



# UNHCR's response to seize historic opportunity for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia

*“I cannot think of another event of this magnitude or a precedent as critical as providing temporary protection for Venezuelans during my mandate... It goes without saying that the implementation of such a large-scale initiative will require significant investment in terms of time, logistics and resources”*

- Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Within the framework of the Inter-Agency Group of Mixed Migration Flows (GIFFM in Spanish) [Support Plan for the Implementation of the Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelans](#), UNHCR calls donors to back Colombia's generosity towards 1.74 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants, cementing in real terms the historic opportunity opened up by Colombia's announcement of 10-year Temporary Protection Status (TPS) for Venezuelans in February 2021.

UNHCR's response aims to ensure that Venezuelan refugees and migrants have the best chance to enjoy their rights and build a better life, while supporting communities that host them.

Regularizing the status of hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans ensures access to the health system, bolstering Colombia's comprehensive fight against COVID-19.

This document explains the rationale of UNHCR's Action Plan, as part of its response to the Venezuelan situation in Colombia within the Inter-Agency Group of Mixed Migration Flows to put donor funding to good use.

Colombia is home to by far the largest number of Venezuelans displaced by the socioeconomic and political crisis in their homeland, hosting more than 1.74 million at the start of 2021.

The estimated 1.74 million Venezuelans residing in Colombia as of 31 January 2021, as well as those arriving in Colombia through official border points after the issuance of the government Resolution **up to May 2023**, will be able to apply to the TPS.

As a result of the process, Temporary Protection Permits will grant access to identification documents, formal employment and state services, including health and education system.

With better access to skills training and income, Venezuelans will integrate in

their communities and will contribute to local development and post COVID-19-recovery.

The TPS offers **unique opportunities** to be harnessed now. As part of the response of the Inter-Agency Group on Mixed Migration Flows, UNHCR has developed an action plan to implement the TPS in collaboration with local and national authorities, humanitarian and development partners.

This plan spans the initial phase of outreach and documentation to the longer-term opportunities for inclusion and integration. Within the framework of the [Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform](#), UNHCR already provides Venezuelans with life-saving assistance and helps them get documentation, education and employment. UNHCR also actively

## Refugees and migrants from Venezuela

**5.6 million**  
people globally

**4.6 million**  
in Latin America and the Caribbean

**1.74 million**  
in Colombia, including over 983,000 who lack regular status



promotes peaceful coexistence with host communities. The implementation of the TPS, however, requires a rapid and significant **scale-up of UNHCR's activities**.

There is no time to be lost: the first phase of the TPS started early May with online pre-registration. UNHCR is already **working closely with the Government of Colombia and members of the national Inter-Agency Coordination Platform** to enable Venezuelans with specific needs and those residing in hard-to-reach or conflict-affected areas to have the necessary information and access to pre-register. The second phase of TPS – individual in-person biometric registration – is expected to begin in September. During the third phase of the TPS, Colombia will issue identity documents, reaching a target of 800,000 Venezuelans by the end of 2021.

# UNHCR's Action Plan: IMPROVED ACCESS TO RIGHTS

As a mandated protection agency with a long-standing field presence in Colombia, UNHCR will support access to the TPS through a three-pronged plan of action:



## Pillar I: Registration and documentation

UNHCR will support the Government of Colombia to **register and deliver documentation** to Venezuelan refugees and migrants, by:

1. **Procuring mobile units to support the biometric registration process.** Mobile units will facilitate access to registration for Venezuelans living in urban and hard-to-reach areas.
2. **Setting up registration points.** UNHCR will support national and municipal authorities in establishing and operating registration points, particularly in cities.
3. **Delivering information campaigns.** UNHCR will support the authorities in delivering comprehensive and systematic information about the TPS through a variety of platforms.
4. **Supporting the production and issuance of plastic ID cards** for the Temporary Protection Permits.



## Pillar II: Outreach, orientation and communication



The second pillar focusses on **ensuring that all Venezuelans can access the TPS and no-one is left behind**, by:

1. **Providing orientation and building trust with communities, especially those in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas.** UNHCR will work with community-based organizations and volunteers to reach women, children, older persons, young people, people with disabilities, LGTBQ+ people and indigenous people.
2. **Strengthening the network of legal clinics** that will support those facing difficulties accessing or being granted the TPS. As co-lead of the Inter-agency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM) Protection Sector, UNHCR will develop guidance on legal orientation for Venezuelans.
3. **Providing assistance and orientation** by increasing the capacity in existing support centres, opening new ones in underserved areas and deploying mobile units.
4. **Setting up internet kiosks** to facilitate access to the TPS, in particular pre-registration.
5. **Providing digital devices** to be used across Colombia to assist Venezuelans in applying for TPS.
6. **Establishing a national call centre** to provide information and orientation on gaining TPS and to refer Venezuelans as necessary to targeted services (e.g. legal aid).



## Pillar III: Reception and basic needs

The Colombian government has reopened its borders in early June 2021, including with Venezuela. This came after the border between the two countries had been closed for 14 months in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It is expected to lead to an estimated 300,000 new arrivals from Venezuela during the remainder of 2021, once the neighbouring countries take similar steps. UNHCR is stepping up its reception and assistance capacity, in compliance with biosecurity measures, including by:

1. **Expanding the network of reception, assistance and transit centres and facilities, in border and remote areas**, together with authorities, and shelters operated countrywide by NGO partners.
2. **Providing core relief items**, including hygiene kits, blankets, tents and solar lamps, to be pre-positioned in strategic locations.
3. **Stepping up protection monitoring** with a focus on identifying the most vulnerable, including those forced to enter through irregular routes and at risk of trafficking, exploitation and sexual violence.
4. **Expanding UNHCR and partner capacity to conduct pre-registration in PRIMES** to facilitate individual case management.
5. **Ramping up cash assistance** in underserved areas to meet the basic needs of new arrivals, many of whom are suffering malnutrition and extreme poverty.
6. **Offering protection services** with a focus on psychosocial support and assistance for survivors and those at risk of gender-based violence.



## Funding the response

**The successful implementation of the TPS — from registration and documentation, to access and enjoyment of rights, and inclusion in national systems — demands significant financial resources.**

While needs are growing, the Venezuela situation remains one of the most underfunded emergencies in the world. Funding for UNHCR's operations in Colombia to address the situation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian returnees, and host community is now more urgent than ever. When supporting

the TPS, donors are demonstrating their solidarity boosting a unique pathway to formal employment, access to education and non-emergency healthcare. At the same time, support will allow the registration and documentation of 1.74 million Venezuelans, in addition to those who will enter Colombia up to 24 May 2023, which will involve a large-scale logistical effort.

Adequate financing is a pre-condition for the success of the TPS. The needs related to the TPS mean that the effects

of underfunding will be felt even more acutely across all areas of UNHCR's response, from protection, to assistance and resilience activities, to solutions.

On the positive side: successful implementation will lead to inclusion of refugees and migrants into national systems, socioeconomic recovery plans and the formal economy, which will be a major focus of UNHCR's efforts in 2022. In the medium to long run, this will translate into lower dependence on humanitarian assistance.

## Consequences of Underfunding

**Without funding, the risk is that assistance and protection activities under all three pillars of UNHCR's action plan will come to a halt.** Timely and flexible funding is needed to harness fully the potential of the TPS and to address the most acute and pressing needs of the current and anticipated Venezuelan population in Colombia.

**A late arrival of funds will delay the delivery of much needed protection and assistance, as well as the rollout of the TPS itself.**

- **Without sufficient funds, nearly one million Venezuelans currently in an irregular situation will remain unable to access formal employment and non-urgent medical care.**
- Without regularization, Venezuelans will **remain vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, gender-based violence and discrimination.**
- Without opportunities to achieve self-reliance, **more than 1.74 million Venezuelans in Colombia will have to rely on humanitarian assistance** to access basic needs, services and protection.
- Once the border fully reopens, **limited funds will prevent UNHCR from scaling-up registration and providing arriving Venezuelans with life-saving assistance and protection services** in border areas.

### For more information, please contact:

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