

Forum of Humanitarian Organisations in Colombia

Public Statement and Call for Action

International Donor's Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants

The 28 humanitarian organisations members of the Forum of Humanitarian Organisations in Colombia assisted **1.6 million Venezuelan** migrants and refugees in 2020.¹ We welcome the Government of Canada and the European Union for their leadership of this Conference. Also, to Governments from donor Countries and Countries in the region that continue to demonstrate their solidarity, the UNHCR and OIM, and humanitarian local, national and international organisations. Most importantly, the Venezuelan migrant and refugee populations.

Colombia receives the highest numbers of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, more than 1.7 million people, four out of every ten Venezuelans leaving their country. Additionally, tens of thousands annually cross Colombia towards other destinations, mostly crossing the borders through irregular routes. Moreover, in bordering departments, 1.8 million people enter and exit in a pendular way. In total, there are around **4.1 million people with humanitarian needs** in Colombia.

Humanitarian needs increased and intensified following the impact of the **Pandemic** on public health and the local economy. As humanitarian organisations, we respond simultaneously with **humanitarian assistance** and **socioeconomic integration** programs for migrants and refugees. We also include in our programmes Colombian **host communities**, themselves in a situation of severe vulnerability.

We are aware of the financial needs of other crises throughout the world. However, we are also realistic. The current **financial resources** for this crisis are **underwhelming and dangerously inadequate**. Even if the Regional Response Plan is wholly funded, each of the 1.8 million people will receive 365 dollars on average, a low figure given the scale and challenges of the needs and compared to similar humanitarian crises.

Our first message for the Donors' community is that **funding contributions should increase as quickly as possible** to reach the total funding and coverage of the Plan. Moreover, and when possible, they should also be planned from a multi-year perspective.

Furthermore, some areas of the Response Plan which we believe need to be prioritised and strengthened are:

- A. Regularisation is the first step to social and economic integration. Unfortunately, around 56% of the Venezuelans in Colombia hold an irregular status. The lack of regularisation represents the first barrier in the integration process. In February 2021, the Colombian government created the **Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelan Migrants**, which grants temporary protection and the possibility of acquiring residency status to Venezuelans. It is crucial to **accompany and support its rollout**. It should be fast and effective, but it also becomes a model that may inspire other countries in the region as a favourable public policy.
- B. **Socioeconomic integration** with local communities is key to avoiding xenophobia. Around 58% of the Venezuelan in Colombian are young between 18 and 39 years old. Therefore, it is necessary to fund

¹ Forum of Humanitarian Organizations in Colombia (April 2021): Response to the Humanitarian Situation in Colombia 2020. <https://datastudio.google.com/s/hvhiQOTABNQ>. Also available at: <http://forohumanitarioongi.org/>

programmes for recognising studies degrees and titles, training on technical skills and competencies for employment or entrepreneurship, labour promotion, or access to financial services and social protection through multi-year programs, including migrants, refugees, and refugees host communities.

- C. Humanitarian assistance must include those **Venezuelans affected by the armed conflict**. An assessment by members of this Forum found out, among 5,415 cases of assisted migrants and refugees, that **6.7% declared being affected by the armed conflict**. Specifically, they had to flee/forcibly displace within Colombia to protect their own lives.² Reports from the field also identified that, in 2020, at least 16 Venezuelan children recruited by organised armed groups. As such, it is crucial to include humanitarian assistance programs and prevention programs tackling forced recruitment, sexual violence, people smuggling and trafficking, situations of aggression, threat, or forced displacement.
- D. **Access to healthcare**. At least 69% of Venezuelans with health needs cannot access healthcare services due to a lack of insurance. This figure includes 70% of those holding a regular status but lacking a labour contract. Therefore, programs to accelerate registrations to the national health system are fundamental, especially for chronic diseases, sexual and reproductive health services, maternal and infant health and Covid-19 (access to tests, isolating possible cases, appropriate care according to the course of the illness and vaccination). It is urgent to build **specific mechanisms to access health services, regardless of the migration status**. As in the rest of the assistance, preventative action and assistance for **gender-based violence and sexual violence** must be included in the health programs.
- E. No successful integration is possible for families without access and the capacity to keep their children in school. Thousands of migrant and refugee minors do not have **access to education** due to a lack of spaces for the over-aged population, lack of teachers, documentation barriers, lack of schooling infrastructure or the armed conflict. If there is no funding, there will be no education.
- F. **Cash transfers** are fast, efficient and provide immediate relief to the most vulnerable populations. In addition, they increase household spending, stimulate local economies, and encourage transparency thanks to the low risk of misuse of the funds. As such, they should represent the **front line of the response**, both for families intending to remain in Colombia and those transiting to other countries. For example, access to dignified transport through cash transfers would reduce the suffering of *caminantes* (people crossing by foot). Also, it is more efficient than using the scarce humanitarian resources and follows the commitments agreed in the World Humanitarian Summit, which promote cash transfers as the front line of intervention.

As a humanitarian civil society, we hope this Conference and the participant will consider our voice and experience. We are committed to providing principled humanitarian assistance, integrating migrants and refugees with host communities and countries of shelter. We hope and expect Donors' pledges in this Conference of Solidarity, offering our partnership to donors countries, Colombia and, especially migrants, refugees and host communities.

Bogotá, June 14, 2021

RESPECTFULLY,

Forum of Humanitarian Organisations in Colombia

² Surveys conducted in the municipalities of Apartadó, Bogotá, Carepa, Maicao, Manaure, Montería, Riohacha, Uribe, Turbo (Colombia).
Double Affection: Migrants and Refugees.