

# Forgotten Crises

## Displacement in Latin America

Fact Sheet | March 2023

### Introduction

As humanitarian needs become increasingly prevalent worldwide, longstanding crises often lose global attention, remain unaddressed, and are eventually considered “forgotten” altogether. European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations defines **forgotten crises** as:

“severe, protracted humanitarian crisis situations where affected populations are receiving no or insufficient international aid and where there is no political commitment to solve the crisis, due in part to a lack of media interest.”<sup>1</sup>

In this severely underfunded humanitarian response, displaced Venezuelans, host communities, and organizations such as HIAS are working to address critical protection risks and vulnerabilities.<sup>2</sup> This factsheet draws on HIAS’ experiences within this context and offers insight based on our work within the region in response to the 2024 European Humanitarian Forum’s (EHF) theme of prioritizing forgotten crises and bridging the funding gap.

### Context and Response

In Latin America, Venezuelans are facing protracted displacement, and millions have left the country since 2016.<sup>3</sup> No decrease in displacement is foreseeable in 2024 as people continue enduring intense migration routes to secure their futures. The majority of these displaced people are hosted throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), particularly in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.<sup>4</sup> In response to this multifaceted crisis, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) co-lead the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants

from Venezuela (R4V) which partners with hundreds of local non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations to coordinate efforts with 17 countries that host Venezuelan refugees and migrants across LAC.<sup>5</sup>

The R4V utilizes a Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis (an evaluation of the vulnerabilities and needs of refugees and migrants to provide insight into the situation and challenges) and a Refugee and Migrant Response Plan<sup>6</sup> (RMRP) to promote consistent response and fundraising. Despite these efforts, the RMRP has faced a significant decline in funding over the years. In 2023, the plan reached its lowest point, securing only 21 percent (\$363 million) of the \$1.7 billion required to execute the RMRP’s assistance activities, which was determined through needs assessments, the number of people being targeted, and 248 R4V partner organizations.<sup>7</sup> This lack of international funding, in part due to multiple competing crises, has contributed to limitations in the provision of essential services and opportunities for sustained integration. The lack of integration opportunities in the region, compounded by economic setbacks and political crises within host countries, has led to new displacements and secondary movements for some Venezuelans and locals.<sup>8</sup>

Venezuelan refugees and migrants have been overshadowed by other global crises, and the prolonged nature of the crisis caused “donor fatigue” to creep in. Investments have gone down every year, with 2023 having the lowest investments to date as interest declines and donor attention moves toward emerging issues.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, high-level pledging conferences have encountered diminished interest among major donors.<sup>10</sup> Given the mixed movements affecting other countries, donors are requesting responses shift focus to a full LAC regional approach, but funding remains scarce for the millions experiencing prolonged displacement.

# LAC by the Numbers

7.7M

**7.7 million Venezuelans**, at minimum, have left the country since 2016, making it one of the largest displacement situations globally.<sup>11</sup>

4M

**4 million** of those displaced in **17 LAC** countries face continued humanitarian needs as determined by the RV4 needs analysis;<sup>12</sup> including protection, livelihood, education, and food needs.<sup>13</sup>

500K

**Over 500,000 refugees and migrants** crossed the dangerous Darién Gap in 2023, a historic high.<sup>14</sup>

Over half of this total were Venezuelans.<sup>15</sup> Some came directly from their home country, while others moved on from previous host countries such as Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador.



## HIAS' Impact with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants

HIAS has been operating within the LAC region for 20 years and provides protection and services to Venezuelans in Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, as well as in other LAC country destinations. Despite the limited resources and attention, in 2023, **HIAS provided protection and services to 264,000 people**, including Venezuelans, Colombians, Haitians, and the host communities. In 2023, HIAS also coordinated emergency responses in Ecuador and Peru to support relief efforts due to natural disasters, impacting thousands of people, including Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

- HIAS administers interventions through a **cross-border approach** aimed at increasing response across the displacement cycle. This approach had a special focus on **gender-based violence (GBV) prevention, mitigation, and response services, which 27,000 people received, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), which impacted 29,000 people.** This innovative model has

been in place across the borders of Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador for the past three years and has proven effective in reaching people in transit.

- HIAS and these three host countries also support and implement initiatives to facilitate access to regularization programs and asylum through **protection information sessions, payment of fees, legal counseling, and representation.** More than **37,000 people were assisted** through these initiatives.
- HIAS implements programs designed to **foster economic inclusion and local integration opportunities** with the aim of lifting individuals out of poverty, assisting in finding employment and starting businesses, enhancing protection during emergencies, and achieving self-reliance.<sup>16</sup> These programs include a Graduation Model Approach,<sup>17</sup> which includes provisions of cash; technical, vocational, and financial literacy; training and coaching; and business advisory support. HIAS

also supports a regional Entrepreneurship School with a Gender Lens, equipping refugees and host communities with skills training, knowledge, and the capital required to start and own a business. These programs have **benefited approximately 24,000 people**.

- In Ecuador and Colombia, HIAS supports the implementation of higher education scholarships, known as “Dafi Scholarships,” through a program run through UNHCR. These scholarships are funded by Germany and Denmark and benefit local communities to foster inclusion in the educational system.<sup>18</sup>
- Through a coordinated approach, **HIAS advocates for a more welcoming protection environment for all refugees and migrants, promoting safer pathways and opportunities in host countries.** HIAS played a significant role as a founder and co-lead of the Regional Protection Sector of the R4V Platform from 2018 to 2022 and is involved in other key coordination mechanisms throughout the region. HIAS shares recommendations with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights<sup>19</sup> and advances the implementation of the Los Angeles Declaration (a comprehensive initiative to address migration and protection in the Western Hemisphere by promoting regular pathways for migration and international protection, humane migration management, and a coordinated response).<sup>20</sup>

## Recommendations: Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants

Given HIAS’ years of experience in the LAC region and in line with the 2024 European Humanitarian Forum’s objectives of highlighting forgotten crises and reducing the funding gap, HIAS presents the following recommendations for improved and continued impact:

- The European Union (EU) and Member States should increase funding for humanitarian programs supporting displaced Venezuelans and host communities, with a focus on long-term development initiatives, to support sustainable protection services, economic inclusion, and integration possibilities.
- EU diplomatic actors should encourage LAC governments to enhance the role of existing coordination mechanisms such as the Quito Process, a joint forum to promote information exchange and

discuss a regional strategy for responding to the Venezuelan migration crisis.<sup>21</sup> They should also encourage the use of new processes to find solutions, such as the Cartagena +40 process, a consultative process hosted by UNHCR to design a new 10-year strategy and commemorate the Cartagena Declaration’s renewed commitment to support and protect refugees and displaced and stateless people.

- The EU should engage other donors and the international community on comprehensive, multilateral strategies that emphasize responsibility sharing to meet the needs of refugees and migrants and host communities.
- EU diplomatic actors should promote the use of the Los Angeles Declaration<sup>23</sup> as a basis for cooperation to encourage security and stability, improve access to public and private services, and advance refugee and migrant rights in the LAC region.

To shift attention and resources toward underfunded and neglected crises, key donors must step up to promote a more equitable distribution of aid. The EU’s commitment to allocating at least 15 percent of its initial annual humanitarian budget to overlooked and forgotten crises is good practice. Yet, to preserve the EU’s standing as a global, principled donor, more must be done to secure sustained, predictable, and flexible funding.

## About the Center

The HIAS Center for Refugee Policy seeks to advance the rights of refugees and displaced people across the globe by publishing research and policy analysis, generating new policy-relevant ideas, and bringing new voices to the public conversation. The Center leverages HIAS’ global presence and over a century of experience to provide practical responses and policy solutions to the most pressing challenges concerning displaced populations.

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## Endnotes

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