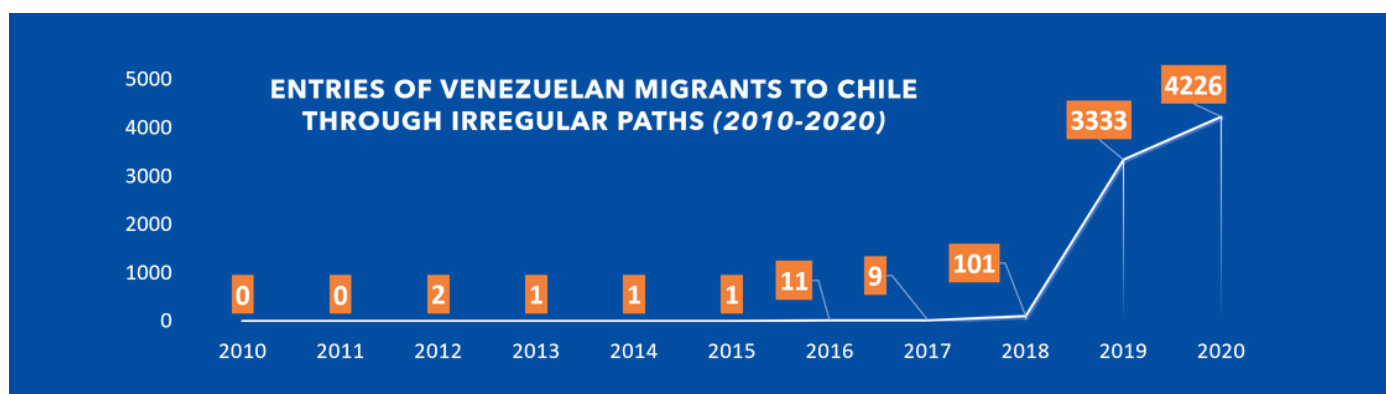
- After the official visits to Chile and Bolivia in March 2020 before the mandatory lockdowns, the Office of the OAS General Secretariat for the Crisis of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees continued its work virtually with the purposes of **generating global visibility to the Venezuelan refugee crisis, denouncing the illegitimate regime of Venezuela as the only one responsible for this unprecedented crisis in the region and articulating policies for the assistance, protection, and integration** of this population across the continent.
- From March to December, 2 country reports were published on the situation of Venezuelans in [Chile](#) and [Bolivia](#), as well as 2 reports within the context of the pandemic, together with the situation reports of November and December. The regional campaign "[I am Venezuelan, I am a Refugee](#)" against discrimination and xenophobia was launched and **nearly 100 testimonies of forced migration were collected in virtual public sessions with migrants and refugees living in Argentina, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Mexico, and Uruguay**. These testimonies were added to the over 400 testimonies gathered by this Office in face-to-face public sessions that took place before the pandemic. Likewise, coordination meetings with the governments of host countries, representatives of the legitimate government of Venezuela, United Nations agencies such as IOM and UNHCR, and other concerned actors continued.



Regional Campaign "I am Venezuelan, I am a Refugee" (June 2020)

## Challenges ahead in 2021

- The closure of borders due to the health emergency and the migratory restrictions imposed by some countries in the region on Venezuelan citizens, together with the deepening crisis in Venezuela, have led to **an increase in the number of entries through irregular paths, which leads to the proliferation of crimes such as human trafficking and smuggling throughout the continent**. The case of Chile is noteworthy, where there is a sustained increase in the number of people who enter through non-authorized routes since the implementation of the Democratic Responsibility Visa, going from 101 entries through irregular paths in 2018 to 3,333 in 2019 and 4,226 by September 2020 [according to data from the Jesuit Refugee Service in this country](#).



Jesuit Refugee Service, JRS(2020)



## Migratory flows in the context of Covid-19

- There are more and more Venezuelans risking their lives by the sea who have disappeared or died trying to reach some island in the Caribbean.** On December 12th, this Office was notified and alerted about the sinking of a boat with an undetermined group of people that left the coast of Venezuela towards Trinidad and Tobago some days before December 12th, the date in which their remains began to appear. The first bodies would have been found 6.3 nautical miles from the city of Güiria, Sucre, within Venezuela's jurisdiction. **A total of 33 bodies have been found to date, including minors. All of them left Venezuela for similar purposes: to meet again with family members living in that country and to flee the complex humanitarian emergency in Venezuela, as well as the collapse of basic services such as water and electricity.** The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) asked Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago ["to immediately implement a serious, impartial, effective investigation into these events"](#), while the United Nations agencies IOM and UNHCR warned in a [joint statement](#) that "this tragic incident is a reminder of the extreme risks of sea journeys and other irregular cross-border movements undertaken by Venezuelan refugees and migrants".
- On December 17, 2020, this Office was informed of the deportation of at least 60 Venezuelans by Trinitarian authorities, after carrying out the deportation of 161 Venezuelan migrants in conjunction with the illegitimate regime of Venezuela last November 28 and returning a group of 29 Venezuelans, including 16 minors, who were later able to go back to the island. This Office asks to remain vigilant on **the risk these persons run by being returned to Venezuela in coordination with a regime which is considered illegitimate and is being accused of committing crimes against humanity**, as well as of generating the largest complex humanitarian crisis in the Western Hemisphere. On December 22, it was learned that the Court of Appeal of Trinidad and Tobago decided that the 16 Venezuelan children who had been returned to Venezuela should remain on the island. After this decision, it is expected that the immigration authorities of that country will proceed so that the children can be reunited with their parents. On December 9, the IACHR issued [Resolution 93/2020](#) granting precautionary measures to six of the 16 migrant children in Trinidad and Tobago.
- Various actors on the ground assure that **the vulnerability of Venezuelan migrants arriving to host countries are increasingly critical** with a significant increase in the number of minors and women who are entering through irregular pathways. This Office **calls for joint efforts throughout the region to strengthen regular border-crossing paths by 2021 and to facilitate protection mechanisms for a population that is fleeing for humanitarian reasons.** Host countries are especially urged to implement flexibilization measures to facilitate the regularization and integration of migrants, taking into account that Venezuelans are also being subjected to the impossibility of accessing their identity documents. If the borders are reopened in the first quarter of next year and Venezuela's illegitimate regime remains in power, **there could be as many as 7 million Venezuelans living outside of their country by 2021.**

THERE COULD BE AS MANY AS 7 MILLION VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES BY THE END OF 2021

**5,000**

Venezuelans were fleeing daily before the pandemic hit



**140,000+**

Venezuelans returned home amid Covid-19 crisis



**500-700**

Venezuelans are crossing each day through irregular paths (trochas) or dangerous sea routes





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

### Colombia

- **Colombian Migration started [a new process of renewing the Special Permits to Stay \(PEP\)](#)** that began on December 21 and will end on April 27, 2021. This measure benefits 132,000 Venezuelans whose document is about to expire, specifically, those who issued their document between December 27, 2018, and April 27, 2019. Likewise, Venezuelan citizens who are in an irregular situation and have stamped their entry to Colombia before August 31, 2020, may issue their PEP until February 15, 2021, as part of [the new PEP issuing process which is expected to benefit more than 100,000 people](#). This Office welcomes these measures as they will allow the number of Venezuelans in an irregular condition to decrease, thus facilitating their insertion into the labor markets and the educational system. According to information provided by Migration Colombia, 118,000 PEPs have been granted and 188,000 have been renewed in 2020.

### Peru

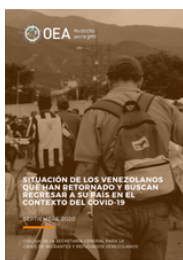
- **The government of Peru facilitates the recruitment of foreign health professionals to strengthen the health response to Covid-19**, through Emergency Decree N 090-2020 [published in the official newspaper El Peruano](#). This exceptional measure [opens the door for thousands of Venezuelan doctors residing in Peru, of the 1,043,460 migrants who have arrived, to join the country's health system](#) without the need to be licensed. According to the norm, for the purposes of hiring them, the only requirement is that the professional degree or title has an apostille or legalization, as the case may be. This Office has encouraged and will continue to encourage the governments of the region to consider flexible measures that facilitate the insertion of Venezuelan migrants and refugees to labor markets, especially health professionals in the context of the pandemic.

### Brazil | Costa Rica

- **The representations of Venezuela in Brazil and Costa Rica, headed by Ambassadors María Teresa Belandria and María Faría respectively, have opened new assistance facilities for Venezuelan migrants and refugees.** Last October, the Venezuelan Embassy in Brazil [inaugurated the first Venezuelan Service Center \(CAV\) in the city of Boa Vista](#) to provide consular advice and assistance to Venezuelans residing in the state of Roraima of the 262,475 Venezuelans that have arrived in this country. For its part, the Venezuelan Embassy in Costa Rica [inaugurated last December 19 "La Casa Venezuela" in San José](#) to provide assistance to Venezuelans in vulnerable conditions of the almost 30,000 who have arrived in this country, an initiative that emerged after the visit of this Office to Costa Rica in November 2019. Learn more about the situation of Venezuelans in these countries in the reports prepared by this Office after the visits to [Brazil](#) and [Costa Rica](#).



## Additional resources



**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](#)



**REPORT | Update #1 to November 2020 on the situation of Venezuelan migrants and refugees**

December 1, 2020  
[More information](#)

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