

Responding to the Health Needs of Venezuelan Migrants & Refugees in Colombia

Project HOPE's Strategy in Response to the Regional Venezuela Humanitarian Crisis

Photo credit: Charlie Cordero

Quick Facts

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS:

Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario Municipalities, Norte de Santander department

BENEFICIARY POPULATION:

Venezuelan migrants & refugees and Colombian returnees

PRIMARY INTERVENTION AREAS:

- Access to health services
- GBV service strengthening
- Access to laboratory services
- Supporting local health authorities

Project HOPE is currently addressing the health needs of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia. As the regional humanitarian crisis evolves, so does HOPE's response to ensure priority health and humanitarian needs are being met.

Situation Overview

More than three million people have fled Venezuela as a result of the ongoing humanitarian, political, and economic crisis. While the growing crisis has affected countries throughout the Latin America & Caribbean region, Colombia has experienced the greatest burden, receiving more than 50 percent of all Venezuelan refugees and migrants. More than 5,000 refugees, migrants, and Colombian nationals seeking reintegration cross the border into Colombia daily. The number of those staying in the country has increased more than 2,500 percent since 2015 reaching 1,263,355 by end of September 2018, according to IOM reports. This number is expected to increase by more than one million by the end 2019.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimate that 94% of all Venezuelan migrants and refugees cross into the Northeastern part of Colombia by passing through Venezuela's Táchira State. According to IOM statistics, 73% of those cross over the Simón Bolívar International Bridge – one of the seven formal border crossing points connecting the city of San Antonio del Táchira in Venezuela with the small town of La Parada in Colombia. However, there are also numerous informal border-crossing points, which are often dangerous or patrolled by non-state armed forces, putting migrants and refugees at high-risk of violence and exploitation.

Priority Health & Protection Needs

While Colombia has made a significant effort to respond to the needs of migrants and refugees, the mass influx, particularly in the Norte de Santander department, is overwhelming humanitarian efforts and health and social services. More than half of the arrivals in Colombia have irregular status, leaving them without rights and access to services as well as highly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Health facilities have also noted a significant increase in the number of gender-based violence (GBV) cases.

Priority needs for Venezuelan migrants and refugees, as well as Colombian returnees, include access to:

- Health services, including laboratory services and medicines;
- Protection services such as confidential and appropriate Gender-based violence (GBV) services, including anti-discrimination and legal support;
- Access to livelihoods and food security; and
- Safe transportation, lodging, and water and sanitation.

As the number of migrants and refugees entering Colombia continues to increase, so does the need for broader response and support from both the national and international communities.



Women waiting for health services at the Hospital Erasmo Meoz in Cúcuta. Photo credit: Charlie Cordero



United Nations Response Strategy for Colombia

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is currently leading the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela along with the IOM. To facilitate further coordination, UNHCR recently released the [2019 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](#) (RMRP).ⁱ The RMRP is a coordinated roadmap for all partners and responding entities, detailing how to best address humanitarian needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, as well as how to secure their social and economic inclusion in the communities that receive them. It includes multiple action plans for the most affected countries in effort to provide tailored approaches and objectives specific to each context.

The action plan for Colombia recognizes the Government of Colombia as the lead responder and aims to establish and reinforce links with the government's response plan. The plan aims to reach approximately 640,000 of the current 1,114,266 migrant and refugees, focusing on four priority areas:

1. **Direct emergency assistance** under four sectors: basic health assistance; food security and nutrition; shelter; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).
2. **Protection** including legal services, ensuring access to documentation, and protection mechanisms, particularly for at-risk populations like children, women, and survivors of GBV.
3. **Socio-economic and cultural integration** for Venezuelan migrants and refugees staying in country and Colombian returnees, including long-term access to services such as healthcare, education, and clean water.
4. **Capacity strengthening** for both national and local institutions, in comprehensively managing the arrival of migrants, refugees, and Colombian returnees.

An estimated \$315 million USD will be required for partners and responding entities to effectively implement these interventions in Colombia. This figure for Colombia represents more than 42 percent of the RMRP budget for the entire region.

Project HOPE's Response

Project HOPE is currently on-the-ground in Colombia, coordinating with key stakeholders and working to provide critically needed health services to Venezuelan refugees and migrants and Colombian returnees. Our basis of operations is in Cúcuta in the Norte de Santander department, with current activities extending to Villa del Rosario and nearby border communities including La Parada and Santa Barbara.

All of HOPE's response activities in Colombia align with the Colombian Government and RMRP priorities, particularly under the areas of Direct Emergency Assistance and Protection. Our key focus areas for intervention activities include:

- **Increasing access to health services** for migrants and refugees through staff surge support at local hospitals and health outposts.
- **Strengthening GBV services** through increasing local capacity to provide confidential and appropriate care and case management for survivors.
- **Ensuring access to laboratory testing** for infectious diseases such as TB through sponsorship and coordination with national TB program.
- **Supporting local health authorities** to coordinate an integrated response to the needs of migrants and refugees by actively participating in the health, nutrition, and protection/GBV coordination cluster meetings.

Since arriving in Colombia, the need for interventions under these focus areas has been emphasized through our direct contact with health facilities, responding entities, and Venezuelan migrants and refugees.

Project HOPE is continuing to expand our intervention strategies in Colombia in direct coordination with the Colombian government, international stakeholders, and local authorities and organizations.

ⁱ UNHCR. "Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela." December 2018.

<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2019%20RMRP%20Venezuela%20%28December%202018%29.pdf>