Preliminary Report on the Venezuelan Migrant and Refugee Crisis in the Region

By the OAS Working Group
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First Report on the Venezuelan Migrant and Refugee Crisis in the Region

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Executive Summary

The ongoing Venezuelan migrant and refugee crisis is, without doubt, unprecedented in the region. As of end-2018 at least 3.4 million Venezuelans, more than 10 percent of the country’s population, have fled to different destinations in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹ They have left behind a Venezuela crippled by severe problems, including shortages of food and medicine, hyperinflation, generalized violence, existence or perception of social control, and widespread violations of human rights and crimes against humanity.

The majority of Venezuelan migrants and refugees are in Colombia (1.2 million),² Peru (700,000),³ Chile (265,800),⁴ Ecuador (220,000),⁵ Argentina (130,000),⁶ and Brazil (100,000)⁷ among other countries in the region. In percentage terms, Venezuelans now make up a large portion of the populations of several Caribbean countries. In the case of Curaçao, for example, the 26,000 Venezuelans registered there represent 15 percent of the island’s total population, while the 16,000 Venezuelans in Aruba are equivalent to 10 percent of its population.⁸

⁴ Department of Foreign Nationals and Migration of Chile. January 2019.
The high flows of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, who, according to data for 2018, amount to approximately 5,000 people per day or around 200 people per hour, travel in conditions of high vulnerability. Many of the fleeing migrants and refugees suffer from malnutrition, as well as diseases such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, and malaria, among others, which at one time had been eradicated from Venezuela and the region. The vulnerabilities of many of these Venezuelan migrants and refugees, who come in all ages, have been addressed for the most part by national and local authorities in the receiving countries. Colombia, for example, administered around 600,000 vaccination doses in 2018 alone, according to official figures from the Ministry of Health. Over that same period of time more than 115,000 Venezuelans received emergency medical care.9

Venezuelans also migrate in precarious economic circumstances. Independent reports say that more than 40 percent—by United Nations’ estimates, at least 1.3 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees—suffer from nutritional problems.10 The phenomenon of the so-called “walkers” (Venezuelans who decided to travel thousands of kilometers across the continent by foot to reach another country) is a sign of the desperation to escape, as well as revealing the high economic vulnerability that prevents them from making the journey by conventional means of transport that for many of them are simply unaffordable.11

This migrant and refugee crisis constitutes a major challenge for the region and all OAS member states. However, it would be remiss not to draw attention to the welcome that Venezuelans have received from the region’s governments and societies, in a demonstration of the prevailing Latin American fellowship. In spite of the difficulties that this episode has created for

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10 Lederer, Edith M. “UN says an estimated 2.3 million people have fled Venezuela.” Associated Press, August 14, 2018, https://www.apnews.com/ddf44515d5a6413b854d30e01b524d9f.
receiving countries, the challenge presents an immense opportunity for prosperity for all those involved in the process, especially receiving communities. That will depend on the region’s ability to keep working together to offer a hemispheric response that maximizes the benefits of this migration phenomenon while at the same time mitigating its possible costs.

This preliminary report contains part of the analysis performed by the OAS Working Group to Address the Regional Crisis Caused by Venezuela Migrant and Refugee Flows, the ultimate objective of which is to pave the way for a regional agreement to provide assistance and protection to Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the Americas. The report describes some of the determinants of the migrant and refugee crisis that the Working Group’s experts consider most significant, based on available evidence, their own findings, two visits by the Working Group to Cúcuta, and evidence gathered from a variety of sources.

Our main conclusions are that the primary determinants of the mass migration are the humanitarian crisis, the generalized violence, and a repressive system that produces widespread violations of human rights. The latter is consistent with what was documented by an independent panel of experts, which concluded that there was sufficient evidence to prove that acts to which Venezuela’s civilian population had been subjected since at least as far back as February 2014 constituted crimes against humanity. That evidence, according to the independent experts, satisfies the standard of proof required by Article 53 of the Rome Statute.¹²

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Secondly, the flow of Venezuelan migrants is similar in magnitude and speed to other episodes that led to massive migrant and refugee crises in other parts of the world which resulted from armed conflicts, such as in Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, and South Sudan. The characteristics of the flow are not those typically associated with purely economic migrations.

Thirdly, the region’s countries need the financial support of the international community on a much bigger scale than the generous contributions made so far. International financial assistance is critical to enable national and local governments in host countries to make the necessary infrastructure investments and provide the services that migrants along with all the residents of receiving communities need, since that will allow the optimal integration of Venezuelans into those communities and local labor markets.

The rest of the report is organized as follows: the first part takes a detailed look at what the Working Group considers the main determinants of the mass migration of Venezuelans in recent years, based on data and evidence analyzed by the Working Group itself and by other independent sources. The report then examines the characteristics of the flows of Venezuelan migrants and refugees observed and the international financing needed to assist migrants and receiving communities.
Methodology

To prepare its first report, the Working Group to Address the Regional Crisis Caused by Venezuela Migrant and Refugee Flows visited the Colombian border with Venezuela on three occasions, specifically in the departments of Norte de Santander (Cúcuta and Villa del Rosario) and La Guajira (Maicao and Rioacha). The first visit was made in the company of the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro; the second, with 17 missions of OAS member states; and the third, during the international effort to take humanitarian aid into Venezuela. The Working Group also participated in the meeting in Quito. Complementing the activities on the field, the report also draws on the results of a public consultation with civil society organizations, the Working Group’s own investigations, and contributions made by the Group’s members at its periodic meetings.

The aims of the report are to describe a large part of the determinants of the forced migration of millions of Venezuelans, estimate the number of people that may be forced to leave against their will if the situation continues to deteriorate, and set the dimensions of this migrant and refugee crisis in a global context relative to other crises. In the next report, after conducting other on-site visits, the Working Group will put forward recommendations for governments to provide assistance and protection to Venezuelan migrants and refugees, as well as describing their situation in receiving countries.

The Working Group to Address the Regional Crisis Caused by Venezuela Migrant and Refugee Flows comprises David Smolansky (coordinator), Gastão Alves (co-coordinator) and four independent experts: Dany Bahar, Cyntia Sampaio, James Hollifield, and Francisca Vigaud-Walsh.
Determinants of the migrant and refugee crisis

The economic collapse in Venezuela

The deep economic recession coupled with rampant hyperinflation are part of a crisis that includes serious shortages of food, medicines, and basic inputs, as well as a highly unpredictable supply of electricity and water services. According to numerous testimonies, the humanitarian conditions that Venezuelans have to endure are one of the causes of the mass migration from the country.

To a large extent the humanitarian crisis is the result of a procyclical economic policy as well as an enormous amount of control and regulation of the economy and the private sector. Under the administration of Hugo Chávez, a massive increase in imports was accompanied by an unsustainable accumulation of external debt.\(^\text{13}\) In the short-term the strategy proved effective for a time at improving the country’s economic and social indicators, including the poverty and inequality rates. However, the effect was only temporary.

In 2014, with the fall in world oil prices, Venezuela was faced with a foreign exchange revenue deficit that led to a massive 70 percent cut in imports and, in the absence of other sources of external financing, a vast expansion in monetary supply by which the regime hoped to cover its high fiscal spending bill.\(^\text{14}\) Already strangled by unending regulations and controls on prices and access to foreign exchange, the private sector was powerless to fill the void created by the cuts in imports. Indeed, Venezuela’s gross domestic product (GDP) has shrunk by nearly 50 percent since 2013.\(^\text{15}\) That explains the huge shortage of food, medicines, and basic goods, which have stopped being imported. In parallel, monetary expansion led to hyperinflation, which has


destroyed, and continues to destroy, the value of Venezuelans earnings and savings. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated that hyperinflation topped 1,370,000 percent by end-2018 which means that nominal prices are doubling every 26 days.\(^{16}\)

The 2014 drop in oil prices may have made the crisis worse but it was not its primary cause. On the contrary, the humanitarian crisis is the direct upshot of economic policies implemented between 1999 and the present time. If oil prices were the main cause of the crisis, an improvement would have been seen in Venezuelan living standards with the moderate recovery of the oil price in early 2016. However, the humanitarian situation in the country continues to worsen, partly because of the implosion of the country’s oil-producing capacity, which fell from 3.5 million barrels per day (mbpd) in 1999 to just over 1 mbpd at end-2018.\(^ {17}\) To some degree, the country’s worsening shortages can be attributed to the regime’s decision to service for years the overwhelming foreign debt with international banks, at the expense of plowing oil revenues into the country’s productive sector so that they could continue importing intermediate and final goods in the form of food and medicines.

Despite the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the country, the regime remains unable or unwilling to adopt suitable policies to improve the situation. On August 20, 2018, the regime announced that it was knocking five zeros off the currency, the “Strong Bolivar” (Bolivar Fuerte), and creating the “Sovereign Bolivar” (Bolivar Soberano), along with other measures, such as an increase in the minimum wage and the elimination of a number of gasoline price subsidies. Unless significant corrections are made to the profound distortions in the Venezuelan economy, the situation will continue to grow worse.

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The situation in Venezuela has turned into a complex humanitarian emergency and is perhaps the worst crisis in the modern history of the Western Hemisphere. Today, 87 percent of Venezuelan households live below the national poverty line, compared with fewer than 50 percent in 1996. Extreme poverty is at over 60%.

That is reflected by a startling statistic: more than half the population has lost 11 kg in weight. Independent sources say that 8 in 10 Venezuelans said that they had reduced their calorie intake because they did not have sufficient food at home, while approximately one third of Venezuelans eat fewer than three meals a day with a low calorie and protein content.

Health indicators have also declined dramatically. Venezuelans in socioeconomically vulnerable circumstances used to rely on the public health system but the crisis has eliminated that possibility. Drastic changes in indicators relating to child and maternal mortality are usually a reliable metric of the performance of national health systems. In the case of Venezuela, independent sources say that the child mortality rate has risen by at least 30 percent, and maternal mortality, by 65 percent since the regime stopped reporting health results in 2015.

Patients with chronic illnesses, such as cancer, kidney disease, or diabetes, cannot get the medicines they need to take regularly.

A recent survey of Venezuela’s public health system revealed that hospitals lack 88 percent of medicines and 79 percent of medical and surgical materials. Essential medical diagnostic equipment is also in short supply: over 90 percent of radiology and tomography units at public health facilities are inoperative. The survey also revealed that not a single laboratory in the public health system is fully functional because of a lack of reagents. At the same time, 53 percent of operating rooms are unusable and 70.7 percent of emergency rooms in the public health system are deficient or function intermittently. Many of these shortcomings are caused by a lack of inputs and the uncertain supply of water and electricity in the country.

**Persecution and generalized violence**

Systematized persecution by different methods is another major factor behind the mass migration from Venezuela.

Between January 2014 and November 2018, 12,949 people were arbitrarily detained in Venezuela. Of those, 7,512 were placed under criminal investigation and are the subject of noncustodial precautionary measures, including the requirement to appear periodically before authorities, house arrest, and a prohibition from making statements to the media, among others. On February 4, 2019, Foro Penal, an NGO, denounced that there were 966 political prisoners in Venezuela. That figure changes constantly because of the “revolving door effect”

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described by Foro Penal as part of the regime’s practice of constantly jailing and releasing prisoners.\textsuperscript{23}

Aside from incarceration (or forced exile), significant attacks and widespread, systematic abuses are also committed against the civilian population, as documented by an independent panel of experts convened by the Organization of American States. The report documents evidence of murders, incarceration, torture, rape, and other forms of sexual violence, persecution, and forced disappearance that demonstrate a pattern evidencing that these crimes are perpetrated by the government. According to the report, many of these repressive acts can be categorized as crimes against humanity in accordance with Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court based on sufficient evidence to satisfy the standard of proof required by Article 53 of the Rome Statute.\textsuperscript{24}

It is reasonable to conclude that there is a State policy of anyone who disagrees with the Maduro regime being systematically persecuted and made victims of abuse at the hands of the State’s various security agencies, such as the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) and the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN). The nongovernmental organizations Foro Penal and Human Rights Watch documented 53 cases of repression between April and September 2017, in which at least 232 individuals were subjected to physical and psychological abuse with the purpose of incriminating and compromising other persons. Those NGOs determined that the GNB and SEBIN perpetrated the majority of those abuses. They also concluded that torture was used in several of those cases.\textsuperscript{25}


Moreover, as has been the case at other times in history, generalized violence in a country is a significant factor in mass migrations. Our conclusion is that this may also be the case of Venezuela, where there has been a gradual increase in homicide rates, general criminality, and impunity, to the extent of disrupting public order throughout the country.

According to a Gallup study, Venezuela is the most unsafe country in the world. The study found that 42 percent of Venezuelans reported having had property or money stolen in 2017; only 17 percent of Venezuelans felt safe walking alone at night and just 24 percent expressed confidence in the police.²⁶

According to the Venezuelan Violence Observatory there were a total of 23,047 homicides in Venezuela in 2018, which corresponds to a homicide rate of 81.4 per 100,000 inhabitants. That rate is the highest in the region and one of the highest worldwide.²⁷ Moreover, according to the same NGO, the number of homicides increased from over 5,000 in 1999 to 23,000 in 2018. In all, there have been 333,039 recorded murders since 1999, of which 130,997 were registered between 2014 and 2018 (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1. Total homicides in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999-2018)

Source: Observatorio Venezolano de la Violencia

Compounding this situation is the fact that criminal activity enjoys a high level of impunity: According to Amnesty International, more than 90 percent of crimes in the country are not prosecuted. What is more, that organization has determined that “Venezuela is responsible for violations of the right to life and physical integrity of hundreds of victims.”

Social control and restriction of liberties

The existence or even the very perception of tools imposed and used by the regime to restrict Venezuelans’ liberties also seems likely to be a significant factor behind the mass exodus of migrants from Venezuela.

The use of ways of exerting social control in order to restrict individual freedoms is a common feature of authoritarian regimes. In particular, one characteristic of instruments of social

28 Amnesty International. This is no way to live: Public security and right to life in Venezuela, September 2018
https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR5389752018ENGLISH.PDF,
control is to ensure that the basic needs of individuals depend exclusively on the will of the authorities, not on their own endeavors. Depending on completely opaque authorities for access to basic services—and in the case of the most vulnerable populations, to social programs that supply basic needs, such as housing, health care, and food—generates a perverse system of incentives whereby the beneficiaries have to show their support for the ruling party at the ballot box or in other ways in order to secure their livelihoods.

In Venezuela, perhaps the most visible example of the existence of social control mechanisms, and even of the perception thereof, is the “homeland card” (carnet de la patria). The homeland card is an identity document linked to an automated payment system necessary to access social programs, such as food, medicine, and fuel subsidies, housing, special bonuses, university placements, jobs, and even the pensions of beneficiaries of the Venezuelan Social Security Institute, among other things.\(^29\) The imposition of this new added requirement in order to receive benefits to which Venezuelans are entitled by the mere fact of being citizens, as well as being required to carry an identity card, have been viewed from the outset as tools of social control for several reasons.

To begin with, because of the strong party-political rhetoric—favorable to the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)—in all pronouncements by the authorities and official documents in relation to the homeland card. Official websites of the Venezuelan regime describe the homeland card in partisan and ideological language as “a new instrument of the revolution that has advanced protection, social equality, solidarity, socialism, happiness, and peace for the whole population.”\(^30\) Furthermore, the design of the homeland card features the silhouetted profile of former president Hugo Chavez, the founder and ideological leader of the PSUV.


Obtaining a homeland card, therefore, implicitly means an affiliation to the ruling party in order to access social services.

Secondly, there is increasing evidence that the regime is using the homeland card to exert direct control over the population. For example, numerous testimonies say that the homeland card has been used to check how citizens voted in the 2017 and 2018 elections.\(^\text{31}\) It is thought that there were “red points” outside polling places on the election days to verify if carnet holders turned out to vote. In fact, on April 28, 2018, Nicolás Maduro announced his intention to reward those who registered at “red points” with their homeland card after casting their ballot on May 20.\(^\text{32}\) Reports indicate that several carnet holders received text messages from Nicolas Maduro thanking them for their support.\(^\text{33}\)

The most revealing evidence of the use of the homeland card as a social control tool was documented in an extensive article by the Reuters international news agency on the subject in November 2018.\(^\text{34}\) The article documents the role of the Chinese telecommunications company ZTE Corp, which the Venezuelan regime hired for US$70 million to build a database and create a mobile payment system for use with the homeland card. ZTE is known for developing technologies used in the smart cards issued as part of a “social credit system” by the Government of the People’s Republic of China, which grades citizens based not only on their financial solvency, but also on their political activity. Poor grades can result in a ban from using public transport or the expulsion of family members from certain schools. ZTE is also known for providing services and equipment to authoritarian governments in countries such as Iran and North Korea, including systems to spy on their citizens’ communications.


In the case of the homeland card, the Reuters article describes how the system stores details on each cardholder, such as birthdays, family information, employment and income, property owned, medical history, state benefits received, presence on social media, membership of political parties, and electoral participation history. The capture of information on each citizen on a single database that includes electoral participation as well as eligibility for welfare programs, suggests that the homeland card is being used or could be used as a tool of social control to enable discriminatory access to state programs and services based on political affiliation. In fact this tool has direct consequences on citizens in all areas. For example, testimonies collected indicate that citizens who are not cardholders are denied access to medicines needed to treat chronic conditions.\(^{35}\)

Based on available evidence and existing testimonies, in our opinion the increase in the use—or simply the perceived existence—of tools to exert social control strikes fear and intimidates the Venezuelan population, forcing them to express partisan preferences in order to survive. Therefore, we consider it an important determinant of the forced migration.

**The flow of Venezuelan migrants and financing for receiving countries**

As a result of the humanitarian, economic, social, and political crisis in Venezuela, in 2015 the mass migration of Venezuelans accelerated. Based on the two visits of the Working Group to the border at Cúcuta, informal conversations with Venezuelan migrants and refugees, and a comparative analysis of data, we surmise that, given its

magnitude and speed, the Venezuelan migration is not economic in nature. In general, the Venezuelan migrant and refugee crisis has many characteristics in common with other historical events that led to forced displacement, a conclusion also shared by the World Bank (2018).36

Figure 2 shows the cumulative total of refugees or people in refugee-like situations per year since the start of different crises, based on United Nations data.37 A historical comparison with other refugee crises without taking the duration of each crisis into account found that in terms of total numbers Venezuela is the source of the third highest number of migrants and refugees.

Figure 2. Total number of refugees and people in refugee-like situations, by place of origin and year since the crisis began (cumulative)


It is important to note that the number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees recorded by the United Nations in its most recent report only counted those in Latin America and the Caribbean; therefore, the figures are lower than the total number of Venezuelans at destinations worldwide.38

A comparison between the number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees with those from other current and past refugee crises around the world requires a number of clarifications. First, it is true that not everyone in the different crises that appear in Figure 2 has official refugee status in their receiving countries. However, those numbers correspond to the category referred to by the United Nations as refugee-like.39 Second, the chart only counts individuals with refugee-like status that fled to a foreign country and, therefore, excludes internally displaced people. In the case of Venezuela there is no evidence of internal displacement, in contrast to other crises reflected in the chart (and others not shown, such as that of Colombia, with large numbers of internally displaced people). Third, the comparison intentionally uses absolute figures and not relative terms in order to avoid an arbitrary selection, so as to standardize the numbers, thereby preventing their manipulation. In light of those arguments, we consider the visualization relevant and informative.

Figure 2 describes how the refugee crisis in Syria that began in 2011 reportedly resulted in 6.3 million people displaced outside their country of origin by 2017. Likewise, the war in Afghanistan, which began in 1978, would eventually produce some 6.3 million migrants and refugees 11 years later, who reached other countries. In the case of Venezuela, since 2015—in just three years—the number of migrants and refugees has passed 3.4 million, taking into account only destination countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to United Nations estimates. It is important to note that the

speed at which the total number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees has grown is as high as that seen in the first years of the Syrian crisis.

In that sense, the graph also shows consistently in all the cases analyzed that the number of refugees continues growing for several years after the crisis or conflict begins before peaking. It is hard to know for sure when the Venezuelan migrant and refugee crisis will peak but there are several estimates that are important to consider.

The United Nations recently announced a forecast of 5.4 million by the end of 2019 in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is more than 60% percent higher than the 2018 number of 3.4 million.\footnote{United Nations, \textit{Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela}, December 14, 2018, \url{https://s3.amazonaws.com/unhcrsharedmedia/2018/RMRP_Venezuela_2019_OnlineVersion.pdf}.}

That forecast is based on a linear projection that assumes that the flow of migrants in 2019 will be the same as in 2018. Figure 3 shows two possible projections as far as 2020, premised on the assumption that there will be no significant changes in Venezuela that bring an improvement in the situation. Extending the linear projection to 2020 takes the estimated total number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees to around 7.5 million. Figure 3 also offers a visual representation of a projection made by the Brookings Institution (BI), which, were it to become a reality in 2020, would take the total to 8.2 million people.\footnote{Bahar, Dany and Douglas Barrios, \textit{How many more migrants and refugees can we expect out of Venezuela?} The Brookings Institution, December 10, 2018, \url{https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/12/10/how-many-more-migrants-and-refugees-can-we-expect-out-of-venezuela/}.}
In contrast to the linear projection, in the BI projection the number of migrants corresponds to the number of people in the Venezuelan population in 2018 (projected in 2011) with insufficient means to cover their basic nutritional needs. The forecast does not expressly provide a specific time frame; however, the authors have specified that it is a medium-term projection that could materialize by the end of 2020.42

Both forecasts are large numbers and, considering that completely different methodologies were used, strikingly similar. It should be noted that the United Nations projection refers only to the Latin America and Caribbean region, and while the BI forecast is not confined to any particular region. However, both projections have important limitations that are worth highlighting.

The linear projection assumes that the flow will remain the same and is not based on any determinant of emigration. However, in the case of Syria the annual growth in the number of refugees and people with refugee-like status was quite similar year after year (see Figure 2), and therefore it could be a fair approximation. The BI projection is based on economic fundamentals but is simplistic in the sense that it leaves out many elements that influence the migrant and refugee numbers aside from the issue of food, including, for example, health care and aspects of the political crisis that adversely affect the lives of average Venezuelans.

BI also does not provide an explicit timeframe for its projection. However, it has one advantage over a straightforward linear projection. In particular, given that the humanitarian crisis could continue to worsen at an increasingly rapid rate, a simple linear projection might not reflect the possibility of an acceleration in the rate at which Venezuelans emigrate, and therefore the BI projection, based as it is on economic fundamentals, could be more accurate.

Whatever the case, our conjecture is that the number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees will be somewhere between those two forecasts. Unless there is a significant shift that could revert the economic, political, and social crisis in Venezuela, the total number of migrants and refugees could reach between 5.39 million and 5.75 million by the end of 2019, and between 7.5 million and 8.2 million by the end of 2020. However, whatever the eventual number over the next year or two, the Venezuelan migrant and refugee crisis stands out for its magnitude, as Figure 2 shows.

Another important aspect to consider when one analyzes and compares this migrant and refugee crisis with others is the modest amount of financial assistance offered by the international donor community.
In the case of Venezuela, however, three years since the flow of migrants and refugees accelerated, the amount of international monetary assistance provided and pledged is around US$163 million.

As the graph shows, different migrant and refugee crises, such as the cases of Syria and South Sudan, reportedly received billions of dollars in funding in the first years after forced migration began. In the case of Venezuela, however, three years since the flow of migrants and refugees accelerated, the amount of international monetary assistance provided and pledged is around US$163 million. Even if the United Nations drive to raise US$737.61 million in funds to provide humanitarian and other types of aid to Venezuelans scattered throughout the region were to become a reality in 2019, the total amount would still be less under US$1 billion.
In the Syrian refugee crisis, for example, the amount of financing is more than US$5,000 per refugee; in the case of the Venezuelan crisis, even with the financing requested in 2019 and the current number of 3.4 million migrants and refugees, the amount would be less than $300 per person. This is a highly conservative scenario that supposes that the funding sought by the United Nations for 2019 will be secured and, at the same time, that the number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees will remain the same in 2019.
Financing is key for effective integration of migrants and refugees and, equally important, for mitigating possible costs of the massive flow of migrants and refugees. In the case of the Syrian refugee crisis, the purpose of the aid has been to provide humanitarian assistance and a number of basic services to refugees in countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, the vast majority of them in urban areas, with a much smaller number in refugee camps. In the Venezuelan case there are no such camps, nor is it our intention, in any way, to recommend their implementation. Several studies have suggested that integrating migrants and refugees is made harder when they are confined to camps isolated from urban areas or far from receiving communities.43

Indeed, the possibility of the region accessing resources in the form of grants or soft loans is critical for expanding basic services and infrastructure (such as schools and hospitals, for example) in receiving communities, in order to ease the reception and integration of the rapid and massive flow of Venezuelan migrants and refugees. The absence of large-scale financing for national, regional, and local governments in receiving countries in the region could lead to a collapse in public services, which could, in turn, provoke a backlash from local populations averse to receiving Venezuelans. That is a scenario that the region’s countries would like to avoid.

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Leaving aside the discussion about the optimal use of resources to facilitate the integration of migrants and refugees, financing for the Venezuelan crisis has been supremely modest in both absolute and relative terms. Accordingly, we call on the international donor community to provide more funding to receiving countries as part of the shared responsibility that the international community accepted with the adoption of the New York Declaration (2016)\textsuperscript{44} and, more recently, the Global Compact on Refugees (2018).\textsuperscript{45}

The possibility of accessing international financial aid together with suitable public policies will help to ensure the successful integration of Venezuelans and enable receiving communities to benefit in the medium and long terms from the many economic and social blessings that economists attribute to migrants.\textsuperscript{46} The Americas could turn this crisis into an opportunity that will be not only advantageous to the societies of the receiving countries, but also key to rebuilding Venezuela.
