

Joint NGO Consortia Summary Report on the International Solidarity Conference on the Venezuelan Refugee and Migrant Crisis

Prepared by: InterAction, ICVA & the Colombia INGO forum for NGO members

28-29 October 2019 | Brussels, Belgium

Background and Summary of the Conference:

The International Solidarity Conference on the Venezuelan Refugee and Migrant Crisis held in Brussels on 28-29 October 2019 aimed to raise global awareness of the Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis, ensure solidarity with displaced Venezuelans, support the coordinated response of host countries and communities, and call for greater international cooperation, both technical and financial. The conference was prompted by the lack of international response and strained regional capacity despite the crisis being one of the most severe displacement situations in the world with over 4.5 million displaced Venezuelans. Conference participants expressed support to set clear priorities for coordinating a global response that shares the burden among the international community through multi-stakeholder partnerships and more effective mobilization of global resources.

Areas for Collective Effort

- **Respecting and facilitating principled humanitarian action:** Humanitarian principles must be respected, and aid should not be used as a political tool. Although many participants identified the root causes of the crisis to be political, responding to humanitarian needs is urgent and should not be delayed due to political motives. While a political process takes shape, humanitarian assistance must go on.
- **Need for technical support:** Host country institutions, infrastructure, and resources are strained to the limit. The Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region needs more support from the international community in order to facilitate basic access to services for displaced Venezuelans and developing longer-term solutions. Strengthening the capacity of local organizations is crucial.
- **Increasing financial support:** The crisis has been and continues to be largely underfunded in proportion to its needs. Host country budgets are strained, limiting their capacity to meet the needs of affected populations. Although not a pledging conference, various participants committed pledges¹ and agreed to hold a pledging conference in the first half of 2020 to mobilize substantial additional funding.

Major Humanitarian Challenges and Recommendations as Identified during the Conference

Regional Capacity: Host country institutions, infrastructure, resources, and budgets are strained which impacts their ability to respond to the most pressing humanitarian needs including on protection, health and sanitation, education, access to food, livelihoods, vocational training and, employment.

¹ See Donor Pledges paragraph below.

Recommendations:

- Build upon best practices of existing regional coordination processes (e.g., Quito Process, Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan) with a globally supported multi-stakeholder approach to ease the burden on host countries.
 - Public donor support is essential to respond to immediate needs.
 - NGOs are necessary mediators and facilitators through their enhanced understanding of displaced populations and local host communities.
 - Civil society actors help generate localized solutions that best fit the needs of the communities involved.
 - Private companies bring innovation, supporting job creation and labor training which makes new resources available for public donors.

Livelihoods and Entry: Venezuelans are struggling to socially and economically integrate into host communities due to discrimination, documentation issues, delays with family reunification, lack of access to health and education services, and barriers to employment and business opportunities. In addition, increased restrictions on entry requirements lead to more frequent use of irregular pathways that put displaced people at greater risk of human trafficking, smuggling and violence.

Recommendations:

- Use the Cartagena Declaration when considering the protection needs and status of Venezuelans.
- Integrate Venezuelans into labor markets by establishing a mechanism that recognizes documentation and qualifications for employment.
- Recognize an education passport throughout the LAC region to ensure youth have immediate access to schooling and education services.
- Ease entry requirements for migrants and maintain open border policies that include access to family reunification.

Protection: Women, unaccompanied and separated children, indigenous people, and other vulnerable groups are highly prone to violence, mistreatment, and discrimination.

Recommendations:

- Use the Cartagena Declaration when considering the protection needs and status of Venezuelans
- Ensure gender-focused programs are implemented in the response to better mitigate risks of sexual abuse and exploitation of women.
- Build welcoming societies, developing measures to prevent and respond to xenophobic tendencies.

Funding: The lack of international funding limits the regional response of initiatives like the RMRP which is severely underfunded at 40% coverage in 2019.

Recommendations:

- Raise global awareness and establish a common understanding of the crisis to strengthen international support and longer-term commitment.
- Encourage international donors to set up nationally to commit to flexible, multi-year funding that supports the immediate humanitarian response as well as sustainable solutions for integration in the long-term.
- Leverage public and private donors to design investment that benefits migrants and host communities through social investment, infrastructure, public services, and economic opportunities.

Coordination: Gaps among national, regional, and international actors, as well as between humanitarian and development actors, impede operations, funding, and advocacy.

Recommendations:

- Continue supporting a coordinated response through the Quito Process to avoid the duplication of efforts, standardize tools for implementation, exchange data, and advocate for multilateral financing.
- Strengthen concrete expressions of the humanitarian-development nexus.
- Push for coordination between development banks and governments to more effectively support host countries.
- Establish NGO fora and include civil society in dialogues to help address operational challenges and generate local solutions.

Data: Lack of transparent data and information-sharing makes coordination more difficult.

Recommendations:

- Adopt an open data policy, respecting data protection standards, that promotes collaboration and information sharing among actors to increase the quality and accuracy of information as well as the complementarity of data with humanitarian action.

Politicization: Focus on the political aspect of the situation impedes service delivery to Venezuelan displaced people.

Recommendations:

- Respect humanitarian principles and prioritize the needs of affected populations.

Donor Pledges

Although not a pledging conference, international donors pledged approximately 120 million euros during the conference in addition to 30 million euros that EU Institutions are currently mobilizing.

- **Concrete Pledges²:** Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the United-Kingdom (UK) announced the following pledges at the conference:
 - Germany: 5.5 million euros in collaboration with UNHCR and WFP.
 - Ireland: 1 million euros to UNCHR in 2020.
 - Italy: 2.5 million euros for Venezuela and Brazil for immediate disbursement.
 - Spain: 15 million euros for the needs of displaced Venezuelan in the LAC region.
 - The UK: 13 million pounds for Venezuela and the region.
- **Commitments to Pledges:** The European Investment Bank, Canada, notably with the private sector, Japan including for displaced Venezuelans inside Venezuela, the Netherlands on the RMRP, Portugal, South Korea, Switzerland, and the United States.

Next Steps

1. Discuss priorities and dates for upcoming coordination opportunities at the Quito Process V meeting in November.
2. Utilize the Global Refugee Forum in December to achieve the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, deliver concrete pledges and contributions, exchange good practices and turn international solidarity into concrete donor support for the Venezuela crisis.
3. The European Union (EU) will hold the first meeting of the Group of Friends of the Quito Process to mobilize international support for the regional response to the crisis, providing a possible opportunity for NGOs to get involved.
4. A pledging conference will be held during the first half of 2020 to mobilize substantial additional funding for the response.

Upcoming Opportunities for Collective NGO Engagement and Advocacy:

South America UNHCR-NGO Consultations	In Rio de Janeiro, 21 and 22 November
IASC Principals meeting	In Geneva on 5 December – Venezuela is on the agenda – we can feed into InterAction’s principal’s talking points.
Meeting with Joint UNHCR-IOM Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Eduardo Stein	Washington DC, InterAction is hosting. Week of December 9.
Global Refugee Forum, Advance and High Level Sessions	In Geneva on 16, 17 and 18, December.
Friends of Quito Process V, Donor Meeting	TBD

² In addition to the conference, from 22 to 31 October 2019, several Member States contributed to the RMRP, more information available [here](#).

Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP)	January to December 2020 regional and refugee and migrant response plan is under process
2020 Pledging Conference	February 2020, TBD

References and Statements

If your organization made a statement or gave a floor intervention during the Conference and you'd like it to be included in this document, please email Kathryn Sidlowski (ksidlowski@interaction.org).

- [A Joint NGO statement: Ensuring solidarity with displaced Venezuelans: supporting countries and communities hosting and protecting them](#)
 - in [Spanish](#) and [English](#)
- [Colombia INGO Forum 5-point floor statement](#)
- [International Rescue Committee, The Venezuelan Displacement Crisis: A Test of Global Commitments and Solidarity, Report, October 2019](#)
- [EEAS: International Solidarity Conference on the Venezuelan Refugee and Migrant crisis Brussels 28-29 October 2019 - Joint communique by the co-chairs](#)
- [EEAS: List of Participants](#)
- [EU report of the International Solidarity Conference on the Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis](#)
- [European Commission dedicated webpage, including several live streams of the Conference](#)
- [Intervencion Caritas Conferencia Venezuela 2019 – Une Iglesia sin fronteras, madre de todos](#)