EVALUATION OF THE UNHCR REGIONAL REFUGEE RESPONSE TO THE VENEZUELA SITUATION

EVALUATION REPORT
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UNHCR's Evaluation Policy confirms UNHCR's commitment to support accountability, learning and continual improvement through the systematic examination and analysis of organizational strategies, policies and programmes. Evaluations are guided by the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility and utility, and are undertaken to enhance the organization's performance in addressing the protection, assistance and solution needs of refugees, stateless people and other persons of concern to UNHCR.

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This report was written by an evaluation team based at the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, a university-wide initiative with a mission to advance the science and practice of humanitarian response worldwide through research and education. Phuong Pham was evaluation team lead, Katrina Keegan and Julie Ricard were evaluation researchers, Michelle Arevalo was the policy adviser and researcher, and Patrick Vinck was senior evaluator. The evaluation was conducted under the technical guidance and oversight of the UNHCR Evaluation Service in Geneva and with valuable insight and support from the UNHCR Regional Bureau in Panama.

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Evaluation information at a glance	
Title of the evaluation:	Evaluation of the UNHCR regional refugee response to the Venezuela situation
Time frame covered:	2018–2020 UNHCR Response
Expected duration:	18 months
Type of evaluation:	Formative/developmental evaluation
Countries covered:	Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru (and Panama)
Evaluation manager / contact in UNHCR:	Susan Bird, UNHCR Regional Bureau in Panama
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Acronym list

ALNAP: Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action

AOI: areas of inquiry

BO: branch office, also called country operation

Bureau: UNHCR Bureau for the Americas (Regional level)**BWPO:** Brigham and Women's Physicians Organization

CAI: Integrated Assistance Centre (Centro de Atención Integral)

Caminantes: refugees and migrants travelling on foot; "walkers"

CBI: cash-based interventions

CBP: community-based protection

CEBAF: Binational Assistance Border Centres (Centros Binacionales de Atención en Frontera)

CEPR: Special Commission for Refugees (Comisión Especial para los Refugiados)

CONARE: National Committee for Refugees (Comitê Nacional para os Refugiados) – Brazil

COP: country operations plan

CPF: Individual taxpayer registry (Cadastro de Pessoa Física) – Brazil

CwC: communication with communities

DIMA: data and information management and analysis

DPIN: International Protection Office (Dirección de Protección Internacional – Ecuador)

DTM: Displacement Tracking Matrix (by IOM)

ENPOVE: Survey directed to the Venezuelan population residing in the country (Encuesta Dirigida a la Población Venezolana que Reside en el País) – Peru

ERTs: emergency response teams

ES: Evaluation Service

FG: focus group

FO: field office

GEM: Special Migratory Group (Grupo Especial Migratorio) – Colombia

GIFMM: Inter-agency Group on Mixed flows (Grupo Interagencial sobre Flujos Migratorios Mixtos) – Colombia

GTRM: Working Group on Refugees and Migrants (Grupo de Trabajo para Refugiados y Migrantes) – Ecuador and Peru

HHI: Harvard Humanitarian Initiative

Interiorização: Brazil's "Interiorization" relocation programme

HIAS: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

HQ: UNHCR Headquarters (international level)

LGBTI: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex

IOM: International Organization for Migration

KII: key informant interview

NFI: non-food items

MIDUVI: Ministry of Urban Development and Housing – Ecuador

MYMP: multi-year, multi-partner

OA: welcome operation (Operação Acolhida) – Brazil

OECD–DAC: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee

P1: Phase 1 of the evaluation

P2: Phase 2 of the evaluation

PAO: orientation and attention points (Puntos de Atención y Orientación)

PEP: special stay permit (Permiso Especial de Permanencia) – Colombia

PMT: protection monitoring tool

PRIMES: UNHCR's population registry and identity management ecosystem

ProGres: UNHCR's profile global registration system

PTP: temporary stay permit (Permiso Temporal de Permanencia) – Colombia

PTRIG: screening centre (Posto de Triagem) – Brazil

RAMV: Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (Registro

Administrativo de Migrantes Venezolanos) – Colombia

RDS: respondent-driven sampling

RHU: refugee housing unit

RMRP: regional refugee and migrant response plan

R4V: Venezuela Situation Response Coordination Platform

SENA: National Training Service (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje) – Colombia

SENAC: National Commercial Training Service (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje Comercial) – Brazil

SGBV: sexual and gender-based violence

SIS: Integral Health Insurance (Seguro Integral de Salud) – Peru

SISBEN: System of Possible Beneficiaries of Social Programmes (Sistema de Identificación de Potenciales Beneficiarios de Programas Sociales) – Colombia

Somos Panas: UNHCR anti-xenophobia campaign in Colombia

TMF: border mobility card (Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronteriza)

TOR: terms of reference

Tu Causa es Mi Causa: UNHCR anti-xenophobia campaign in Peru

UASC: unaccompanied and separated children

UNDSS: United Nations Department for Safety and Security

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

VenSit: Venezuela Situation

VERHU: humanitarian visa (Visa De Residencia Temporal De Excepción Por Razones Humanitarias) – Ecuador

Executive summary

1. The external evaluation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) regional response to the Venezuela Situation (VenSit) follows the declaration of the L2 emergency, effective 2018, and covers the first two years of the response. It is undertaken in accord with UNHCR's revised Evaluation Policy approved by the High Commissioner on 16 October 2016. The purpose of the external evaluation is to analyse the extent to which UNHCR is providing a timely and effective response to the needs of refugees and migrants affected by VenSit, including to better understand the enabling and constraining factors in this context. The evaluation will also draw lessons that could be used to reinforce the organization's global approaches to emergency responses.

2. The evaluation focuses on UNHCR's response in four selected countries: Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, and includes an inception phase, two phases of data collection, and a validation phase. Due to challenges and restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the second round of data collection was more limited than originally planned. The evaluation is focused exclusively on UNHCR's response, and in agreement with terms established with the Evaluation Service, it does not assess the UNHCR–IOM-led Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform.

Context and background

3. Forced by an internal political and economic crisis, the Venezuelan exodus began as early as 2012 and has since become the world's second largest refugee and migration crisis, and the largest in Latin America.[1] As of 9 November 2020, about 5.4 million Venezuelan refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers are reported by host countries, of whom 4.6 million are in Latin American and Caribbean countries.[2]

4. The flow of refugees and migrants from Venezuela has evolved over time and so, too, has UNHCR's response. As the situation worsened and people left Venezuela in greater numbers, UNHCR scaled up its operational response to help governments meet their protection responsibilities and to provide assistance to persons of concern to UNHCR. In March 2018, UNHCR issued the *Guidance note on the outflow of Venezuelans,*[3] which underlined the refugee dimension of the flow, noting that a significant proportion needed international protection. A month later, on 12 April 2018, the UN Secretary-General asked UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to co-lead and coordinate a joint response at the regional level, formally acknowledging the Venezuelan egress as a mixed refugee and migrant situation. This resulted in the formation of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform, which coordinates the implementation of the regional refugee and migrant response plan (RMRP). UNHCR's response to VenSit seeks to ensure that:

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[1] UNHCR (2020) *Figures at a glance*, 12 June 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html [accessed October 2020]

[2] R4V Latin America and the Caribbean, Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region – November 2020, https://r4v.info/en/documents/details/82846 [accessed 25 November 2020]

[3] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2018) *Guidance note on the outflow of Venezuelans*, March 2018, https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a9ff3cc4.html [accessed 15 April 2020]

(i) refugees and migrants from Venezuela[4] who are in need of international protection can gain access into the countries to which they are seeking entry and to asylum or protection-oriented arrangements;

(ii) refugees and migrants, and especially those with specific needs and vulnerabilities, receive protection and support to access basic rights and services without discrimination, ideally through a community-based approach; and

(iii) efforts increasingly work towards the attainment of solutions.

5. Since the issue of the March 2018 Guidance Note, UNHCR has significantly expanded its operational presence and capacity in Latin American and Caribbean countries to respond to international protection and other needs of people on the move from Venezuela. On 9 April 2018, UNHCR declared a Level 2 (L2)[5] emergency for Aruba, Colombia, Curaçao, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago, expanding this declaration in July 2018 to Brazil, and in August 2018 to Ecuador. Considering this unique context and experience, the UNHCR Evaluation Service and UNHCR Bureau for the Americas, (herein titled the Bureau), commissioned the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) and Brigham and Women's Physicians Organization (BWPO) to conduct an evaluation, herein titled, *Evaluation of the UNHCR regional refugee response to the Venezuela situation (VenSit)*.

Scope, purpose and methodology of the evaluation

6. Based on the terms of reference (TOR),[6] the evaluation was structured around three areas of inquiry (AOI):

- **AOI 1 – Assistance and protection response:** What have been the results of UNHCR's regional and country-level assistance and protection responses for refugees and migrants in VenSit?
- **AOI 2 – Socioeconomic inclusion and mid/long-term perspectives:** To what extent has UNHCR been successful in advocating for and developing government capacity to ensure socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and migrants, and in incorporating mid/long-term protection perspectives into the design and delivery of the operational response?
- **AOI 3 – Internal and external factors:** What factors (internal and external) constrained or enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection? To what extent were those influenced by the mixed-flow character of VenSit?

7. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic over the course of this evaluation, the evaluation team added a related question as a cross-cutting theme to give preliminary insights into how COVID-19 has affected UNHCR's response and what measures UNHCR has taken to address early challenges related to the pandemic. The evaluation did not aim to

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[4] The people of concern to UNHCR also include Colombian returnees, as well as other nationals who are refugees or migrants coming from Venezuela, regardless of nationality.

[5] UNHCR has three emergency levels. According to UNHCR's Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response, an emergency level 1 (L1) is proactive preparedness; L2 is stepped-up bureau support; and L3 is whole-of-UNHCR response. See: https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/124201/policy-on-emergency-preparedness-and-response [accessed 25 November 2020]

[6] The TOR were prepared by the Evaluation Service and provided the evaluation with its overall purpose, focus and deliverables.

answer these questions authoritatively but, rather, to document preliminary insights for future efforts.

- **COVID-19 response:** How has COVID-19 impacted UNHCR's response? What measures has UNHCR taken to address challenges related to the virus?

8. The evaluation used a mixed-methods longitudinal approach consisting of two phases of data collection, with Phase 1 occurring from November 2019 to February 2020 and Phase 2 in September 2020. Data collection modalities included: (1) 257 key informant interviews with UNHCR staff and partners, government officials and persons of concern to UNHCR; (2) 87 focus groups with refugees and migrants, including returnees and indigenous populations, and host communities; and (3) online surveys with UNHCR staff in VenSit countries as well as UNHCR regional staff based in Panama whose work was related to VenSit, with a total of 186 completed surveys. Data collection also included surveys with 940 persons of concern to UNHCR in Colombia through respondent-driven sampling (RDS).

Summary findings

9. Considering UNHCR's assistance and protection response (AOI 1), this evaluation finds that the emergency assistance provided by UNHCR is relevant to the needs of refugees and migrants. The strategic decision to employ a needs-based approach improved the relevance of the VenSit response, and interventions were quickly adapted to deliver emergency assistance. However, the provision of life-saving goods and services is insufficient to cover the full extent of needs of the population. The scale of the VenSit population's needs exceeded available resources and capacity of UNHCR and humanitarian actors. In general, the specific needs of persons at risk are taken into account in UNHCR strategies and operations, but coverage is still lacking for certain groups, and mental health needs are not sufficiently addressed.

10. In coordination with governments and partners, UNHCR has established robust assistance structures to address the most pressing needs at formal border points. However, monitoring irregular entries and providing assistance at informal crossings remain a challenge. The border assistance response provides information and orientation, emergency assistance and emergency shelter for those most in need.

11. With the support of UNHCR, governments are providing access to territory, asylum, regularization processes and documentation to different extents across the four countries, depending on national policies. UNHCR has helped to improve asylum systems and procedures to different degrees depending in large part on the asylum system infrastructure already in place prior to VenSit. However, most refugees and migrants did not feel that their rights were respected in host countries (except in Brazil), citing experiences of labour exploitation, poor/no access to health services, discrimination and xenophobia.

12. In response, community-based protection (CBP) has been central to UNHCR's protection strategy, but duplications and gaps in assistance between UNHCR and other actors remain a concern. At the same time, mechanisms for refugees and migrants to share feedback and/or complaints are not widely known or accessible. Furthermore, the

coverage, quality and results of efforts to promote rights awareness remain uneven. UNHCR's information campaigns and websites are widely recognized and virtual aspects have expanded in the context of COVID-19, but improvements are still needed to ensure better coverage and understanding from refugees and migrants, including a dedicated evaluation.

13. UNHCR has developed and implemented multiple strategies to assess emergency assistance and protection needs, with improvements over time. However, these tools do not always reflect field realities or allow for adaptation to local contexts, and gaps may exist concerning certain populations and types of violations. The assessments are not rapid or regular enough to fully understand trends of people in transit and they lack harmonization. Importantly, response to cases and referrals is insufficiently supported.

14. Considering socioeconomic inclusion and mid/long-term perspectives (AOI 2), this evaluation finds that UNHCR has undertaken a multi-pronged approach to promote both social and economic inclusion throughout the region, mainly via advocacy and capacity-building, and to a lesser extent, via implementation. However, UNHCR's focus on the emergency response has taken priority over socioeconomic inclusion activities. Socioeconomic inclusion activities are perceived to be small-scale, opportune, lacking monitoring, and limited to a place, population and/or partner, while the regional strategy has not translated into cohesive national socioeconomic strategies. UNHCR further lacks data and technical staff dedicated exclusively to socioeconomic inclusion, especially at the field level.

15. Despite these findings, UNHCR's advocacy efforts towards social inclusion have been largely successful, but advocacy efforts towards economic inclusion are scattered, with little uniformity across countries. UNHCR has provided capacity-building and technical support to the government and partners on multiple fronts, but frequent turnover of government actors and administrations requires equally frequent efforts to maintain institutional capacity and knowledge.

16. In terms of socioeconomic inclusion, UNHCR has served in a supportive and complementary role to governments and partners, prioritizing advocacy and capacity-building over direct implementation of projects. UNHCR's implementation of social inclusion activities, including projects to counter xenophobia and promote coexistence and solidarity among communities, was widely recognized and perceived as effective, though insufficient to address the magnitude and complexity of the issue of inclusion.

17. UNHCR's design and delivery of mid/long-term protective perspectives is uneven across countries. Stakeholders, especially in Colombia and Brazil, emphasized that while border areas were still overwhelmingly focused on the short term, offices farther from the border or located in larger cities had greater potential to implement more forward-looking protection perspectives. Nevertheless, the link between UNHCR's strategies for humanitarian assistance and permanent solutions is not clearly developed. As such, the VenSit response may have been effective for humanitarian assistance, but less so for permanent solutions, where there is room for improvement. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted progress towards implementing long-term strategies for durable solutions as UNHCR had to shift priorities back to emergency assistance.

18. Considering factors that constrained or enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection (AOI 3), this evaluation finds that offices in all four countries have achieved notable successes in a short time frame. UNHCR's emergency mechanisms have enabled the organization's response, and its human capital is a major internal asset. However, UNHCR's one-year funding cycles, along with the late and/or sporadic arrival of funding and resources limited the response, especially in terms of long-term planning. Varying levels of rootedness and limited operational experience in delivering emergency responses presented challenges at the onset of VenSit, as all offices had to transition, adapt and scale to respond to the Venezuelan influx. The fast growth of the operation presented new challenges for human resource management, especially at the onset of VenSit. Specifically, UNHCR hiring mechanisms tend to favour staff within UNHCR and do not encourage local hires such as host-country nationals or those of Venezuelan nationality, who have relevant contextual knowledge and experience. Of note, UNHCR staff's mental health and well-being are not adequately addressed.

19. Within countries, UNHCR's vertical (national–field) and horizontal (field–field) communication and information exchange did not always flow smoothly. However, this increased and improved due to COVID-19, as digital communication and the need to coordinate remotely enabled more frequent and targeted exchanges. Nevertheless, UNHCR communication was non-uniform and largely informal in nature and lacked a regional approach.

20. Separately, resources remain insufficient to cover the extent of needs of the emergency – despite increased visibility of VenSit and the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which enabled access to funding. For 2019, only 52 per cent of the refugee and migrant response plan (RMRP) appeal ($384 million)[7] was raised for VenSit. As of November 2020, 45 per cent of the COVID-19 adjusted RMRP appeal ($628 million) has been covered, making this the year with highest funding levels since the VenSit emergency began. Yet, 55 per cent of the funding needed to fulfil the appeal request remains unfunded. Governments in the region have adopted a migrant narrative over a refugee one, which has constrained UNHCR's response. At times, UNHCR has faced challenges in working with governments and their institutions, an issue worsened by political and social instability and unrest, while economic challenges, such as high rates of informal employment and unemployment, have constrained the response. In addition, border sites present few livelihood and integration opportunities. Xenophobia and tensions with the host communities are on the rise, leading to discrimination in hiring, labour abuse and exploitation.

21. The mixed-flow character of VenSit has not influenced UNHCR's delivery of emergency assistance and protection, in part because of UNHCR's needs-based approach. In fact the mixed population flow may have enhanced UNHCR's mixed strategies for long-term solutions.

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[7] R4V Platform. *RMRP Funding Update 31 December 2019,* https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/73413 [accessed November 2020]

Recommendations

22. Considering the findings outlined in the report, the evaluation team proposes the following recommendations summarized here and detailed in the full report. The evaluation recommends three key areas for strategic realignment considerations:

   i. <u>Build cohesive strategies and frameworks for socioeconomic integration</u>

       At the regional level, UNHCR must continue to pursue concerted efforts for socioeconomic integration, and to monitor and build on progress towards the *2020 Stepped up livelihoods strategy for the Americas*, as it pertains to VenSit. UNHCR must define more precisely its role in relation to the role of government and partner agencies to ensure that it provides a complementary approach. This includes reinforcing guidelines, training, technical support and resources to articulate the regional socioeconomic strategy into national plans and frameworks. UNHCR operations should develop and/or refine a national framework and guidelines specifically geared towards socioeconomic inclusion in order to give coherence to what the field offices are doing and to promote communication and cross-site learning. Additionally, successful pilots and projects undertaken in 2019 and 2020 should be leveraged and consolidated into more holistic national strategies to give coherence to what field offices are doing, and support the socioeconomic inclusion of indigenous populations.

   ii. <u>Continue to develop new funding mechanisms and cycles that support long-term programme planning.</u>

       At headquarters, UNHCR is in the process of developing additional funding strategies to enable longer funding cycles that provide more opportunity for mid/long-term planning and efficient operations. This reform will be important for helping UNHCR to work on longer-term protection solutions. It will also be beneficial to implementing partners, providing more visibility and commitment for their multi-year planning and fundraising requirements.

   iii. <u>Engage in alternative strategies to address issues related to irregular entries.</u>

       UNHCR presence at informal crossings is limited due to a variety of factors. UNHCR's network of partner and community contacts along borders provides a net of protection for refugees and migrants in those areas. Thus, efforts should be made to bolster CBP activities and to continue building and maintaining communication channels within CBP networks to provide insights into new routes and trends in movements, and to amplify the protection response, especially where UNHCR presence is limited. Wherever possible, UNHCR should also consider investing in the establishment of unmanned information points along known crossing points, such as billboards with key information and contacts (for example, telephone helplines, local partners, safe spaces in transit, websites) to direct refugees and migrants towards assistance and resources.

In addition, the evaluation team recommends 11 key areas for improvement and strengthening:

iv.   <u>Strengthen mid- and long-term strategies and the link between humanitarian assistance and development programming.</u>

At headquarters, regional and national levels, UNHCR must continue to build strong partnerships and coordinate governments, development actors, financial institutions and the private sector. This includes both strengthening existing relationships and bringing in new actors to support national and local efforts where appropriate. To achieve the latter, UNHCR should encourage national governments and international donors to advocate for more development actors and resources. UNHCR should also draw from its own pool of development practitioners worldwide to bring in more staff with development expertise and experience to the VenSit operation, which would enable UNHCR to develop a smoother transition between humanitarian and development programming.

v.   <u>Strengthen mental health support for both UNHCR staff and Venezuelan refugees and migrants.</u>

At the national level, UNHCR should strengthen mental health support for Venezuelan refugees and migrants by conducting a review of current detection and monitoring mechanisms as well as a specific assessment of mental health needs, with refugees' and migrants' participation across different sites to identify gaps and opportunities for intervention. Collaboration with national governments and field partners is critical in conducting an assessment of mental health needs, developing actions and proper referral networks to address them, and effectively integrating these actions into protection and livelihood strategies. A concerted effort should be made to invest in the capacity of the government, whose responsibility it is to ensure the highest attainable standard of mental health well-being, and to target actors who focus on mental health (and consider bringing in specialized actors/experts if country actors are absent).

At headquarters (HQ), regional and national levels, UNHCR should institutionalize and implement mental health support to UNHCR staff. Regional- and country-level management should provide guidelines and ensure the enforcement of existing policies, which are necessary during crises including the COVID-19 pandemic. In the latter context, support from HQ, including the provision of guidelines in terms of teleworking and telecommuting, security measures, and so on, needs to be timelier and continually emphasized and monitored, including hardship classifications by the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS). Resources should be allocated to ensure counsellors/psychologists are available in staff's local language for one-on-one sessions, either in person or remotely.

vi.   <u>Improve internal communication both across and within countries, as well as vertically and horizontally.</u>

At the regional level, UNHCR should facilitate opportunities for more fluid and regular cross-country exchanges and meetings. Moreover, the Bureau should structure and standardize cross-country communication flows, providing guidelines about the purposes of each communication channel (such as WhatsApp, email and calls). The Bureau should support the establishment of formal and regular binational

meetings between UNHCR staff in mirror offices and, if appropriate, provide authorization for transborder in-person meetings and monitoring activities to aid in understanding and responding to flows. Finally, the Bureau should facilitate more communication and information from Venezuela to host countries in the region, including more emphasis on scenario-building.

At the national and regional levels, vertical and horizontal UNHCR communication should be improved. UNHCR would benefit from further systematizing communication through increased collaborative work culture and reporting structures to support upward, downward and lateral information-sharing to ensure that messages effectively reach all involved parties. This would require careful consideration of (and safeguards against) potential breaks in the communication chain (for instance, regional messages successfully reach country operations but then are not communicated to field offices; or field messages successfully reach country operations but then are not communicated to the Bureau). To achieve this, UNHCR should institutionalize new (good) practices in terms of digital communication beyond the social isolation period to continue improving upon regularity of multidirectional communication.

vii. <u>Evaluate communication and awareness-raising efforts with refugees and migrants as well as public anti-xenophobia campaigns with host communities.</u>

At the regional level, UNHCR should increase efforts to evaluate the top communication and awareness campaigns in the region, notably *Somos Panas* in Colombia, the Chatbot in Ecuador, and *VenInformado* in Peru. Evaluations should measure the effectiveness, reach and coverage of the campaigns, as well as barriers to refugees' and migrants' access to, and comprehension and retention of the information. Building on the findings of the R4V 2019 communication and information needs assessment, UNHCR should also take into account the information needs and gaps that exist both among refugees and migrants and within host communities, and how they can be better addressed.

At the regional level, anti-xenophobia campaigns and peaceful coexistence initiatives should be evaluated, notably *Histórias en Movimento* in Brazil, *Somos Panas* in Colombia, *Abrazos que Unen* in Ecuador and *Tu Causa es Mi Causa* in Peru. UNHCR should assess current anti-xenophobia strategies from large-scale public campaigns to smaller-scale initiatives targeting subgroups of the population (such as incentivizing local landlords for refugee housing placements) to inform future efforts, especially in areas with higher density of refugees and migrants. Ongoing work to counter xenophobia and promote solidarity should consider: (1) monitoring media and official statements to dispel xenophobic messages; (2) ensuring host communities benefit from projects and initiatives (such as including a percentage of spots in training programmes/workshops for host community members); and (3) promoting local inclusion activities (through sports, arts and so on), and local organizations that support migrants and refugees.

viii. <u>Evaluate the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform</u>

At the headquarter level, conduct an evaluation specifically focused on the inter-agency coordination dimension of UNHCR's response and take inter-agency dynamics fully into account for all future evaluations. A major limitation of this evaluation is the exclusive focus on UNHCR's response, which in agreement with terms established with the Evaluation Service, did not assess the UNHCR–IOM-led Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform. UNHCR's inter-agency work has an important multiplier effect on operability since coordination allows for better geographical, sectoral and population-specific reach and coverage, and thus, future evaluations should take on an inter-agency approach.

ix. Review hiring mechanisms to consider qualified local staff and those of Venezuelan origin.

At headquarters, UNHCR should continue to review and update the hiring mechanisms (as much as possible) and ease the requirements to allow qualified local staff to be hired in more permanent positions where appropriate. In addition, UNHCR may explore contracting more staff of Venezuelan origin and/or expanding UN volunteer posts for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, since Venezuelan volunteers may be particularly adept at reinforcing community-based protection mechanisms and assistance, information and orientation provision, and empowerment activities. They may also be able to liaise with trusted Venezuelan associations, which play a strategic role in providing information and orientation on legal issues and social services in host communities. The inclusion of Venezuelan refugees and migrants as staff and/or volunteers should be carefully considered on an individual basis to protect both Venezuelans themselves and UNHCR. Finally, it is critical to ensure that cross-cultural communication competencies and cultural awareness skills are incorporated as hiring requirements, especially for international staff, and that appropriate training is provided, especially for posts involving communication with communities (CwC), CBP or inter-agency work.

x. Invest in developing faster and more frequently implemented assessment tools, and leverage field staff input to ensure feasibility, efficiency and appropriateness of tools, given field realities.

At the regional level, UNHCR should invest more in the development of improved assessment tools. These tools should be: (1) faster to implement; (2) implemented more frequently; and (3) standardized within and potentially across countries, while still allowing for certain adaptations to local context. Field staff should be involved in the development of regional tools and consulted on their experiences of delivering the protection monitoring tool (PMT) and participatory diagnostics to increase feasibility, efficiency and appropriateness of tools, given field realities. Similarly, the input of Information Management officers at all levels should be taken into account in planning the design of the tool to support the systemization, processing and analysis of data. Upon implementation, the Bureau must share and clearly communicate guidelines at all levels, provide training and technical support, and commit to ongoing monitoring of implementation and evaluation of its effectiveness.

xi. Invest in building the evidence base to inform strategies and advocacy efforts.

At the regional level, UNHCR should invest in building the evidence base on irregular movements, including the use of innovative tools and data collection methods to improve estimates on the numbers and patterns of irregular movements throughout the region. UNHCR staff suggested that it would be beneficial to systematize binational border monitoring through rapid profiling exercises as this information is key for advocacy with governments as well as for informing UNHCR's own strategies moving forward. Further discussion and analysis of regional policy options are needed to address this sensitive and delicate issue. In the short term, and especially in light of the rise of irregular movements during COVID-19, UNHCR should prioritize the adaptation of strategies related to UNHCR's presence at the border and assistance to refugees and migrants entering irregularly. Strategies should include contingency plans for changes in quarantine measures and border openings, include plans for protecting and addressing the needs of groups with pendular movements, and be accompanied with clear guidelines and technical support for staff on the ground.

Also at the regional level, investments should be made in building the evidence base on socioeconomic inclusion. The Bureau should continue to conduct and support more research to inform socioeconomic inclusion efforts, including market assessments, studies on the socioeconomic profiles of refugees and migrants, and research on income-generating initiatives (for example, innovative financing, social impact bonds, seed capital initiatives, microcredit opportunities, entrepreneurial activities and cooperatives). Additional research could inform regional, national and local socioeconomic strategies, highlight opportunities for engagement, and provide leverage for advocacy efforts. While the latter two points could be done through partnerships with universities and/or be contracted out, UNHCR still needs more technical staff dedicated exclusively to socioeconomic inclusion and livelihoods throughout the region to ensure complementarity and cohesive implementation of strategies. The Bureau should also conduct rigorous evaluation of existing socioeconomic inclusion activities to determine effectiveness and provide inputs for scaling and replication.

xii.   Improve documentation and sharing of action-oriented good practices throughout the region.

At the regional level, UNHCR should lead the documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned across countries and field sites to lessen the burden on country teams that do not have the time and/or resources to do so. Documenting, consolidating and giving more visibility to implementation-oriented good practices can enhance donor relations, inform the scaling up or scaling out of initiatives, and promote cross-learning, among other benefits. Thus, the Bureau should explore creative avenues to both capture and communicate good practices and lessons learned. For example, it was suggested that hiring an external consultancy team, paired with UNHCR regional staff, could be a good solution. An initial selection of good practices is provided in Annex 5.

xiii.   Assess the impact of capacity-building efforts with government institutions, authorities and partners to inform future investment in additional human and financial resources for training and technical support.

At the national level, UNHCR should assess the impact of its capacity-building work with governments and rule of law entities, such as ombudspersons, public defenders and authorities involved in refugee status determination systems and labour control, as well as those who work at border and transit points. This exercise should aim to understand whether UNHCR's sensitization trainings for these actors support and strengthen the quality of information provided to the population about their rights and whether appropriate referrals for assistance and protection are made. The same is also true for capacity-building work with assistance-providing partners, to ensure they have protection knowledge and response capacity, and with the private sector (in particular banks and employers) to inform them about the rights afforded to refugees (such as the right to work), and to ensure that forms of documentation are recognized. Since staff rotation is common among these actors, UNHCR should explore how best to maintain institutional knowledge (such as new staff training, refresher training). UNHCR should also explore new pedagogical strategies for virtual training based on the lessons learned in the pandemic, including ongoing training on virtual platforms and virtual communication channels for technical support.

xiv.   <u>Improve UNHCR's detecting and addressing of rights and protection violation.</u>

Country operations should evaluate UNHCR's assessment tools' ability to detect violations, referral mechanisms and staff training. They should consider investing in the expansion of a robust referral network of specialized partners and institutions and regularly revisit referral lists for accuracy. UNHCR should follow up selected cases for quality assurance and monitoring. In addition, UNHCR's CwC and CBP activities should include the provision of information and, where appropriate, training for host communities specifically tailored towards detecting violations among the refugee and migrant population, and referring cases to the proper channels. UNHCR must further continue to ensure that refugees and migrants know their rights and options for protection, that they are informed about and have access to pathways to denounce any violation, and that they get proper attention and assistance.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the evaluation

1.   The flow of refugees and migrants from Venezuela evolved between 2017 and 2020, and with it, so has UNHCR's response. As of early November 2020, there were an estimated 5.4 million refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers from Venezuela, although figures do not account for those with irregular status and thus are likely to be much higher.[8] Since 2017, UNHCR has dramatically expanded and evolved its operational presence and capacity in Latin America to respond to international protection and other needs of refugees and migrants from Venezuela. This significant evolution of UNHCR's response prompted the organization's Evaluation Service and Bureau for the Americas to commission a real-time evaluation, herein titled, *Evaluation of the UNHCR regional refugee response to the Venezuela situation* (VenSit). The implementation of this external evaluation was entrusted to the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) and the Brigham and Women's Physicians Organization (BWPO), and was implemented in accordance with UNHCR's revised Evaluation Policy, approved by the High Commissioner on 16 October 2016. The terms of reference (TOR) were prepared by the Evaluation Service and were updated and revised after the evaluation's inception phase.

1.2 Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

2.   The purpose of this evaluation was to analyse the extent to which UNHCR is providing a timely and effective response to the needs of refugees and migrants affected by VenSit, including to better understand the enabling and constraining factors in this context.

3.   The evaluation aimed to provide insights and inform what could be done to strengthen UNHCR's response to VenSit in 2020 and beyond. It also sought to highlight leading practices and lessons learned to reinforce and strengthen UNHCR's global approach to emergency responses and accountability to communities, particularly in the context of mixed flows. The evaluation covers UNHCR's response since the declaration of the Level 2 emergency in 2018, and it focused on UNHCR's response in four countries: Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The overall evaluation consists of four stages: an inception phase, two rounds of data collection and the final validation phase.

4.   The primary users of the evaluation are key UNHCR stakeholders, particularly staff involved in the ongoing response to VenSit. Other internal beneficiaries include the Regional Bureau for the Americas; Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS); Division of Programme Support and Management (DPSM); Division of International Protection (DIP); Department of Information Systems and Telecoms (DIST); Division of Financial and Administration Management (DFAM); and Department for Human Resources (DHR). External stakeholders with an interest in the evaluation include national and local authorities, UN and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, and VenSit refugees and migrants.

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[8] R4V Latin America and the Caribbean, Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region – November 2020, https://r4v.info/en/documents/details/82846 [accessed 25 November 2020]

1.3 General context and timeline

5. Across the region, UNHCR works with and supports receiving/host governments and other actors to build, systematize and strengthen mechanisms, processes, procedures and capacities to address the protection and basic human needs among the outflow of refugees and migrants in the most predictable, sustained and effective manner.

6. Recognizing the need to enhance UNHCR's operational presence and capacities to respond to international protection and other needs of refugees and others on the move from Venezuela, UNHCR declared a Level 1 (L1) emergency for Venezuela, Brazil, Costa Rica and other countries in the region in May 2017 to enhance preparedness for a possible deterioration of the situation inside Venezuela and in anticipation of an increasing outflow of people from the country.

7. As the situation worsened and people continued to leave Venezuela in greater numbers, UNHCR was required to scale up its operational response to help governments to meet their protection responsibilities and provide assistance to those of concern. UNHCR declared the elevation to a Level 2 (L2) emergency for Aruba, Colombia, Curaçao, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago in April 2018, for Brazil in July 2018, and for Ecuador in August 2018. On 15 November 2019, the L2 emergency expired for all operations responding to VenSit. However, UNHCR declared COVID-19 a global L2 emergency on 25 March 2020.

8. UNHCR's response to VenSit seeks to ensure that:

    (i) refugees and migrants from Venezuela[9] in need of international protection can gain access into the countries to which they are seeking entry and to asylum or protection-oriented arrangements;
    (ii) refugees and migrants, and especially those with specific needs and vulnerabilities, receive protection and support to access basic rights and services without discrimination, ideally through a community-based approach; and
    (iii) efforts increasingly work towards the attainment of solutions.

9. An estimated 5.4 million refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers have left Venezuela as of November 2020, and the profile of the population has shifted over time. Earlier waves of refugees and migrants arriving in neighbouring countries between 2016 and 2018 included many young Venezuelans with university degrees. More recent flows have included more children and families. This latter group represents a lower income and education profile with more limited family/social networks, rendering them particularly vulnerable to exploitation, extortion, human trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), discrimination and xenophobia.[10] Data documenting these flows are limited due to difficulties in capturing populations on the move and estimating informal border crossings. Based on interviews and a desk review, the evaluation team developed a characterization of each year cycle in a timeline to appraise the relationship

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[9] The group of people of concern to UNHCR also includes Colombian returnees, as well as other nationals who are refugees or migrants coming from Venezuela, regardless of nationality.
[10] Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, January–December 2019, http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/21600

between events and the response (Figure 1), with more details in Annex 1: Detailed timeline and context.

- **2016–2017:** Increased flow of refugees and migrants from Venezuela: UNHCR emergency preparedness
- **2018:** Increased flow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants to host countries: UNHCR response with international protection mandate, deployment of new UNHCR's offices, and L2 emergency declarations for VenSit
- **2019:** Increased flow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants to host countries: host country issued border restrictions for Venezuelans, scaled up UNHCR emergency response
- **2020:** COVID-19 pandemic: host country issued border closures and quarantine measures, increased reverse flow of Venezuelan returnees, UNHCR's global L2 emergency declaration and response in the context of COVID-19

Figure 1: Refugees and migrants from Venezuela in destination countries

Venezuelan migrants in destination

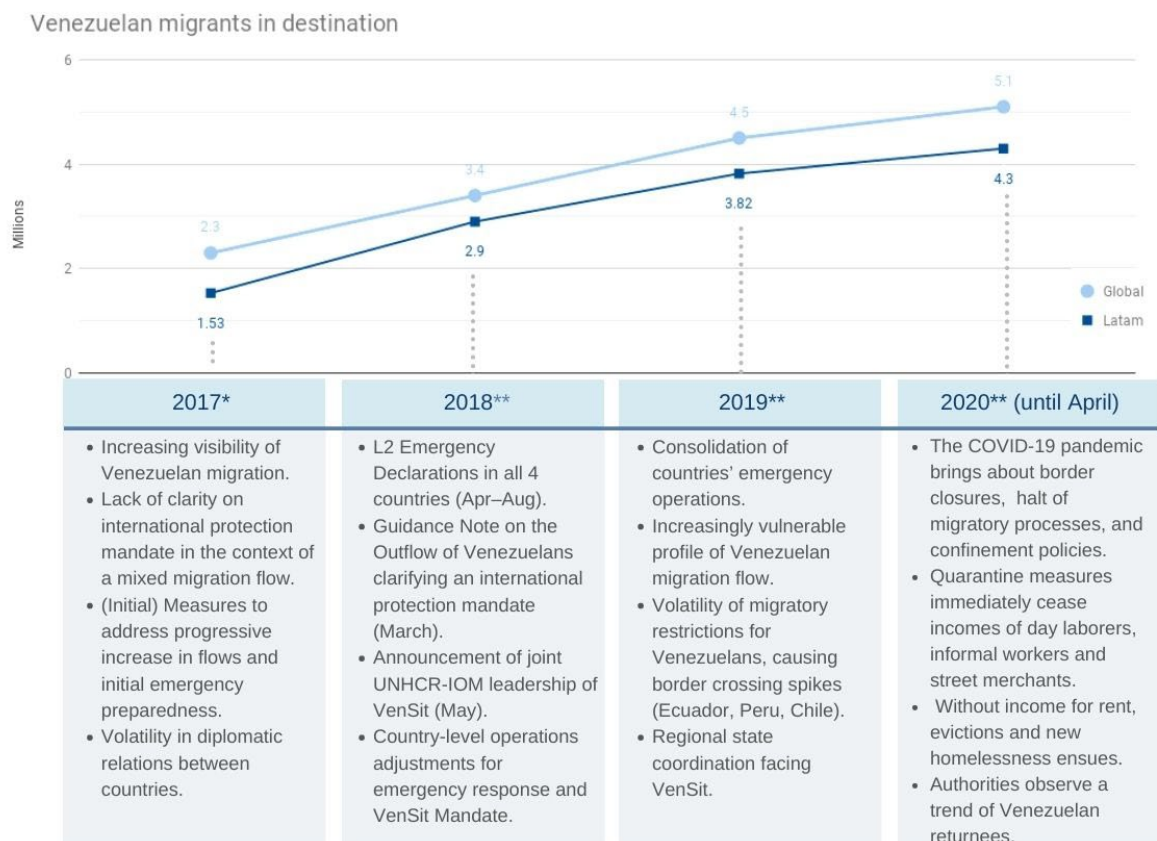| 2017*	2018**	2019**	2020** (until April)
• Increasing visibility of Venezuelan migration. • Lack of clarity on international protection mandate in the context of a mixed migration flow. • (Initial) Measures to address progressive increase in flows and initial emergency preparedness. • Volatility in diplomatic relations between countries.	• L2 Emergency Declarations in all 4 countries (Apr–Aug). • Guidance Note on the Outflow of Venezuelans clarifying an international protection mandate (March). • Announcement of joint UNHCR-IOM leadership of VenSit (May). • Country-level operations adjustments for emergency response and VenSit Mandate.	• Consolidation of countries' emergency operations. • Increasingly vulnerable profile of Venezuelan migration flow. • Volatility of migratory restrictions for Venezuelans, causing border crossing spikes (Ecuador, Peru, Chile). • Regional state coordination facing VenSit.	• The COVID-19 pandemic brings about border closures, halt of migratory processes, and confinement policies. • Quarantine measures immediately cease incomes of day laborers, informal workers and street merchants. • Without income for rent, evictions and new homelessness ensues. • Authorities observe a trend of Venezuelan returnees.

Figure by authors based on :
* IOM. Migration Trends in the Americas: Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (July 2018)
**UNHCR-IOM. RMPR 2020 for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (Dec 2019)
***UNHCR-IOM. RMPR 2020 for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (May 2020 COVID Revision)

2 Evaluation methodology

2.1 General evaluation approach

10. The evaluation is a formative/developmental evaluation designed to guide adaptation to emerging and dynamic realities in complex environments.[11] The evaluation adopts both a retrospective and a forward-looking approach and systematically documents and analyses the progression and effectiveness of the response during the period of evaluation, as well as providing insights and recommendations for adjustments and improvements for relevant operations. Furthermore, it provides evidence-informed findings and recommendations based on OECD–DAC evaluation criteria, following the ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies[12] and is conducted using a mixed-methods approach.[13] The evaluation is guided by an evaluation matrix that details the key evaluation questions and specific sub-questions (Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix), evaluation criteria and likely sources of information, as well as summarizes the methods for data analysis. The matrix, all study instruments and this report are organized into three areas of inquiry (AOI):

   – **AOI 1 – Assistance and protection response:** What have been the results of UNHCR's regional- and country-level assistance and protection responses for refugees and migrants in VenSit?
   – **AOI 2 – Socioeconomic inclusion and mid/long-term perspectives:** To what extent has UNHCR been successful in advocating for and developing government capacity to ensure socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and migrants, and incorporating mid/long-term protection perspectives in the design and delivery of the operational response?
   – **AOI 3 – Internal and external factors:** What factors (internal and external) constrained or enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection? To what extent were those influenced by the mixed-flow character of VenSit?

2.2 Theory of change

11. In order to develop the evaluation design of UNHCR's response to VenSit as it relates to the TOR, the evaluation team developed a theory of change model (Figure 2) to illustrate the causal link between UNHCR's four areas of intervention (direct emergency assistance, protection, socioeconomic and cultural inclusion, and strengthening the

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[11] "Developmental Evaluation supports innovation development to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments" and thus, is particularly suited for complex and crisis contexts. Patton, M. Q. (2010) *Developmental Evaluation. Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use,* New York: Guilford Press.

[12] ALNAP (2006) *Evaluating humanitarian action using the OECD-DAC criteria – ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

[13] The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches can provide a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone. Creswell, John W. and Plano Clark, Vicki L. (2010) *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

capacity of host government) and strategic outcomes as agreed upon in the 2019 Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP).[14]

12. UNHCR approaches the four areas of intervention through direct assistance to refugees and migrants, advocacy, capacity development and coordination. These strategies or inputs help to foster immediate outputs within the enabling environment, including service and resource availability, policy change, and government and partner capacity development. Ultimately, the long-term protection impacts for refugees and migrants are achieved through outcomes that include access to goods and services, access to and enjoyment of rights, and socioeconomic inclusion.

13. This evaluation will not measure impact, nor will it measure UNHCR's inter-agency coordination. Instead it will focus on the strategies (inputs), outputs and outcomes at four levels of analysis (global, regional, national and field). The underlying assumption is that UNHCR operates in an environment influenced by governments and host communities, as well as UNHCR's partners and donors.

Figure 2: Theory of change
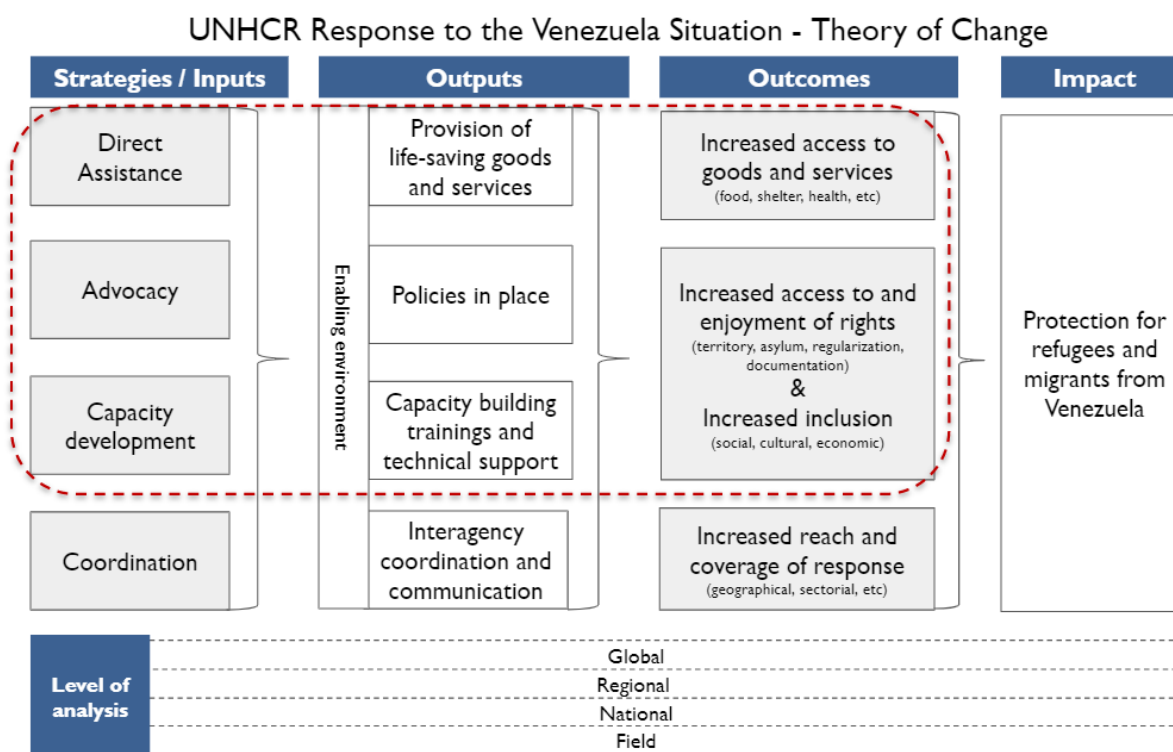
Note: Red dotted box encapsulates the scope of this evaluation.

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[14] Regional RMRP for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela January–December 2019. Accessed from: http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/21600. The four areas of intervention are part of the framework as per the terms of reference of this evaluation. The evaluation team understands that the 2020 RMRP presents a framework of 10 thematic sectors and 6 working groups, to be implemented by a partnership of UN agencies and NGOs.

2.4 Data sources

14. This evaluation employed a mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) approach, implemented in two phases using both primary and secondary data, with Phase 1 occurring from November 2019 to February 2020, and Phase 2 in September 2020. Data sources are described in the text and table below, with country-level details available in Annex 3: Interviews and focus groups conducted by stakeholder and country. All primary data collection activities reflect age, gender and diversity (AGD) considerations.

15. During Phase 1 (P1), 213 key informant interviews and 87 focus groups were conducted in person in at least three different sites per country between November 2019 and January 2020. Some 98 online surveys were completed by UNHCR VenSit staff between January and February 2020.[15] In addition, the evaluation team conducted a document review of 97 public and internal UNHCR reports and documents. For the key informant interviews and focus groups, samples from UNHCR staff, partners and government officials were drawn using purposeful sampling. All samples with persons of concern to UNHCR (Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian returnees, members of the Warao indigenous community, host community members, persons at risk and/or with specific needs) were drawn using maximum variation sampling (combined with emergent sampling), that is, a purposeful qualitative sampling technique that aims to sample heterogeneity. In order to avoid potential biases, the focus group sample for known UNHCR recipients in Ecuador and Peru was randomly selected from recipient databases provided by UNHCR's implementing partners in those countries. This methodology was not possible in Colombia and Brazil, where UNHCR does not have one main implementing partner. Instead, the focus group sample for known UNHCR recipients was randomly selected within shelters and/or attention centres.

16. The COVID-19 pandemic began during the planning for Phase 2 (P2). The Evaluation Service presented the evaluation team with two options: 1) to cease the evaluation as planned; or 2) to continue with a more limited plan. The latter was chosen. Hence, 44 key informant interviews were conducted virtually between 1 September and 22 September 2020, exclusively with UNHCR staff in at least four different sites per country.[16] In addition, 88 online surveys were completed by UNHCR VenSit staff. The evaluation team also conducted a review of 71 public and internal UNHCR reports and documents.

17. Interviews and focus groups were transcribed, coded and analysed by members of the evaluation team. Using charting and mapping techniques, recurring themes were determined. From this, the data were then coded and grouped into themes per evaluation team group discussion. The online survey data was analysed in SPSS Statistics software. Basic descriptive statistics (frequencies and averages) and cross-tabulation were produced and reported for survey results. Using a deductive approach to data analysis, open-ended perception questions were analysed by tallying conceptually

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[15] Ecuador: Quito (BO and FO), Tulcán, Guayaquil. Peru: Lima, Arequipa, Tumbes. Colombia: Bogotá (BO and FO), Medellín, Cúcuta, Riohacha/Maicao. Brazil: Brasília, Boa Vista, Pacaraima, Manaus, São Paulo, Porto Alegre/Esteio.
[16] Ecuador: Quito (BO and FO), Tulcán, and Guayaquil, Lago Agrio. Peru: Lima, Arequipa, Tacna, Tumbes. Colombia: Bogota (BO and FO), Medellin, Cucuta, Riohacha/Maicao. Brazil: Brasília, Boa Vista, Pacaraima, Manaus, São Paulo.

equivalent (per evaluation team group discussion and majority decision) indicators mentioned by study respondents and analysed for response patterns and trends. Secondary data were analysed and triangulated with other data to minimize bias and ensure credibility of findings and conclusions.

Table 1: Data sources

Data source	Phase 1 (November 2019–February 2020)	Phase 2 (September 2020)
Key informant interviews (KIIs)	213 semi-structured KIIs conducted in person with a. UNHCR staff (headquarter, regional, national and field office levels) b. UNHCR partners c. Government officials d. Persons at risk and/or with specific needs (women travelling alone, mothers, older people and LGBTI individuals)	44 semi-structured interviews conducted virtually with UNHCR staff only (national and field office levels)
Focus groups (FGs)	87 semi-structured FGs conducted in person with a. Venezuelan refugees and migrants (known and unknown recipients of UNHCR in city and border sites) b. Colombian returnees (Colombia only) c. Members of the Warao indigenous community (Brazil only) d. Host community members (city and border sites)	N/A
Online survey	98 online surveys (sent via a secure email survey link) conducted with UNHCR staff in VenSit countries and UNHCR regional staff whose work is related to VenSit	88 online surveys (sent via a secure email survey link) conducted with UNHCR staff in VenSit countries and UNHCR regional staff whose work is related to VenSit
Secondary data review	97 public and internal UNHCR reports reviewed	71 public and internal UNHCR reports reviewed

2.5 Limitations

18. Due to the type of sampling employed for primary data collection, the results are not generalizable or transferable to other times and places. There were also some key informant interviews that could not be conducted due to changes in staff or for other external reasons (i.e. national strikes occurring at the time of Phase 1 data collection). There is also a potential bias in the online survey responses since the participation in the

survey was voluntary;[17] therefore, its results may not be generalizable to all UNHCR response efforts in the selected countries. While participation was voluntary and the information provided was confidential, the first round of the online survey did require respondents to identify themselves, which may have deterred staff from participating or providing honest feedback. Conversely, the second round of the online survey did allow for anonymous submissions, and many respondents chose to respond anonymously. Lastly, the document review is based on available information from the R4V platform, so it might not reflect the most recent changes in UNHCR strategy.

19. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, plans for the second phase of data collection changed considerably. Phase 2, originally envisioned to employ multiple primary data collection techniques with multiple stakeholder groups as it had in Phase 1, was delayed and reduced to the online survey and a limited number of targeted key informant interviews, exclusively with UNHCR staff and conducted virtually. As a result, the second round was used to elaborate on findings and recommendations from Phase 1 and to capture new contextual factors that have emerged in 2020, including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given a more limited scope, the second round did not allow the evaluation team to compare and assess changes in findings across two time points, as originally intended. In addition, the second round potentially represents a biased perspective on UNHCR's operations since the only stakeholders in the sample were UNHCR staff.

20. Finally, the response to VenSit is co-led by both UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) through the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform. However, this evaluation only examines the response led by UNHCR, and therefore, only provides a partial examination of the entire VenSit response. In agreement with terms established with the Evaluation Service, the UNHCR–IOM-led Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform would be the subject of a separate evaluation to provide a fuller understanding of the entire response.

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[17] Respondents were asked to share their names in the survey but were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses via a study information and consent form.

3 Detailed findings

3.1 Assistance and protection response (AOI 1)

3.1.1 ASSISTANCE

21. <u>The emergency assistance provided by UNHCR is relevant to the needs of refugees and migrants.</u> UNHCR's strategic decision to employ a needs-based approach, targeting the most vulnerable, improved the relevance of the VenSit response. Across Phases 1 and 2 of data collection, stakeholders reported that the emergency assistance provided by UNHCR was relevant to the needs of refugees and migrants in all four countries, at the immediate team level, national level and regional level. Between Phases 1 and 2, online survey results with UNHCR staff (Figure 3) indicate that the perceived relevance of UNHCR assistance strategies remains high and improves slightly when considering the regional level. The scale of the VenSit population's needs made it essential that assistance was targeted from the onset. Given limited resources, UNHCR's adoption of a needs-based approach and prioritization of vulnerable subgroups, including persons at risk and with specific needs, was appropriate and effective.

22. Despite COVID-19 limiting access to the population of concern, UNHCR reacted quickly to adapt and deliver emergency assistance by virtual means, shifting towards telephone helplines and cash-based interventions (CBIs). The needs-based approach and prioritization of vulnerable subgroups continued in 2020, but the pandemic complicated this strategy. Vulnerability profiles within the population rose as refugees and migrants faced both direct effects (infections and health complications) and indirect effects (loss of income, evictions, rise in SGBV cases during lockdowns) of COVID-19. Simultaneously, the implementation of quarantine and sanitary precaution measures forced UNHCR and many partners and government institutions to suspend or limit activities on the ground, making it considerably harder to target and support vulnerable groups. UNHCR adopted a "stay-and-deliver" approach and quickly adapted many of its strategies for assistance provision. In all four evaluation countries, UNHCR advocated with national and local governments to include refugees and migrants in COVID-19 response plans, provided assistance to the health sector (such as refugee housing units (RHUs), equipment), and established sanitary measures in all UNHCR-administered shelters.

23. UNHCR also expanded the vulnerability criteria of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to better address the needs of the population and established virtual channels both for internal and external communication with partner and government actors, host communities and the population of concern. For instance, UNHCR set up telephone hotlines to maintain contact with refugees and migrants, which expanded UNHCR's reach (though inaccessible to those without phone or Internet). In addition, UNHCR shifted towards the delivery of CBIs to support families and developed virtual delivery mechanisms to avoid exposure, an approach that staff felt was relevant and necessary for families. Finally, UNHCR developed online communication channels and virtual mechanisms to continue communication with communities (CwC) and community-based protection (CBP) activities at a distance. UNHCR staff did raise concerns about virtual approaches, however. While CBIs were considered an effective way to provide emergency assistance during the pandemic, UNHCR staff reported long waiting lists of

those waiting to receive CBIs, particularly in Ecuador, and were concerned about the resource-intensive nature of CBIs. Similarly, while the hotlines allow UNHCR greater reach in terms of contact with the population, it has not necessarily translated to greater or better coverage since both detecting and addressing cases has been a challenge via virtual channels.

Figure 3: Relevance of UNHCR's emergency assistance strategies

How relevant are UNHCR's emergency assistance strategies to the needs of VenSit refugees and migrants (N_{P1}=98, N_{P2}=88))

At immediate team level

| | Partially relevant | Relevant | P1: Phase 1 | P2: Phase 2 |

At national level

At regional level

24. <u>The provision of life-saving goods and services is insufficient to cover the full extent of needs of the population.</u> The scale of the VenSit population's needs exceeded available resources and capacity of UNHCR and humanitarian actors. The general perception of UNHCR staff, partners and government respondents across the four countries was that refugees' and migrants' needs are only partially met, primarily because of the large numbers of refugees and migrants compared to available resources. Online survey results (Figure 4) corroborate this, showing that the vast majority of UNHCR staff considered needs only "partially" met. In Brazil and Peru, there was an increase in the percentage of staff stating that response efforts fully meet the needs of VenSit refugees and migrants; however, a decrease was observed in Colombia, Ecuador and other sites.

Figure 4: Degree to which VenSit refugees' and migrants' needs are met by UNHCR's provision of life-saving goods and services (% partially – fully)
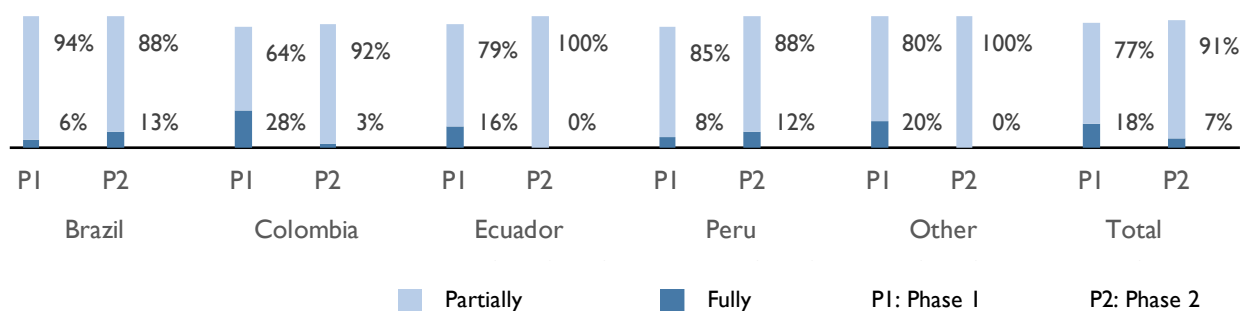
25. Overall, refugees and migrants also perceived their needs were partially met regarding the provision of life-saving goods and services, though responses varied by country. Respondents acknowledged limited funding as a structural challenge, but still reported the need to scale up to expand reach and coverage of the population to improve the delivery of the emergency assistance response, while also investing in livelihood activities.

26. The response during the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. In the second online survey in 2020, nearly 60 per cent of UNHCR staff indicated that COVID-19 had constrained the delivery of UNHCR's operational response. In Ecuador, for instance, the revised RMRP[18] made available in May, indicated that 47 per cent of activities reported to assist Venezuelans had to be suspended (similar data were not available for the other countries). COVID-19 did, however, increase access to funding (see Figure 5). In 2020, many UNHCR operations were reaching their highest-ever funding levels.[19] That said, an October 2020 UNHCR funding update indicated that of the $260.7 million in financial requirements that UNHCR has for VenSit, 59 per cent had been funded, leaving a

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[18] RMRP 2020, May 2020 Revision.
[19] OCHA's financial tracking service reflected contributions to all partners of the RMRP in 2019 of $84.4 million, compared to $154 million mobilized for VenSit in 2020. See: https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/944/summary

funding gap of $106.5 million.[20] Overall, R4V data indicate that on average in the four countries, UNHCR had reached 42 per cent of their targeted population as of October 2020.[21]

Figure 5: COVID-19 impact on access to funding (N_{P2}=88)
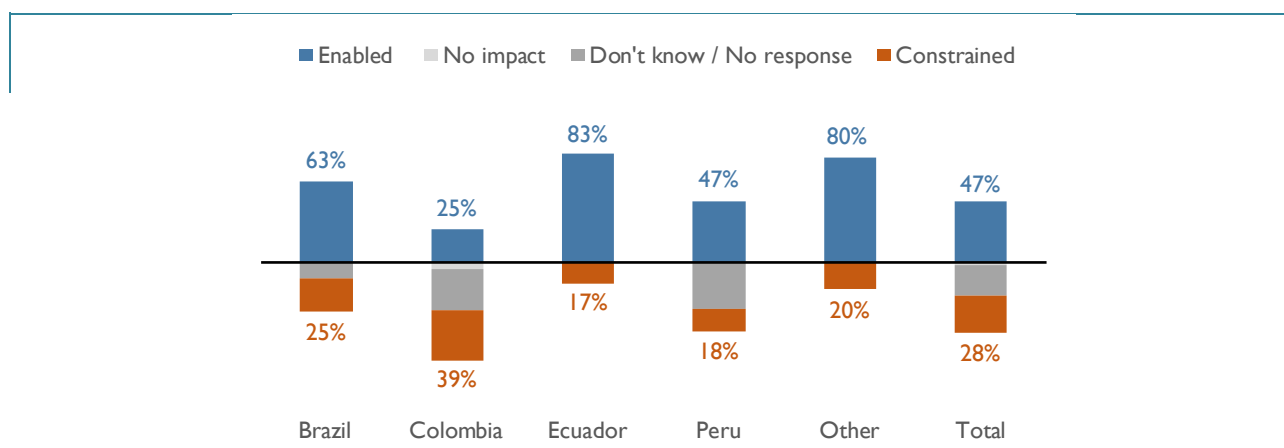
27. <u>The most pressing needs of refugees and migrants sampled were health, shelter/housing, food and employment</u>. According to refugees and migrant key informants and focus group members in Phase 1, the most pressing emergency needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants were health (medical attention and medicine), shelter/housing and food. Although considered mid/long-term assistance (and further discussed under AOI 2), employment was mentioned by migrants and refugees as their most pressing need, alongwith those given above. Priority of these needs varies slightly by country. Figure 6 shows the most pressing needs of refugees and migrants leaving Venezuela reported by refugees and migrants themselves in P1. Employment was clearly the most pressing need among respondents in Brazil and Ecuador, while food and health needs were mentioned more often by respondents in Peru. Although health care was mentioned as one of the most pressing needs of refugees and migrants across countries, this area was mentioned as a more critical need in Peru and Colombia due to refugees' and migrants' poor access to public health services.

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[20] UNHCR Division of External Relations (2020) "Funding Update – Venezuela Situation as of 7 October 2020", brief.
[21] People reached (from targeted population): Colombia: 50 per cent, Ecuador: 30 per cent, Peru: 20 per cent, Brazil: 69 per cent. (R4V platform, accessed on 6 October 2020)

Figure 6: Most pressing needs of the VenSit population according to refugees and migrants

What are the most pressing needs (both emergency and mid/long-term) of refugees and migrants leaving Venezuela* [Refugee and migrant focus groups]

■ Known beneficiaries   ■ Unknown beneficiaries   ■ Colombian returnees   ■ Warao
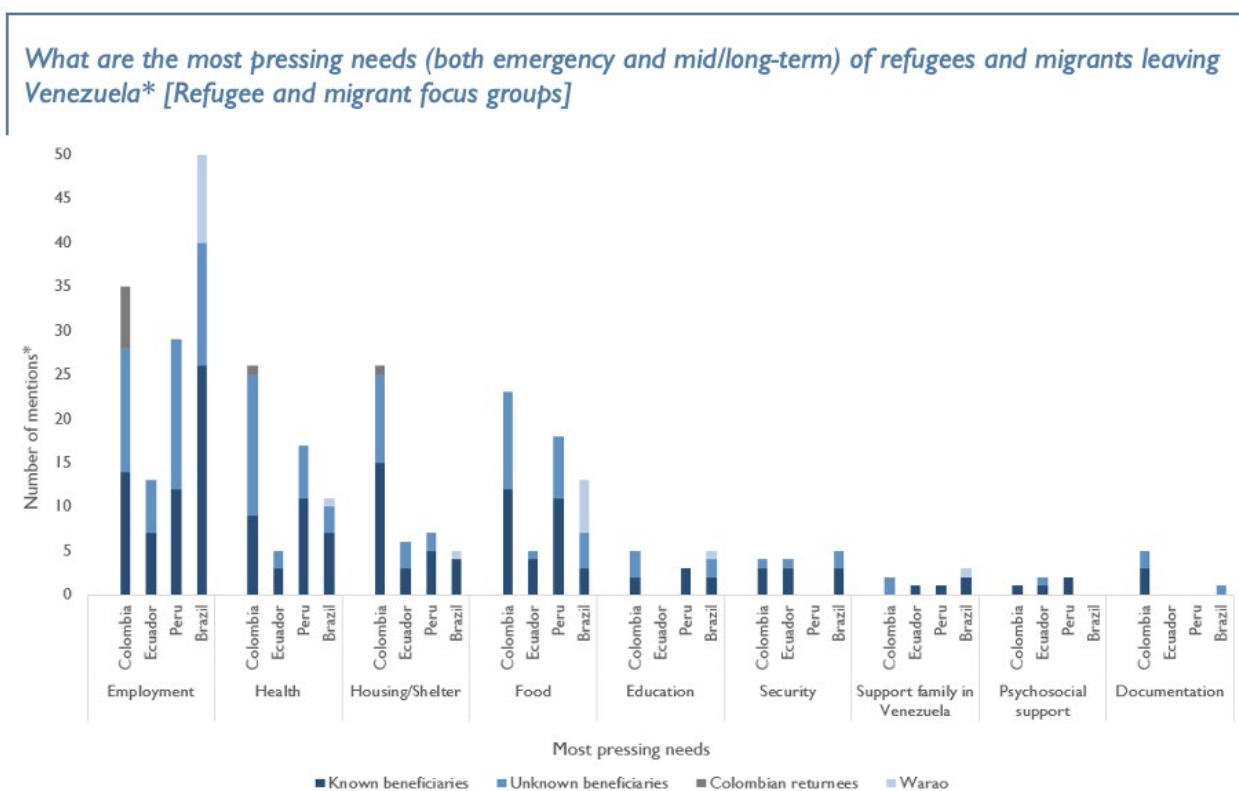
*Graph only includes groups mentioned by at least 10% of the focus group sample. Other needs with more than one mention: Clothing (4: ECU, COL, BRA) Cash (3: COL), Information (3: ECU, COL), Language classes (3: BRA), Interiorização (3: BRA), Transportation (2: COL, BRA), Visa (2: ECU), Fight xenophobia (2: ECU), Quality of life (2: BRA), Hygiene (2: COL, ECU)

28. Refugees and migrants were not sampled in Phase 2 but the evaluation team did conduct a remote respondent-driven sampling (RDS) study with Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia,[22] wherein more than 80 per cent of respondents reported having difficulties in meeting basic needs, with the largest percentage reporting not having enough food. According to P2 online survey results with UNHCR staff, education and employment are generally identified as the two needs least met, and shelter and health as the two needs most met, although there are differences among countries (Figure 7). In Ecuador and Peru, food is the most frequently identified as the need most met (83 per cent and 47 per cent respectively), while just 29 per cent reported food was the need most met in Brazil, and 17 per cent in Colombia. According to R4V documentation from March to May 2020, housing and employment remain among the top three needs across the four countries, as well as food in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

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[22] The evaluation team was commissioned by UNHCR to conduct a remote RDS study in two locations (Bogota and Norte de Santander) using two data collection methods: a phone RDS component employing phone-based survey with peer-to-peer recruitment through phone contacts and an online RDS component employing a web-based survey with peer-to-peer recruitment through WhatsApp. Phone RDS was conducted between September and August 2020 and online RDS was conducted between October and November 2020 (N=942).

Figure 7: Most pressing needs of the VenSit population according to UNHCR staff

These were the top needs identified among refugees and migrants in round 1 data collection.
Rank the needs from most met to least met (P2, n=88)

■ Least met ■ Second least met ■ medium ■ Second most met ■ Most met
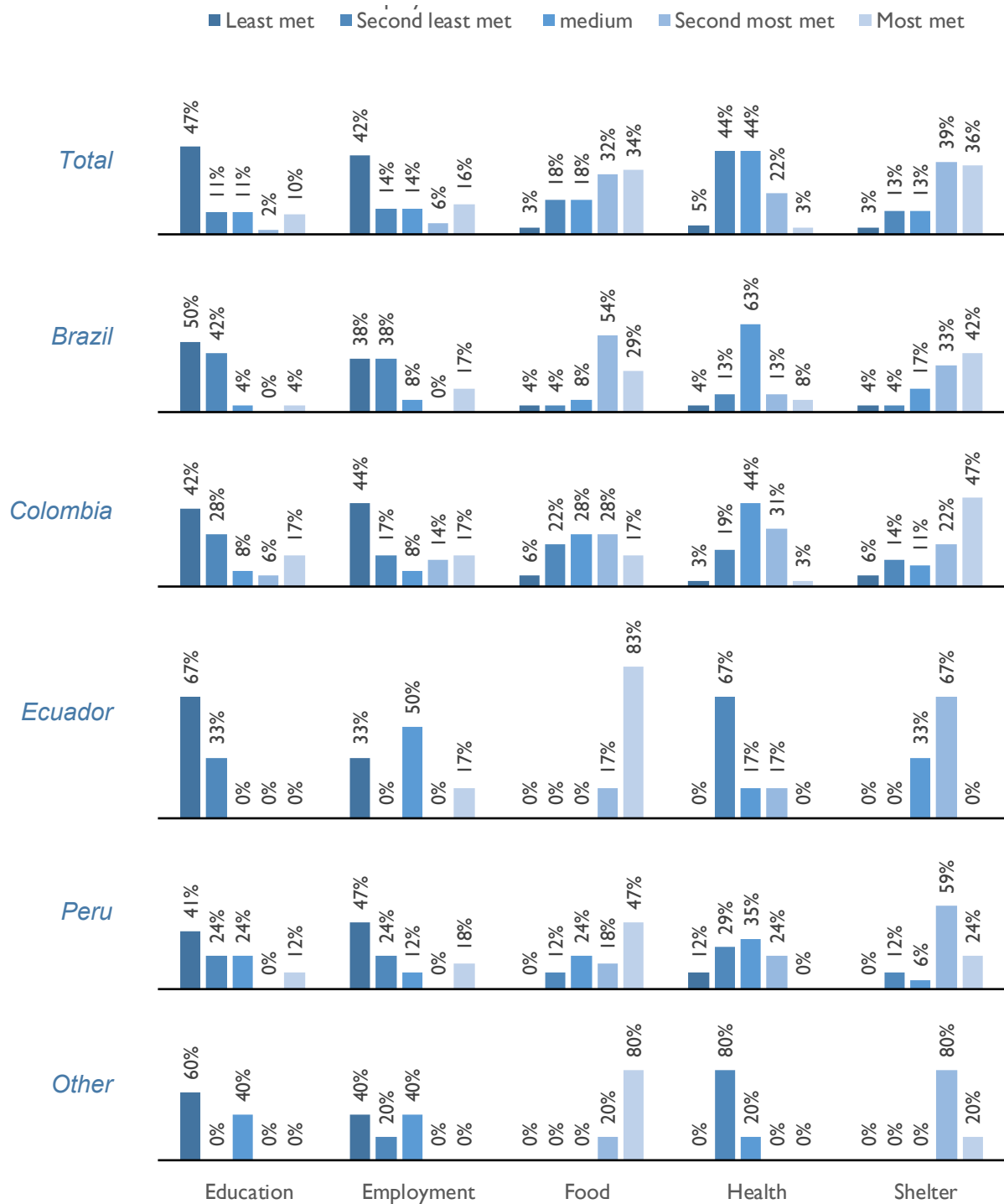
29. In general, the specific needs of persons at risk are taken into account in UNHCR strategies and operations, but coverage is still lacking for certain groups. Most stakeholders across the four countries indicated that the needs of persons at risk and/or with specific needs are taken into account in UNHCR's strategies and operations.

However, when considering the needs of specific groups, the views were more contrasted. Coverage is still lacking for persons with specific needs and certain "hidden" populations, including persons with disabilities, older people, LGBTI individuals, and indigenous groups (in Colombia and Brazil), whose needs may not be fully assessed and addressed. Figure 8 depicts UNHCR staff opinions (P1) regarding which groups might have been left out of services. Half of UNHCR staff who provided a response to this question indicated that Venezuelans with an irregular status are often left out or not reached (applicable to all countries except for Brazil). Other groups mentioned included single/young men, indigenous people (in Colombia and Brazil), and people with disabilities. According to R4V documentation, certain profiles face increased risk in 2020, such as women survivors of violence and victims of trafficking / smuggling.

Figure 8: Groups left out of services according to P1 KIIs

Percentages may not add to 100%. Some staff provided multiple groups while others didn't list any. Graph includes all groups mentioned in interviews with staff.
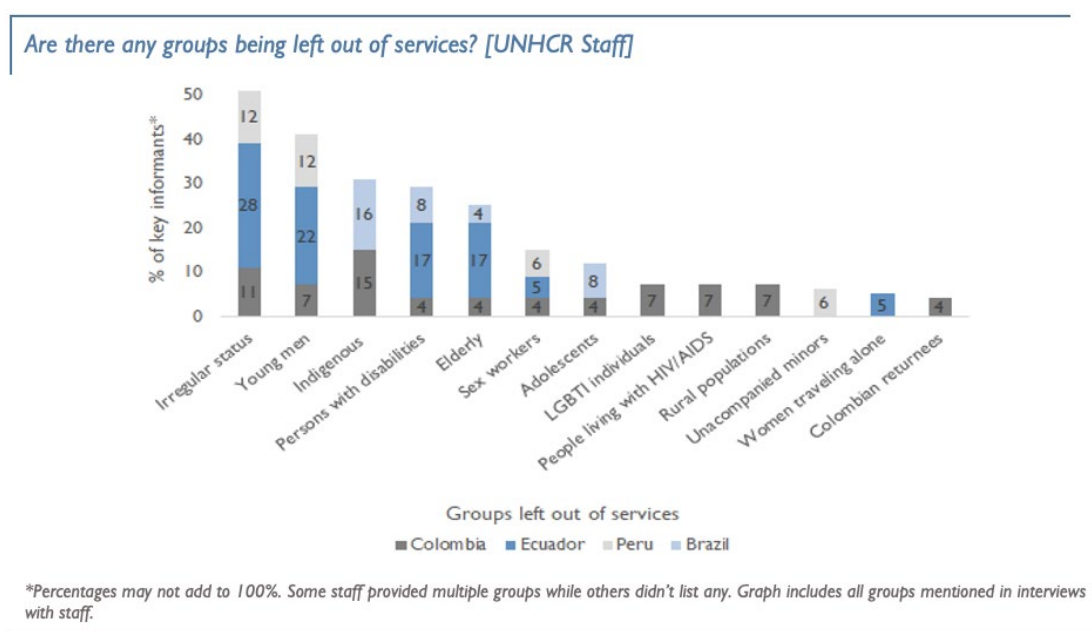
30. According to online surveys (Figure 9), while the needs of children at risk were generally perceived as being fully taken into account (81 per cent at P2), fewer respondents were similarly positive considering the needs of indigenous communities (28 per cent at P2), older people (25 per cent at P2), and adult men travelling alone (20 per cent at P2). Compared to P1, staff perceptions from P2 indicated that progress made to address the needs of these groups may have declined (fully taken into account: 28 per cent at P1 compared to 15 per cent at P2). Indigenous communities were an exception, mainly due to an improvement in Brazil (35 per cent at P1 compared to 71 per cent at P2). Brazil is the only country where the needs of indigenous communities were reported to be fully taken into account by more than half the respondents. Brazil has received the largest influx of Venezuelan indigenous people, and according to staff, multiple initiatives have been undertaken to improve the conditions and perspectives of the indigenous populations in Brazil, namely, relocation to an improved shelter and a successful socioeconomic integration pilot, both in Manaus.

Figure 9: Extent to which the following groups were considered in the VenSit strategies implemented by UNHCR to provide life-saving goods and services (% partially – fully; N_{P1}=98, N_{P2}=88)
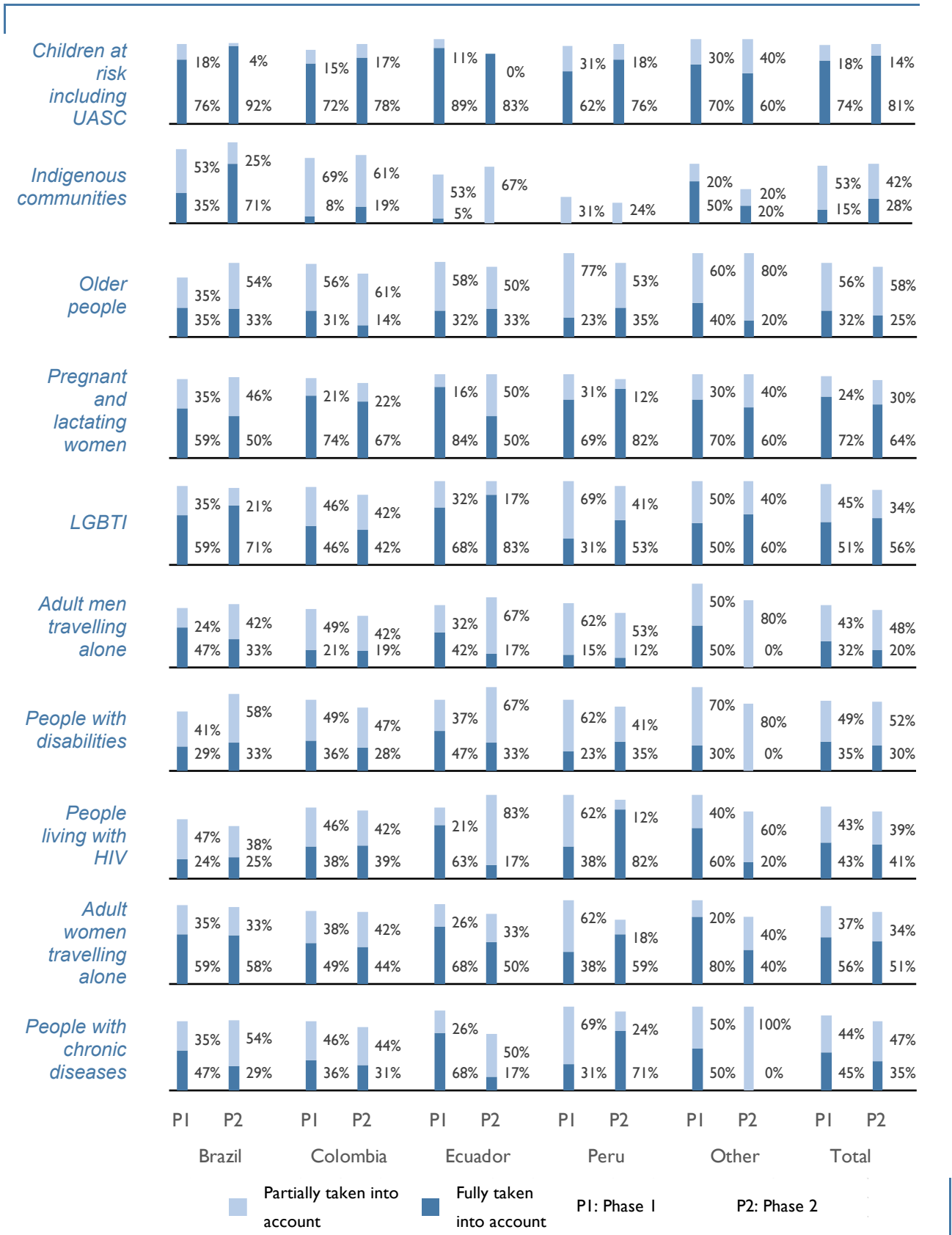
31. <u>Refugees' and migrants' mental health needs are not sufficiently addressed in the assistance response.</u> According to refugee and migrant key informants and focus group respondents, mental health needs were an important concern and were currently not sufficiently covered by professional care or psychosocial support in the respective countries. Psychosocial support was also listed by UNHCR online survey respondents as an important need that was not being met. In the RDS study conducted by the evaluation team in Colombia, nearly one in five refugees and migrants reported having experienced psychological and emotional abuse since arriving in Colombia; more than one in five refugees and migrants reported constant or persistent worrying; and more than one in ten reported frequent anxiety.

32. In coordination with governments and partners, UNHCR has established robust assistance structures to address the most pressing needs at formal border points. However, monitoring irregular entries and providing assistance at informal crossings remain a challenge (except for Brazil).The border assistance response provides information and orientation, emergency assistance and emergency shelter for those most at need. Although there is little documentation available specifically about border assistance and structures put in place, including the number of people reached, evidence from key informant interviews and on-site observations suggest that these structures have been critical to providing information and orientation, emergency assistance and emergency shelter for those most at need.

- **Ecuador:** UNHCR set up an emergency response compound in Rumichaca in 2019, where agencies and NGOs provided assistance and orientation. It was later disrupted by the visa requirement put in place in August 2019 and again by border closures due to COVID-19 in 2020, but UNHCR and partners adapted to continue providing a coordinated response.

- **Colombia:** At the request of the government, UNHCR set up an integrated assistance centre, the *Centro de Atención Integral* (CAI), in Maicao in March 2019. UNHCR and partners provided camp management and coordination, protection monitoring and case referral, identification of persons with specific needs, psychosocial support and non-food item (NFI) distributions. In Cucuta, UNHCR provides orientation and assistance and supports a community kitchen, temporary shelter and health centre.

- **Peru:** In response to the humanitarian visa requirement, on 15 June 2019 UNHCR and its partners set up an emergency response at the northern border, including RHUs serving as temporary shelters for refugees and migrants stranded at the border.

- **Brazil:** The shelter and documentation structure PTRIG in Pacaraima was a government initiative with UNHCR assistance, praised for its high quality and efficiency. In particular, it largely contributed to tackling homelessness in the city, ensuring the protection of vulnerable populations and contributing to appeasing tensions with the host community. In light of COVID-19, and the drastic influx reduction due to border closure since March 2020, it was reported by staff that the PTRIG has been temporarily closed.

33. Monitoring of irregular crossings and providing assistance at informal crossing points are major challenges for UNHCR, complicated by border restrictions and closures,

geographical access limitations and insecurity. Monitoring and providing assistance to irregular entries is a major challenge: informal routes are constantly changing, while informal crossing points are often geographically difficult to access and are marked by insecurity (such as armed actors, human traffickers). Border restrictions and closures have driven up the number of irregular entries via informal crossings, further complicating UNHCR's border monitoring and assistance efforts. Visa restrictions enacted by Peru in June 2019 and by Ecuador in August 2019 left many refugees and migrants stranded at the other side of border points in the short term and increased the number of irregular crossings into both countries in the long term. UNHCR in both countries responded with advocacy and quick action to prevent refugees and migrants from being stranded between borders. While UNHCR maintained its presence at official crossings to cover the basic needs of the few who met the requirements to enter regularly, border staff's ability to monitor and assist those entering irregularly was limited. Their strategy was to make contact further along the refugees' and migrants' journeys, although staff voiced concern that some might fall through the cracks. Border closures across all four countries due to COVID-19 in March 2020 drastically reduced the regular movements of refugees and migrants at formal border points, further increased irregular entries via informal crossings throughout the region, and limited UNHCR's field presence during social isolation and quarantine measures.

34. Figure 10 shows the majority of staff reported that UNHCR has "partially" provided protection to those with irregular entries, with the percentage reporting "fully" provided protection decreasing from P1 (36 per cent) to P2 (24 per cent). Staff have mentioned that binational meetings between UNHCR staff and regular communication with partners and community contacts along the border provide them with a general picture of new routes and trends in movements. Increased evidence on irregular movements and more regular and better quality binational communication would enhance the understanding of flows and early-warning mechanisms, which are critical to allow for preparing in case of a mass influx, and to further support refugees and migrants in transit and in need of assistance and monitoring. The issue of irregular crossings is less a problem for Brazil than for Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, although the Peru–Brazil border in the Amazon (Madre de Dios) is increasingly becoming an irregular entry point into Brazil. Across the four countries, hard data about irregular crossings are not available, and countries' IM teams produce estimates for bridging these gaps.

Figure 10: Degree to which UNHCR has provided protection
for those with irregular entries (% partially – fully)

Degree to which UNHCR has provided protection for those with irregular entries (% partially – fully)

	Brazil		Colombia		Ecuador		Peru		Other		Total	
	P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2	P1	P2
Partially	18%	33%	59%	56%	79%	100%	31%	71%	70%	60%	53%	
Fully	65%	38%	31%	22%	21%	0%	38%	18%	30%	20%	36%	

Partially   Fully   P1: Phase 1   P2: Phase 2
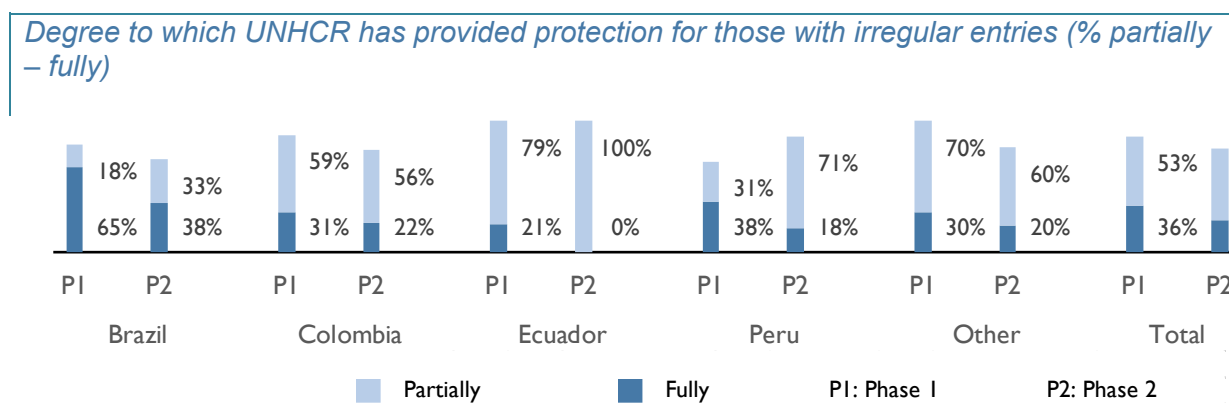
3.1.2 PROTECTION

35. <u>With the support of UNHCR, governments are providing access to territory, asylum and regularization processes and documentation to different extents across the four countries.</u> Access to territory has differed by country, depending on national policies. Although there were differences across countries, stakeholders indicated that, overall, refugees' and migrants' rights to access to territory, asylum and regularization processes and documentation were partially met (summarized in Tables 2 and 3). The major factors that affected these rights were government regulations, visa restrictions (Ecuador and Peru), and government capacity to provide access to the asylum system and regularization processes. In 2019, access to territory had remained open in Colombia and Brazil, but became more restricted in Ecuador and Peru with the passage of visa restrictions. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the four countries closed their borders as a public health measure. Some countries also issued policies to address an increase in returns to Venezuela. In Colombia, for example, immigration authorities issued Resolution No. 1265 on 5 June 2020, according to which, Venezuelans who decide to return to Venezuela are at risk of losing their refugee status or having their application for asylum rejected.

Table 2: Factors enabling and constraining access to territory and asylum by country

	Access to territory	Access to asylum
Colombia	**Enabling access:** •Open until March 2020 (COVID-19) **Constraining access:** •Irregular crossings •Armed groups •Special Migratory Group (*Grupo Especial Migratorio, GEM*) expulsions •Border closed as of October 2020	**Constraining access:** •Weak asylum system •Refugees and migrants lack info about right to asylum and process •Overburdened asylum system: large backlog •Delays: currently 2+ years to process
Ecuador	**Constraining access:** •Restricted by visa requirement, then closed in March 2020 (COVID-19) •Remained closed as of October 2020 •Irregular crossings	**Enabling access:** •Strong asylum system in place •Using 1951 Convention definition **Constraining access:** •Refugees and migrants lack info about right to asylum and process
Peru	**Constraining access**: •Restricted by visa requirement, then closed in March 2020 (COVID-19) •Remained closed as of October 2020 •Irregular crossings	**Enabling access:** •Asylum system is a strong mechanism to access to territory. Online system for asylum application was reopened in June 2020, after being closed for a few months **Constraining access** •Procedures at the border (e.g. pre-interview for asylum-seekers) •Changes in interpretation of CEPR policies
Brazil	**Enabling access** •Open until March 2020 (COVID-19) **Constraining access**: •Border closed as of October 2020	**Enabling access:** •Application of the Cartagena Declaration •Prima facie allowed to recognize 46,000 Venezuelans as refugees as of October 2020

36. Through advocacy and technical support, UNHCR has helped to improve asylum systems and procedures in all of the countries to different degrees, depending in large part on the asylum system infrastructure that was already in place prior to VenSit.

- **Brazil:** Brazil adopted the expanded definition of "refugee" established by the Cartagena Declaration and implemented prima facie, the only country to do so. As a result, Brazil has the highest number (more than 46,000) of recognized Venezuelan refugees in the region as of October 2020.[23] Based on June 2020 data, Brazil also has a large number of pending cases (101,636, which does not take into account the latest prima facie decisions). UNHCR strongly supported and facilitated the government's decision to implement prima facie through high-level advocacy, capacity-building (national and international missions for Brazilian authorities), technical support and resources. UNHCR has also advocated additional improvements in the asylum system such as the change of the asylum-seeking protocol format from paper to card. UNHCR is currently working to bridge challenges related to CONARE implementation, that is, through support for submitting asylum requests (direct and through partners).

- **Colombia:** As of December 2019, Colombia has a low number of recognized refugees (425, only 0.4 per cent of the recognized refugee population)[24] and a low number of pending cases (8,824), despite having received the highest number of Venezuelans worldwide. Owing to its history as a refugee-producing country and not as a refugee-receiving country, Colombia did not have a strong asylum system to begin with. The weak asylum system was unprepared to handle an increased influx and was immediately overwhelmed, resulting in long processing delays that may further deter refugees and migrants from applying. The government is currently analysing the possibility of applying UNHCR's registration system to the asylum system, but there is a need to advocate at higher levels for more support.

- **Ecuador:** Ecuador's asylum system is among the most developed in the region due to its experience with the Colombian refugee situation in the past decade. UNHCR staff expressed that UNHCR plays a key role in the asylum system in Ecuador and reported that while Venezuelan refugees and migrants have access to asylum procedures, most are not informed about their right to asylum. This likely accounts for why Ecuador has only 374 recognized refugees (0.3 per cent of the recognized refugee population) and asylum claims (29,078) as of April 2020, despite the relatively high capacity of the asylum system.

- **Peru:** Peru has 1,282 recognized refugees and has the largest number of pending asylum claims of any VenSit country, with close to 500,000 applicants as of June 2020. This is, in large part, likely due to Peru's open asylum system and information

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[23] UNHCR (2020) *Brasil reconhece mais 7,7 mil venezuelanos como refugiados,* August 2020, https://www.acnur.org/portugues/2020/08/28/brasil-reconhece-mais-77-mil-venezuelanos-como-refugiados/
[24] All figures reported are from R4V Platform, which reports total pending asylum claims per country (number of Venezuelan individuals subject to pending asylum applications received by national authorities) and the number of recognized refugees from Venezuela. Percentages are listed as a fraction of the country's asylum claims/regularized refugee population over the asylum claims/regularized refugee population across all VenSit countries.

provided at the border regarding the asylum process as a way to enter the country. The historical support UNHCR has given to the Special Commission for Refugees (Comisión Especial para los Refugiados – CEPR), either with technical assistance, funding or human resources, has been essential for the increase of CEPR capacity to register asylum-seekers. Staff in Peru have also highlighted strong advocacy efforts from UNHCR management to promote the adoption of the Cartagena definition and the prima facie procedure for Venezuelans. During COVID-19 quarantine measures, staff considered that UNHCR's advocacy for the reopening of the online registration for the asylum system has been particularly significant. Between 22 June 2020 (when the online registration system was reopened) and early September, 27,500 asylum-seekers made a claim and received a virtual work permit.[25] However, it remains a challenge to keep information regarding asylum procedures accurate, due to the constant changes in interpretation of CEPR policies, resulting in arbitrary asylum procedures at the border.

37. UNHCR has advocated with governments and provided technical support to authorities throughout the region to foster Venezuelan refugees' and migrants' access to rights to documentation and regularization. As of August 2020, Colombia has the highest absolute number of Venezuelans with regular status (763,411; representing 31.4 per cent of the total VenSit population)[26] of any VenSit country. Peru has the second-highest number of regularized Venezuelans (477,060, 19.6 per cent of the population). Ecuador and Brazil have 178,246 (7.3 per cent) and 150,196 (6.2 per cent) regularized Venezuelans, respectively.

- **Brazil:** Refugees and migrants can access their Brazilian individual taxpayer registry, the *Cadastro de Pessoa Física* (CPF), work permit (*carteira de trabalho),* public health and education systems, as well as *interiorização* through asylum or registration. However, in response to COVID-19, it has not been possible to issue or renew documentation. Even though the government declared that expired documents were valid until services were reopened, private and public actors do not always recognize this in practice.

- **Colombia:** The Colombian government has issued Special Stay Permits called PEPs or *Permiso Especial de Permanencia*. In 2018, with UNHCR and IOM support, the Colombian government registered 442,000 Venezuelans irregularly present in Colombia in a two-month registration exercise, the *Registro Administrativo de Migrantes Venezolanos* (RAMV) and gave them the right to obtain a PEP for two years. Since then, the government has also issued additional PEPs, including a recent labour-specific PEP. The 2019 government initiative granting Colombian nationality to children born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents since 2015 was also considered an important step towards preventing statelessness and remains valid until August 2021. UNHCR supported both the establishment and ongoing implementation of the initiative through high-level advocacy, capacity-building, technical support and inter-agency mobilization (with IOM and UNICEF to give more

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[25] UNHCR (2020) COVID-19 Situation Peru, 11 September 2020, https://www.acnur.org/5f766be34.pdf
[26] All figures reported are from R4V Platform, which reports residence permits and regular stays granted. The number may reflect, in some countries, residency permits that are not currently valid, as well as duplications and triplications (one person carrying multiple permits). It does not include tourist visas. Percentages are listed as a fraction of the country's regularized population over the regularized population across all VenSit countries.

credibility to the matter). According to key informants, more than 46,000 children born to Venezuelan parents have been naturalized. In Phase 2, UNHCR staff in Colombia mentioned that the Colombian government has expressed interest in establishing pathways to regularization and documentation through labour insertion.

- **Ecuador:** UNHCR was instrumental in drafting Ecuador's special protocol for unaccompanied children (*Protocolo para Niñez en Situación para la Movilidad Humana*) which helped many vulnerable children to enter the country in a protected way. UNHCR's advocacy, and technical support helped to share the protocol and UNHCR is leading its implementation, by funding SOS Children's Villages, childcare NGOs, and funding staff for legal protection boards. This protocol was in place until the visa restriction was activated in mid-2019.

- **Peru:** The open asylum system in Peru has allowed many Venezuelans to access territory via the asylum system. UNHCR has contributed to building and expanding CEPR's capacities to register asylum-seekers and to provide them with a plastic ID. Unfortunately, this ID is not widely accepted in many institutions (banks, private and public sector), and during COVID-19, the asylum card stopped being delivered to regions outside of Lima.

Table 3: Factors affecting access to regularization and documentation by country

	Regularization	Documentation
Colombia	**Enabling access**: •Government issued PEPs **Constraining access:** •PEPs are temporary (expire and are not always renewed) •PEPs not available to all (especially irregular) •No active PEP for arrivals during 2019 (rectified only in Jan 2020 retroactively) •Newest PEPs (labour PEP) not well known	**Enabling access**: •Nationality policy for Colombian-born children of Venezuelans, improved documentation access for Colombian returnees **Constraining access:** •PEPs and salvo conducto are not widely recognized documents in practice
Ecuador	**Constraining access:** •Regularization requirements (passport, apostilled criminal record, payment)	**Enabling access:** •Nationality policy considers that children born in Ecuador to Venezuelan parents are Ecuadorian and the family can regularize through a visa •Recognized refugees and those with residence visas can obtain national IDs **Constraining access:** •Poor access to documentation for those with irregular status
Peru	**Enabling access:** •During the emergency all foreigners pending regularization will be considered as regulars **Constraining access:** •Temporary Stay Permit, *Permiso Temporal de Permanencia* (PTP), no longer available	**Enabling access:** • Asylum-seekers' document is currently a card instead of paper document. • Asylum-seeker card expirations extended until 31 December 2020 **Constraining access:** •Poor access to documentation for those with irregular status
Brazil	**Enabling access:** Processes facilitated and	**Enabling access:** Processes facilitated and

38. Most refugees and migrants did not feel their rights were respected in host countries (except in Brazil), citing experiences of labour exploitation, poor or no access to health services, discrimination and xenophobia. Despite access to territory, asylum, documentation and regularization being provided to certain extents in the four countries, few refugees and migrants perceived that they received direct assistance in accessing those rights. In key informant interviews and focus groups in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, the majority also reported feeling that their rights as Venezuelans were not respected or protected in the country of their residence at the time of data collection (November 2019). They cited episodes of labour exploitation, poor or no access to health services, discrimination and xenophobia. Focus groups with host communities were divided on whether the rights of refugees and migrants were respected.

39. <u>Multiple protection strategies enable UNHCR to target different needs. Community-based protection (CBP) has been central to UNHCR's protection strategy.</u> In Phase 1, UNHCR's CBP efforts were positively acknowledged by refugees and migrants, partners and/or government actors overall. In Phase 2, UNHCR staff perceived that CBP had improved across the evaluation countries between 2019 and 2020 with a higher investment and prioritization in outreach strategies, including mapping of Venezuelan organizations' WhatsApp groups, establishing networks of community contacts and leaders, and developing partnerships with community actors. In response to COVID-19, UNHCR made efforts to continue CBP approaches through virtual channels, but staff said that it became more difficult to assess and address refugees' and migrants' needs. According to UNHCR's 2019 End of Year Report, 2,167 organizations or community-based networks were strengthened through community protection mechanisms in Colombia, and 8,859 members of the civil society were trained on protection issues in Ecuador. In Peru, 2,450 informative fairs, seminars and workshops were organized by partners to inform on protection risks and their prevention, mitigation and response, and in Brazil, workshops on CBP were provided to staff of R4V partners engaged in community participation, mainly in Boa Vista, Roraima State.

40. Registration and case management are important means of protection, but duplications and gaps in assistance between UNHCR and other actors remain a concern. Across the region, UNHCR, governments and partners are using different registration systems across and within countries. UNHCR staff and partners flagged that this has and can continue to lead to duplication of assistance and/or gaps in information and assistance. In Brazil, over the past year, the government has developed its own registration system (*Acolhedor*) with a strong focus on *interiorização*. Currently, there are also efforts being undertaken to achieve interoperability of PRIMES/ProGres[27] and *Acolhedor*, while carefully considering data protection issues. In Ecuador, both the government and UNHCR's largest implementing partner, HIAS, are using ProGres. Despite the time and

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[27] ProGres, UNHCR's registration and case management software application, is one of the core tools of PRIMES (UNHCR's population registry and identity management ecosystem), established in 2017. PRIMES consists of a digital centralized repository containing all relevant identity information on refugees in one secure place. See: https://www.unhcr.org/blogs/new-tool-for-protection/

resource investment required to achieve this, stakeholders in Ecuador felt it has greatly improved efficiency and helped to reduce instances of double-counting some individuals or not counting some individuals at all. The Colombian government has also expressed interest in using ProGres for their asylum system. In Peru, even though the use of ProGres has increased among partners, its use is still not uniform, and many of them maintain their own control and registration systems. Stakeholders did mention that the CBI platform created by UNHCR has enabled partners to cross-check information about CBI beneficiaries. Staff in all countries reported noticeable progress with the use of ProGres but few mentioned the need to expand and systematize registration efforts to prevent duplications and close gaps in assistance.

41. There are multiple mechanisms for refugees and migrants to share feedback and/or complaints, but they may not be widely known or accessible to all. According to the P2 online survey results, 75 per cent of respondents indicated that complaint/feedback mechanisms were in place for refugees and migrants (Figure 11). Those mechanisms included hotlines, toll-free numbers, websites (*Somos Panas* Colombia), online platforms (help.unhcr.org/brazil, help.unhcr.org/ecuador), email, WhatsApp, leaflets, "mail boxes" in shelters/offices, and in-person support. In the context of COVID-19, remote mechanisms are increasingly important. However, stakeholders cautioned that refugees and migrants still may not have knowledge of these mechanisms, have access to them, or have adequate technological literacy to take advantage of them.

Figure 11: Complaint/feedback mechanisms for refugees and migrants

Are there any complaint/feedback mechanisms in place for refugees and migrants? (% yes) P2 (n=88)

Brazil	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru	Other	Total
63%	72%	83%	88%	100%	75%
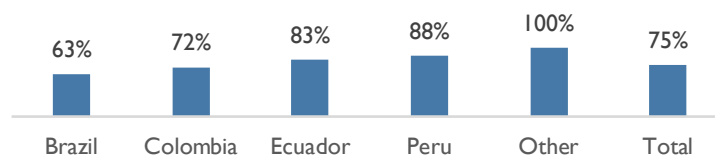
42. <u>UNHCR has made significant achievements in promoting rights awareness, but coverage and quality remain uneven.</u> UNHCR has developed several information and communication channels to promote awareness about rights and protection options among refugees and migrants, with good practices throughout the region. UNHCR offices in the four countries have implemented various strategies to promote awareness of rights and protections among refugees and migrants, ranging from large communication campaigns to orientation at border points.

43. <u>UNHCR's information campaigns and websites are widely recognized.</u> UNHCR staff, along with partner and government stakeholders, perceived that UNHCR is providing key information to refugees and migrants (as well as building public solidarity and countering xenophobia). The most widely recognized strategies include UNHCR's large-scale public information campaign and website *Somos Panas* in Colombia, the awareness-raising

campaign *Tu Causa es Mi Causa* and website *Veninformado* in Peru, and the help.acnur platforms for Brazil and Ecuador (along with the Chatbot in Ecuador).

44. <u>Communication with communities (CwC) is a key strategy to amplify the spread of information and orientation messaging.</u> UNHCR is well positioned to carry out CwC work and has invested in building CwC strategies throughout the four countries as a way to amplify the spread of information and orientation messaging. In Brazil, for example, CwC practices include outreach volunteers in Manaus, Pacaraima, Boa Vista and São Paulo, as well as audiovisual communication materials (in the languages of the Warao and Eñepa) developed in collaboration with the indigenous communities, including a radio channel for/in Warao. Staff mentioned that a major challenge in terms of CwC is consolidating the impact of these initiatives, including standardizing the data collected. Ecuador also has strong examples of volunteer models, in which trained Venezuelan, Colombian and Ecuadorian volunteers provide information and orientation to refugees and migrants.

45. <u>UNHCR has expanded virtual channels for information and orientation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.</u> During the pandemic, UNHCR invested in and scaled up phone and digital communication, which staff qualified as an improvement in terms of coverage and reach (greater geographical coverage, increased coverage of vulnerable profiles). In Brazil, the São Paulo office has mentioned investing more in digital and social media channels, such as further refining the help.acnur/brazil website. In Colombia, staff recognized the shifting of orientation and attention points (Puntos de Atención y Orientación, or PAOs) to telephone helplines as an effective strategy, with many recommending that the practice be continued after COVID-19 to provide information to those who are in transit or have mobility limitations. In Ecuador, staff reported that the call centres took time to set up, but were critical in establishing contact with the population and providing key information during COVID-19. In addition, the WhatsApp bot pilot has received praise among staff in Ecuador as being a way to promote widespread messaging, and it has generated interest among staff in other countries who expressed that it has potential in other operations. In Peru, the implementation of a UNHCR toll-free hotline with delocalized call attendants (instead of a call centre) has allowed staff to maintain contact despite social isolation restrictions, and has been widely mentioned as an important achievement by staff. That being said, these communication channels are not without their limitations, including the fact that those without phone or Internet access are at risk of being left out.

46. <u>Improvements are still needed to ensure better coverage and understanding from refugees and migrants</u>. Most refugee and migrant respondents and focus group respondents in Phase 1 reported that they had not been informed of their rights, and most refugees and migrants did not know the difference between a refugee and a migrant, which in certain cases, may affect their understanding of the rights afforded to each. The Remote RDS study conducted by the evaluation team yielded similar findings, where the vast majority (between 85 per cent and 97 per cent by location) of Venezuelan refugee and migrant participants reported not having been informed of rights and protection options in Colombia. A 2019

regional information and communication needs assessment conducted by the R4V platform in 15 countries found that, of the 3,400 refugees and migrants and host community members surveyed, 1 in 2 felt informed.[28] The word graph captures the channels through which refugees and migrants who had not been informed would prefer to receive information about their rights and protections.

47. Refugees and migrants who had received information about their rights (mostly known recipients), mentioned that it was provided by either UNHCR or one of its partners. However, many reported that even when the information did reach them, it was not always fully understood or retained.

48. While there has been an increase over time in the percentage of UNHCR online survey respondents reporting that strategies to promote awareness of rights and protections among refugees and migrants are "fully effective", the percentage amount still remains low overall with 10 per cent in Phase 1 and 25 per cent in Phase 2 (Figure 12). Across countries and in both phases, staff cited that there is still room for improvement in terms of ensuring that information about rights and protections both reaches and is understood by refugees and migrants. Staff stated that major challenges in reaching the population include the fact that so many are on the move, are in hard-to-reach areas, and lack Internet, phone and/or computer access. Staff also mentioned numerous barriers to the uptake and understanding of the information that is provided, both on the provider side (for instance, too much technical language, inaccurate and/or non-current information) and on the receiver side (such as illiteracy, trauma, forgetting over time).

Figure 12: Degree to which persons of concern to UNHCR are informed about their rights and protections (% partially – fully)
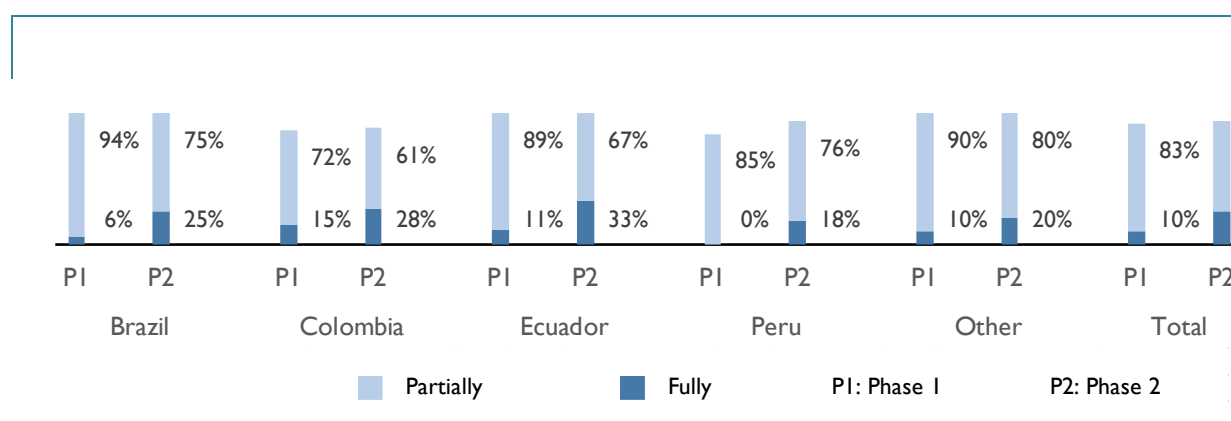
49. <u>Most of UNHCR's information and communication strategies have not been assessed to determine their effectiveness.</u> Online survey results (Figure 13) show that the majority of staff consider UNHCR's strategies to promote awareness of rights and protections among VenSit refugees and migrants to be "somewhat effective" (61 per cent at P1 and P2), indicating that there is still room for improvement. Key informants reported that UNHCR should continue to pursue better access, comprehension and retention of

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[28] R4V Platform. Regional Information and Communication Needs Assessment: Understanding the information and communication needs of refugees and migrants in the Venezuela Situation. November 2019, https://r4v.info/es/documents/details/73683

information. Many also mentioned that materials need to be written for refugees and migrants with lower literacy and digital literacy. Findings indicated that communication campaigns had not been evaluated and suggested that an evaluation would allow further refinement of communication strategies.

Figure 13: Degree to which UNHCR has effectively implemented strategies to promote awareness of rights and protections among VenSit refugees and migrants
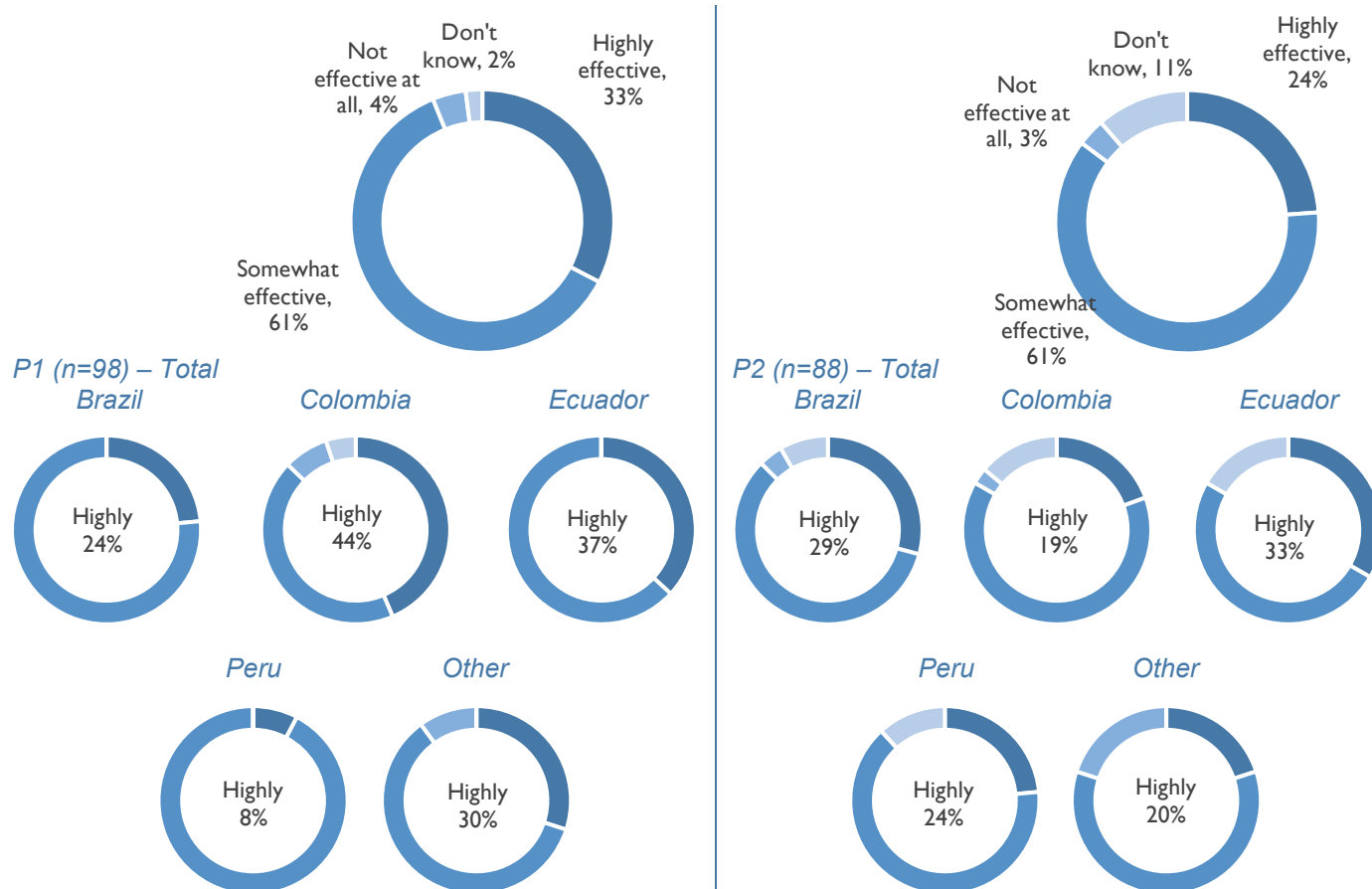
3.1.3   NEEDS AND RIGHTS ASSESSMENT

50. <u>UNHCR has developed and implemented multiple strategies to assess emergency assistance and protection needs, with improvements over time. Assessments are key inputs for the response, but tools need to be further systematized.</u> UNHCR has developed and implemented various strategies to assess the emergency assistance and protection needs of the target population, which are key inputs for strategy development and inform programme planning. The protection monitoring tool (PMT) and participatory diagnostics are the main methods used to assess the emergency assistance and protection needs of refugees and migrants. In addition to these tools, UNHCR has a number of other direct and indirect ways of identifying needs, including but not limited to joint assessments, PRIMES/ProGres registration and case management, programme-specific assessments/evaluations, rapid needs assessments (RNA), and focus

groups/interviews with key stakeholders, as well as direct contact and field presence. Besides assessment tools, staff also mentioned that CwC and CBP can help to assess needs and bring them to UNHCR staff or partners' attention if the right reporting channels exist. Assessment results were considered key inputs used to inform strategy development and programme planning.

51. <u>Strategies to assess the emergency assistance needs of the VenSit population have improved over time.</u> Among the UNHCR online survey respondents at P1, one in three (35 per cent) judged that UNHCR had "fully" implemented strategies to assess the emergency assistance needs of the VenSit target population in 2018 (Figure 14). By 2019, that percentage had increased to include more than half of respondents (52 per cent). In 2020 (P2), a majority of respondents (72 per cent) felt that UNHCR had enacted changes in the way it assesses the emergency assistance needs of the VenSit target population that resulted in improvement.

Figure 14: Extent to which UNHCR has implemented strategies to assess the emergency needs of refugees and migrants

The VenSit target population in 2018 and 2019

2018 | 2019
24%
5%
36%
35%

Don't know, 4
Not at all, 0%
Partially, 44%
Fully, 52%

2019 (% Fully)

| 59% | 46% | 74% | 38% | 40% |

2018 (% Fully)

| 29% | 36% | 58% | 8% | 30% |

Brazil Colombia Ecuador Peru Other
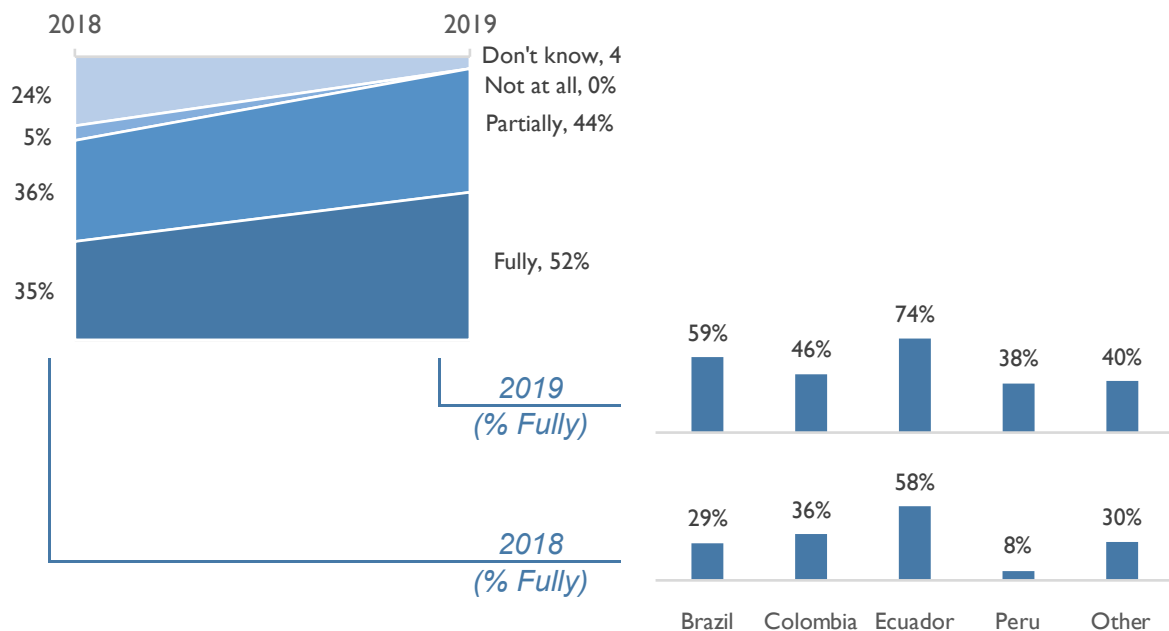
In 2020, were there changes in the way UNHCR is assessing the emergency assistance needs of the VenSit target population? (P2, n=88)

Brazil   Colombia   Ecuador   Peru   Other   Total

	75%	72%	100%	59%	60%	72%
	4%	3%	0%	12%	40%	7%

Positive change ▪ Change with no effect ▪ No change ▪ Detrimental change
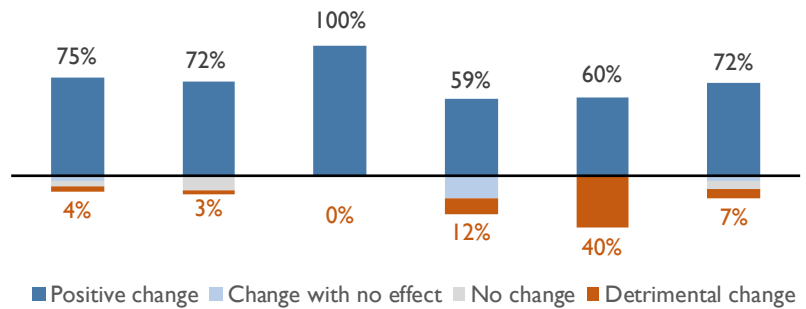
52. <u>UNHCR assessment tools still have a number of limitations. Assessment tools do not always reflect field realities or allow for adaptation to local contexts.</u> Staff at the country and field levels have expressed that regional tools are not always appropriate or adaptable to local contexts or field realities. Staff also express a desire for more input on the development of tools, and more training and technical support from the Regional Bureau on implementing them.

53. <u>Assessments are not rapid or regular enough to fully understand trends of people in transit.</u> Staff have mentioned that assessments like the PMT are time-consuming and not done frequently enough. Some staff and partners mentioned that rapid needs assessments have been conducted and yield key insights into certain sub-populations in certain locations but were not done regularly enough or widely enough to allow for a comprehensive understanding of the population as a whole. The COVID-19 pandemic limited the possibility of using the PMT, creating a gap in the knowledge of the population and thus, biased decision-making that may have negative impacts in the long term. In light of COVID-19 and the shift towards virtual assessments, the need for shorter, faster tools is even more important.

54. <u>Lack of harmonization of assessment tools used by different actors hinders the systematization of data.</u> Needs and vulnerabilities are also identified through partners and government authorities via their own needs assessments, joint assessments and monitoring and reporting tools, which creates challenges in harmonizing data. Staff interviewed in Phase 2 mentioned that COVID-19 has further exacerbated the challenges of harmonizing data, since in the absence of the PMT, there has been a mushrooming of smaller-scale assessment measures, including remote surveys and sub-group targeted tools. While new creative pilots could provide input for future models, the lack of a harmonized, standardized tool during COVID-19 causes challenges for the consolidation and analysis of data.

55. <u>Assessments are adept at detecting most rights and protection violations but UNHCR has neither an adequate budget nor the capacity to respond to cases of rights violations directly and thus relies on partners and institutions to do so.</u> While assessments were adept at detecting most cases of rights and protections violations, there are still gaps for certain populations and for certain types of violations. Staff reported that assessments were able to detect most cases of rights and protections violations. However, they cautioned that detection is not as strong for certain populations (for example, those without phone or Internet access, without social networks, those who are on the move or

outside the reach of assistance provision) and for certain types of violations (such as SGBV cases where the offender may be present during a call or visit).

56. When violations are detected, UNHCR relies heavily on referrals to partners and institutions, particularly for very vulnerable and complex cases. According to P2 online survey results, the majority of respondents thought that assessment results only partially allowed UNHCR to address rights and protection violations (Figure 15). In Colombia and Peru, respectively, 31 per cent and 29 per cent of respondents thought that assessment results fully allowed UNHCR to address violations, the highest percentages across the four countries. In Brazil and Ecuador, the percentage of respondents who thought the same was almost half that in Peru or Colombia (both 17 per cent). Overall, only a quarter (25 per cent) of UNHCR staff respondents felt that assessments allowed UNHCR and partners to "fully" address rights and protection violations.

57. Those who said that rights and protection violations were only "partially" addressed explained that UNHCR has neither an adequate budget nor the capacity to respond directly to identified cases, particularly for very vulnerable and complex cases. Thus UNHCR staff have developed robust referral systems to refer cases to partners who can then assist through their own or jointly managed services, projects/programmes, and safe spaces networks. This method, staff cautioned, depends on UNHCR's maintaining strong relationships with actors, as well as on maintaining and updating referral systems to relay cases and ensuring that actors have the capacity to respond. If these three conditions are not met, staff reported that the detection-response link could break down and violations could go undetected. The COVID-19 pandemic compromised all three conditions, for example.

Figure 15: In 2020, have assessment results allowed UNHCR and partners to address rights and protection violations? P2 (n=88)
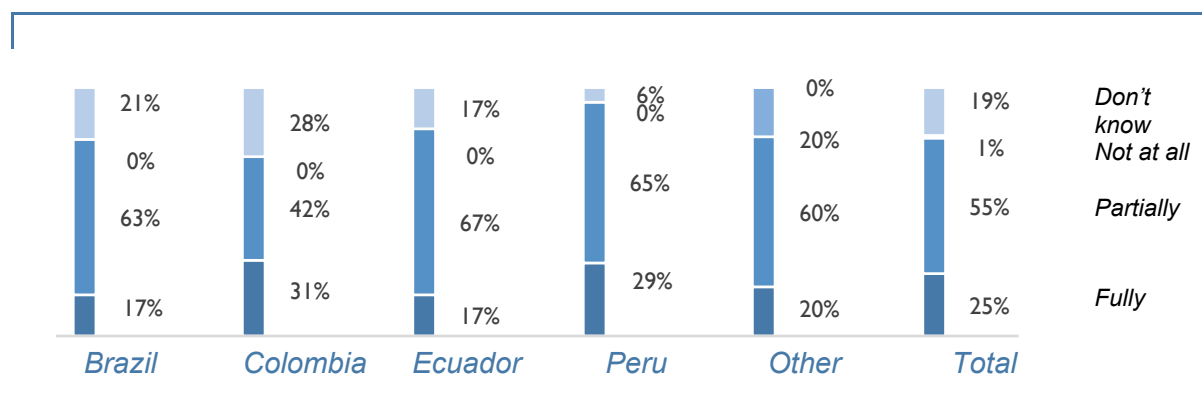
3.2 Socioeconomic inclusion and mid/long-term perspectives (AOI 2)

3.2.1 SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION

58. UNHCR has undertaken a multi-pronged approach to promote both social and economic inclusion throughout the region, mainly via advocacy and capacity-building, and to a lesser extent, via implementation.

59. <u>UNHCR's focus on the emergency response has taken priority over socioeconomic inclusion activities for the VenSit.</u> Across the four countries, stakeholders sampled in Phase 1 perceived that UNHCR's focus was on emergency humanitarian assistance during the 2018 and 2019 response, and that there was room for improvement to ensure socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and migrants. This was especially true with regard to economic integration and livelihoods. Indeed, employment was consistently mentioned as the most pressing need by refugees and migrants interviewed in Phase 1. Phase 1 data indicated that Ecuador was furthest along in terms of contributing to the economic inclusion of refugees and migrants.

60. In 2020 country operations plans (COPs), UNHCR dedicated higher priority and budget lines to socioeconomic inclusion in all four countries. COVID-19, however, interrupted most activities related to socioeconomic inclusion and livelihoods, bringing the focus back to the emergency response to address basic needs. Despite this, the majority of UNHCR online survey respondents in Phase 2 indicated that UNHCR had still done more in 2020 than in previous years in terms of advocacy, developing government capacity and implementing projects to support both social and economic inclusion (Figure 16). One exception was Ecuador, where advocacy and development of government capacity is constrained by the context of 2020 being the worst year of economic crisis in more than a decade, and many of its relief programmes were limited to citizens only.

61. Advocacy is indicated by the highest percentage of respondents (61 per cent on average for social and economic inclusion) as a modality on which UNHCR worked more in 2020 than in 2018 or 2019, followed by implementation of projects (47 per cent), then capacity-building (43.5 per cent). In July 2020, UNHCR released a regional report, *Stepped up livelihoods strategy in the Americas,*[29] as a response to the pandemic's negative effects on the livelihoods of persons of concern to UNHCR. The release of the strategy document and the work that led to it indicates a more concerted focus on socioeconomic inclusion, clarifying UNHCR's role as both a catalyst (Pillar 1, inclusion in stakeholder's responses) and an implementer (Pillar 2, own operations). The strategy maps out existing responses initiated by governments, development actors and multilateral development banks, identifying opportunities to catalyse further inclusion of persons of concern to UNHCR into existing initiatives. As of September 2020, UNHCR staff in the four countries have indicated that some livelihood activities were being resumed, albeit with some adaptations. For example, in all countries, most training

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[29] UNHCR (2020) *Stepped up livelihoods strategy in the Americas*. July 2020, (made available by UNHCR Bureau).

programmes and capacity-building efforts targeting refugees and migrants were moved online.

Figure 16: Extent of UNHCR's advocacy, capacity-building and direct implementation of programmes for social and economic inclusion of refugees and migrants

In 2020, compared to 2018 and 2019, please indicate the degree to which UNHCR has… (N_{P2}=88))

Legend: More in 2020 · No change · Don't know / No response · Less in 2020

Advocated the social inclusion of refugees and migrants in 2020
- Brazil: 71%, 0%
- Colombia: 56%, 19%
- Ecuador: 33%, 0%
- Peru: 76%, 6%
- Other: 80%, 0%
- Total: 64%, 9%

Advocated the economic inclusion of refugees and migrants
- Brazil: 71%, 4%
- Colombia: 47%, 19%
- Ecuador: 33%, 17%
- Peru: 65%, 6%
- Other: 80%, 0%
- Total: 58%, 11%

Developed government capacity to ensure the social inclusion of refugees and migrants
- Brazil: 50%, 0%
- Colombia: 47%, 11%
- Ecuador: 17%, 17%
- Peru: 35%, 18%
- Other: 20%, 20%
- Total: 42%, 10%

Developed government capacity to ensure the economic inclusion of refugees and migrants
- Brazil: 58%, 8%
- Colombia: 44%, 6%
- Ecuador: 17%, 17%
- Peru: 35%, 12%
- Other: 60%, 0%
- Total: 45%, 8%

Implemented programmes to ensure the social inclusion of refugees and migrants
- Brazil: 71%, 0%
- Colombia: 56%, 6%
- Ecuador: 17%, 17%
- Peru: 35%, 24%
- Other: 40%, 20%
- Total: 52%, 9%

Implemented programmes to ensure the economic inclusion of refugees and migrants in 2020
- Brazil: 71%, 4%
- Colombia: 31%, 14%
- Ecuador: 0%, 17%
- Peru: 47%, 18%
- Other: 20%, 20%
- Total: 42%, 13%

Brazil Colombia Ecuador Peru Other Total

62. <u>A more strategic approach to socioeconomic inclusion is needed to magnify UNHCR's work in this field</u>. Overall, UNHCR's socioeconomic inclusion activities are perceived to be small-scale, opportune and specific to a place, population and/or partner, and the regional strategy has not translated into cohesive national socioeconomic strategies. National and field office staff mentioned a need for national UNHCR strategies and guidelines specifically geared towards socioeconomic inclusion. In Colombia, for example, socioeconomic inclusion activities vary greatly from office to office, with Medellin furthest along and the border areas barely beginning with socioeconomic inclusion. UNHCR staff in Colombia considered that translating the regional strategy into a cohesive national strategy would help to articulate the regional approach while also giving coherence to what the field offices are doing, and would promote communication and cross-site learning. Staff in Brazil mentioned that socioeconomic inclusion strategies needed to be local (municipal or state level) and part of public socioeconomic strategies. Ecuador was an exception, as it was the farthest along in its socioeconomic inclusion work of any of the four countries.

63. <u>Few socioeconomic strategies and activities are being monitored and evaluated.</u> Respondents perceived that few socioeconomic projects were being monitored or evaluated, hindering assessment on the effectiveness of these programmes and restricting decision-making as to whether they should be continued and whether they have potential to be scaled up to include more beneficiaries, or scaled out to new areas or populations.

64. <u>UNHCR lacks technical staff dedicated exclusively to socioeconomic inclusion, especially at the field level.</u> There were few staff dedicated exclusively to socioeconomic inclusion and livelihoods across the four evaluation countries. This was especially true at the field office level. Where some counted on a full-time officer, others had a staff member who split time with other activities, while still others had no dedicated staff member at all.

65. There is a lack of sufficient data on economic markets and the VenSit population's socioeconomic profiles to be able to contextualize inclusion opportunities and to help define the socioeconomic strategy. There is a need to build the evidence in the region via market assessments, economic impact assessments, and studies on refugee and migrant socioeconomic profiles. A few examples exist, including Peru's national Venezuelan population survey, *Encuesta Dirigida a la Población Venezolana que Reside en el País* (ENPOVE), considered an important effort to gather reliable and generalizable information about the refugees' and migrants' living conditions, as well as market assessments in Roraima, São Paulo and Manaus (specifically about Waraos) in Brazil to understand the impact of refugees and migrants on the economy. However, staff still perceived that a lack of evidence overall hindered effective socioeconomic strategy development.

66. <u>UNHCR's advocacy efforts towards social inclusion have been largely successful, but advocacy efforts towards economic inclusion are scattered, with little uniformity across countries.</u> High-level advocacy for documentation and regularization is a necessary priority and precursor for achieving socioeconomic inclusion. Overall, staff have reiterated that access to regularization and documentation is the primary step towards socioeconomic inclusion, since opportunities are limited for those with irregular status or

without documentation. Staff also considered that such advocacy must include creating and facilitating access to work permits for asylum-seekers and migrants, and improving recognition and validation of professional certifications and academic diplomas. As mentioned under AOI 1, according to staff, UNHCR has advocated for refugee and migrant work permits for asylum-seekers in Colombia and Peru, and for the recognition of university titles and professional licences in Peru, Ecuador and Brazil, with the acknowledgement that there is still more work to be done.

67. *Advocacy for social inclusion:* UNHCR has successfully advocated inclusion of refugees and migrants in social welfare programmes and development plans. There are positive examples of UNHCR advocacy for social inclusion throughout the region including increased efforts to ensure that refugees and migrants have access to social protection and assistance programmes, and that children have access to education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR successfully advocated for the inclusion of refugees and migrants in national and local public health response plans and emergency aid. For example, UNHCR's São Paulo office is perceived as Brazil's most advanced office in terms of social inclusion, having successfully leveraged the favourable context in the state of São Paulo with significant contributions in the municipal policy plan for refugees and migrants; the first of its kind in the country. One of the main challenges identified in Brazil remains the social inclusion of indigenous populations, in particular Waraos in the north (Roraima, Manaus, Belém, and so on). This is being addressed through strong advocacy with local authorities, as well as multiple activities to address Waraos' needs, including a successful relocation to a shelter in a semi-rural area in Manaus and a pilot project with five families aiming to achieve their full autonomy.

68. *Advocacy for economic inclusion:* UNHCR's advocacy for economic inclusion has taken different shapes in different countries, with varying levels of success. UNHCR's advocacy efforts with governments in the region have included lobbying to strengthen public policies, to promote employment opportunities and income-generating activities for refugees and migrants, and to improve refugee access to bank services and credit. UNHCR has also embarked on advocacy efforts with the private sector to promote the inclusion of refugees and migrants within formal employment channels and to counter labour abuse and exploitation. UNHCR has also undertaken advocacy to catalyse educational and professional diploma equivalence and validation. In Peru, for example, UNHCR was able to leverage its previous advocacy efforts to recognize health professionals, allowing for swift incorporation of Venezuelan health workers into the Peruvian workforce during the pandemic. Staff, partners and government officials in Colombia, Peru and Brazil perceived that while UNHCR has an important advocacy role to play regarding economic inclusion, the organization has not fully stepped into the socioeconomic inclusion space yet and could still do more on this front. UNHCR staff have suggested that improved data on the market impact of the refugees and migrant labour force and the evaluation of livelihood strategies could better support advocacy efforts and foster greater support from the government and private sector.

69. <u>UNHCR has provided capacity-building and technical support to the government and partners on multiple fronts for socioeconomic inclusion.</u> UNHCR has a strong record, not only on sensitizing government officials at all levels about guaranteeing rights and

incorporating protections for refugees and migrants, but also on providing technical support and training to governmental institutions throughout the four countries.

- **Brazil:** UNHCR is recognized by the main actors within the government, Civil Office (*Casa Civil*), army and the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), to have played a fundamental role in the creation and implementation of *Operação Acolhida* through awareness-raising activities within the government and technical support, including funding capacity-building missions of government officials to other countries and working directly with government actors to develop border and shelter strategies. *Interiorização* is the third axis of *Operação Acolhida*, meant to evacuate Roraima (unable to absorb the high number of refugees and migrants) by providing refugees and migrants with the opportunity to be voluntarily resettled elsewhere in Brazil. From April 2018 to August 2020, *interiorização* resettled more than 41,000 Venezuelans across more than 600 municipalities in the country. Currently, there are four modalities of *interiorização*: (1) shelter to shelter (led by UNHCR); (2) family reunification; (3) job matching; and (4) social reunification. *Interiorização* is the backbone of Brazil's socioeconomic inclusion strategy, as well as the most effective strategy to decrease tensions in the state of Roraima, where xenophobia is on the rise and at risk of being exacerbated with the 2020 municipal elections. Expanding *interiorização* was defined as the priority for 2020 by the Brazilian government and has been led in close partnership with UNHCR (shelter-to-shelter modality, primarily), IOM and civil society (e.g. religious groups). In the context of COVID-19, *interiorização* continues but at a reduced pace (the average number of beneficiaries per month decreased from ~3,000 to ~1,000). The programme was viewed as an effective strategy towards socioeconomic inclusion by most stakeholders interviewed, despite requiring intensive resources and involving certain protection risks (such as trafficking and labour exploitation) that require attention.

- **Colombia:** In Colombia, capacity-building has taken the shape of workshops, training and close articulation with the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the SENA (National Training Service – Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje), and other institutions to sensitize and train officials about guaranteeing rights and protections, and to support labour-insertion activities. UNHCR is also working with government officials to promote and issue the PEP-FF (a labour-based PEP) to refugees and migrants, and is also working with the private sector to negotiate contracts with large-scale employers.

- **Ecuador:** In Ecuador, UNHCR works closely with the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other institutions to provide technical support for human/financial resources, databases and registration.

- **Peru:** In Peru, UNHCR provided technical support and capacity-building to the CEPR (Special Commission for Refugees – Comisión Especial para los Refugiados) to thoroughly improve the asylum systems; supported and provided technical cooperation for the Venezuelan living conditions survey in 2018 (ENPOVE); and involved public institutions in the GTRM (Working Group on Refugees and Migrants – Grupo de Trabajo para Refugiados y Migrantes) in Tumbes.

70. Frequent turnover of government actors and administrations requires equally frequent efforts to maintain institutional capacity and knowledge. UNHCR online respondents and key informants in each country considered that UNHCR has only "partially" developed government capacity to ensure the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and migrants. One of the main challenges identified in interviews with UNHCR staff involved in building government capacity is the frequent turnover among government actors and administrations, requiring UNHCR to build new relationships and adapt efforts.

71. <u>In terms of socioeconomic inclusion, UNHCR has served in a supportive and complementary role to governments and partners, prioritizing advocacy and capacity-building over direct implementation of projects.</u> Implementation of socioeconomic inclusion activities depends on articulation and coordination with national governments, which are primarily responsible, with UNHCR playing a supporting, technical role. Stakeholders see governments as responsible for socioeconomic inclusion, with UNHCR playing a more technical supporting role. In Phase 1, governments did not recognize UNHCR as a major collaborator for socioeconomic inclusion, with the exception of Ecuador where the government more readily recognized UNHCR Ecuador's graduation model and other labour insertion activities. UNHCR was praised for its role in delivering the humanitarian response, but its role in socioeconomic inclusion was perceived as only just beginning or lacking altogether. In general, government stakeholders expressed a desire for UNHCR to be more involved in the government's socioeconomic inclusion strategies. UNHCR staff echoed this, expressing that UNHCR could do more to support the government and that ongoing relationship-building (e.g. communication and consultations at multiple levels) is key to ensuring complementarity and alignment on the government's socioeconomic inclusion strategies by specifying where coordination efforts are needed and where gaps can be filled.

72. UNHCR relies on a multi-partner approach to implement economic inclusion activities, involving financial institutions, the private sector and host communities to expand operability and increase sustainability. In general, UNHCR does not implement economic inclusion programmes directly, but rather, relies on other actors with more experience in economic inclusion. In Colombia and Ecuador, for example, UNHCR expanded the partners within the GIFMM (Inter-agency Group on Mixed flows – Grupo Interagencial sobre Flujos Migratorios Mixtos) and GTRM, respectively, to include financial institutions and private sector actors. Stakeholders in all four countries also highlighted the importance of including the host community in socioeconomic inclusion opportunities, including new seed capital initiatives, microcredit opportunities for entrepreneurs and cooperatives, and training programmes.

73. UNHCR's implementation of social inclusion activities, including projects to counter xenophobia and promote coexistence and solidarity among communities, was widely recognized and perceived as effective, though insufficient to address the magnitude and complexity of this issue. UNHCR has implemented a number of projects to promote the social inclusion of refugees and migrants in host countries. Perhaps the most widely recognized of these are the large-scale anti-xenophobia campaigns (such as *Somos Panas*, *Tu Causa es Mi Causa*), which stakeholders considered effective at combating xenophobia, promoting peaceful coexistence and solidarity among communities, and providing information to refugees and migrants. UNHCR was also recognized for

forming, managing and maintaining strategic relationships with host communities and for facilitating successful promotion of social inclusion through host community coexistence and cultural events, and youth inclusion activities in schools, among other activities.

3.2.2   MID/LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVES

74. <u>UNHCR's design and delivery of mid/long-term protection perspectives is uneven across countries: To date, short-term protection perspectives have dominated UNHCR operations,</u> but there is recognition that UNHCR has made strides in incorporating long-term protection perspectives in the response, mainly via socioeconomic integration, as evidenced in the original 2020 planning documents and regional livelihoods strategy. UNHCR staff, partners, governments and persons of concern to UNHCR in all four countries perceived that the organization lacked long-term protection perspectives in its response to date. Partners and government actors, in particular, perceived that UNHCR was overwhelmingly emergency-oriented. UNHCR staff highlighted socioeconomic inclusion as the most important strategy for ensuring long-term protection and recognized efforts to incorporate long-term protection perspectives in the response.

75. UNHCR has incorporated mid/long-term protection strategies in the design of the response, but these strategies have not uniformly translated to the implementation of mid/long-term activities in the delivery of the response. There was recognition that UNHCR has made strides in incorporating long-term protection perspectives in the design of their operational response, also as evidenced in 2020 planning documents. The MYMP and RMRP have been praised as successes in long-term strategic planning both at the regional- and country-specific level. UNHCR's long-term protection strategies include advocacy efforts with governments for access to rights, including territory, asylum, documentation and regularization, as well as inclusion of refugees and migrants in social systems to provide access to health, education and employment. Capacity-building strategies with government institutions, partners and the private sector are also part of the long-term protection strategy, with the aim of leaving installed knowledge and response capacity in-country. Long-term protection strategies also centre on socioeconomic inclusion. Anti-xenophobia and information campaigns and community-based protection efforts have a long-term outlook for social inclusion as well as livelihood development and income-generating activities for economic inclusion. While these long-term protection perspectives have been fully incorporated in the design of the response, implementation of the strategies in the delivery of the response lack regional and national cohesion and articulation.

76. Countries vary in how successful they have been in incorporating mid/long-term protection perspectives in the design and delivery of the operational response. Stakeholders, especially in Colombia and Brazil, emphasized that while border areas were still overwhelmingly focused on the short term, offices farther from the border or located in larger cities had greater potential to implement more forward-looking protection perspectives. Based on staff accounts in key informant interviews, Ecuador leads the way among the four countries in terms of integrating mid- to long-term protection perspectives. This finding is corroborated with online survey results, where Ecuador has the highest percentage of online respondents across both phases reporting that mid/long-term protection perspectives were "fully" incorporated, likely owing to the effective implementation of Ecuador's well-developed socioeconomic inclusion strategy

(Figure 17). Peru fell somewhere in the middle between short- and long-term perspective strategies, a sentiment shared by UNHCR staff, partners and government officials alike. Colombia and Brazil were furthest behind, based on key informant interviews with all stakeholders and online survey results with UNHCR staff, although interviews revealed nuances in responses based on location. Stakeholders indicated that border areas in both Colombia and Brazil were still overwhelmingly focused on short-term emergency protection, while offices farther from the border and those located in larger cities had greater potential to implement more forward-looking protection perspectives. Brazil's *interiorização* strategy was considered a success in moving towards long-term options for refugees and migrants. Colombian stakeholders felt that UNHCR's *Somos Panas* and community presence were effective long-term strategies for social inclusion but reported that there were few examples for economic inclusion, beyond Medellin's graduation model.

Figure 17: Degree to which UNHCR has incorporated mid/long-term protection perspectives in the design and delivery of its operational response (% partially – fully)
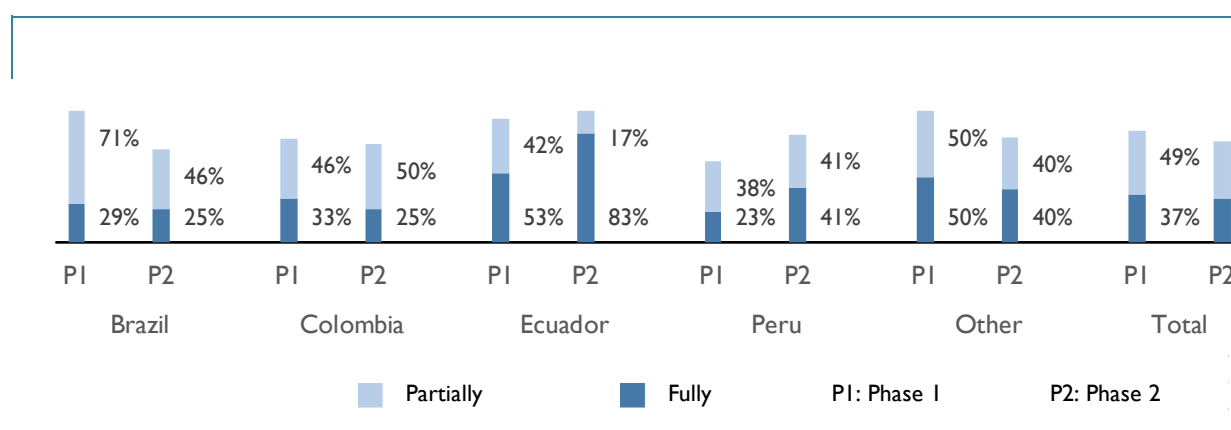
77. <u>The link between UNHCR's strategies for humanitarian assistance and permanent solutions is not clearly developed.</u> With regard to UNHCR's mandate, the VenSit response has been effective for humanitarian assistance, less so for permanent solutions, where there is room for improvement. UNHCR is known throughout the region as a leader in the humanitarian response. Stakeholders consider UNHCR's response to be operational and praise its strong protection focus, technical support and coordination role in facilitating the provision of immediate and emergency needs and protection. However, UNHCR's mandate also includes seeking permanent solutions for the populations of concern, and this is where many stakeholders consider that UNHCR has had the most room for improvement. In fact, when asked about the biggest gaps and/or weaknesses of the response, the absence or underdevelopment of durable and permanent solutions was mentioned by stakeholders across the board. UNHCR staff, partners and government respondents felt that UNHCR needed to establish a better link between humanitarian assistance and development programming focused on sustainable solutions, especially as they related to access to rights and socioeconomic inclusion. Stakeholders perceived that given the protracted nature of the situation, UNHCR must avoid creating dependency on assistance and prioritize permanent stay solutions.

78. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted progress towards implementation of long-term strategies for durable solutions as UNHCR had to shift priorities back to emergency assistance. At the beginning of 2020, operations across the region had been preparing or had even launched new activities as outlined in 2020 strategic plans. However, the pandemic prevented many of these activities from getting off the ground or otherwise halted any progress of those that had managed to get under way. In Colombia, for example, UNHCR was gearing up to replicate Medellin's graduation model in other cities but had to hold off once the pandemic hit. This was also the case in Peru, where implementing CBIs for entrepreneurs and piloting the graduation model was postponed until August due to the pandemic and government restrictions. The pandemic also interrupted, and even reversed, the progress of well-established strategies and activities aimed towards long-term solutions. For example, UNHCR had to rapidly shift away from regular programming (employment training and support) within Ecuador's graduation model towards providing more multipurpose CBI as immediate relief to beneficiaries, some of whom had already phased out of CBI support. In Brazil, most activities related to durable solutions were interrupted from March to September and the whole strategic planning was revised. Most of the trainings planned were shifted online and *interiorização* was reduced from around 3,000 to 1,000 refugees and migrants interiorized per month.

3.3   Internal and external enabling and constraining factors (AOI 3)

3.3.1   INTERNAL FACTORS

79. Although efforts to set up and scale up UNHCR's country operations have presented significant challenges, offices in all four countries have achieved notable successes in a short time frame. UNHCR has been operational since the onset of VenSit and has mobilized a rapid and effective response to a historic influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, including appropriate and timely adaptations to account for changes in movements across the region.

80. <u>UNHCR's emergency mechanisms, including emergency declarations, have enabled its response.</u> Among UNHCR staff in all four countries, the L2 emergency declaration for VenSit in 2018 and global COVID-19 L2 in 2020 were unanimously thought to enable UNHCR's response. The emergency declarations were said to allow for more staff and funds, facilitate a faster response, increase the visibility of the crisis, and allow staff to better articulate and advocate with different stakeholders. UNHCR was able to provide stable staffing and funding to the co-leadership efforts because of its emergency plan, enabling the effective release of resources to the partnership.

81. UNHCR's human capital is a major internal asset. The knowledge and expertise of UNHCR personnel, paired with their dedication, commitment and professionalism were considered a strong enabling factor across the four countries.

- **Brazil**: The commitment and motivation of newer staff, the ability to recruit local staff with technical and contextual knowledge, and the experience of international staff with emergency operations were mentioned as major enabling internal factors. In addition, strong leadership and active support from the country representative (CR) in face of the pandemic was highlighted by several respondents.

- **Colombia**: The combination of the contextual knowledge/experience of local staff and technical expertise of international staff was seen as a favourable combination. The decentralized Colombian operation, though not without its challenges, was also seen as enabling – in that delegation to field offices made them more operable and granted them the flexibility to request resources and allocate them as needed, allowing them to address gaps and gain political will.

- **Ecuador**: The operation had experienced staff, nimble ability to establish new operations, and a more mature relationship with government officials and entities. Strong leadership and communication from the CR at the onset and throughout the pandemic were also recognized by staff key informants.

- **Peru**: Several staff mentioned that an important enabling factor had been the horizontal leadership style, with management open to hearing suggestions and the leadership and staff able to adapt to changing situations. The commitment and motivation of newer staff was also highlighted as an important asset.

82. <u>Elements of operations and institutional strategy are constraining factors:</u> UNHCR's one-year funding cycles, along with the late and/or sporadic arrival of funding and resources limited the response, especially in terms of long-term planning. UNHCR's year-to-year financing cycles, planning based on the previous year's budgets, and the late arrival of funding were cited by respondents as internal barriers and were seen by many as a major limitation for long-term planning. UNHCR staff and partners explained that short funding cycles made it difficult to plan long-term projects with partner organizations, many of whom have multi-year planning and financing structures. The late and/or sporadic arrival of funding also strained partner relations and caused challenges to planning programmes over the course of the year. Staff mentioned that they were usually short on funding at the beginning of the year and then struggled to catch up after a large influx late in the year. Finally, staff mentioned that UNHCR's bureaucratic procurement processes were lengthy and complex, resulting in slow resource mobilization.

83. <u>Varying levels of rootedness and limited operational experience in delivering emergency responses across the four host countries presented challenges at the onset of VenSit,</u> as all offices had to transition, adapt and scale, to respond to the Venezuelan influx. Although UNHCR has been present in Latin America for decades, its operations were largely outside the context of an emergency response, with the exception of a few natural disasters.

- **Brazil**: UNHCR's offices focused primarily on advocacy and legal work, with a small operational footprint. Since the onset of VenSit, the size of the Brazil operation has increased remarkably, going from 20 team members in 2016 to about 160 in 2020, and opening field offices/units in locations such as Boa Vista, Pacaraima, Manaus and Belém. In the context of COVID-19, multiple offices were forced to work remotely. Offices in the north (Boa Vista, Pacaraima, Manaus) remained open to pursue the delivery of life-saving activities.

- **Colombia**: Local UNHCR staff had prior experience of working with an ongoing internally displaced persons (IDP) situation. The transition from an IDP situation to a mixed-methods operation, however, presented a major challenge, given competing

priorities between both emergencies and the shift of some staff from the IDP to the VenSit operation.

- **Ecuador**: UNHCR had operational experience in assistance due to their response to the Colombia Situation, and was used to working within the well-defined Colombian refugee narrative and providing individualized protection in a few locations. Most Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Ecuador, on the other hand, are in transit and those who stay are spread out geographically.

- **Peru**: The operation in Peru is the newest among the four countries. Until 2018, activities in Peru were managed from Argentina. Over the course of two years, the operation has grown exponentially and UNHCR has set up a permanent presence in Lima, Tumbes, Tacna, Cusco and Arequipa. Staff reported that fully setting up a new operation presented opportunities for innovation, but also presented some challenges, such as building basic operational infrastructure (like a UNHCR bank account), and building trust and nurturing relationships with public authorities.

84. <u>Competing priorities have pushed UNHCR to work on multiple fronts and adopt roles as a catalyst, an implementer and a coordinator.</u> Through key informant interviews and document review, multiple types of activities conducted by UNHCR were identified, ranging from direct delivery of assistance and protection, to advocacy, capacity-building, and coordination, including inter-agency. UNHCR is recognized as being highly operational and has been praised for its catalytic and coordination roles (i.e. coordination work with implementing partners and inter-agency coordination) which have been viewed as helping to reduce information gaps and duplications among partners and improve coverage across geography, sectors and targeted profiles. However, recognition and understanding of UNHCR's roles varied among stakeholders; without clarity of UNHCR's roles along these different fronts and clear communication with the stakeholders involved, the potential for an improved response could be lost. Staff indicated that while UNHCR is well positioned and has experience, expertise and capacity to carry out its catalyst and implementer roles, in particular in terms of assistance and protection, the organization was not adequately positioned or prepared for its role as a co-leader with IOM. Since coordination and inter-agency work does not always fall within the UNHCR mandate, staff cited having needed clear guidelines, protocols and tools from the Bureau and country operations as well as support in defining roles and responsibilities between UNHCR, IOM and other actors.

85. <u>The fast growth of the operation presented challenges for human resource management, especially at the onset of VenSit</u>.

- **Brazil**: In the initial phase of the VenSit response, the large turnover of staff and constant reorganization of the organogram were mentioned as constraining factors. In addition, young and enthusiastic staff were seen as an asset in Brazil, but also as a challenge due to a lack of expertise and knowledge of the UN system. Many staff also mentioned the lack of adequate support and training from UNHCR for young and less experienced staff, especially at the border.

- **Colombia**: The transition from an IDP situation to a mixed-methods operation was a constraining factor that staff said affected the work culture and climate, owing to the

resistance of some local staff who had historically worked with IDPs and the tension generated between international staff with refugee and emergency coordination and assistance backgrounds and local staff with IDP protection backgrounds. While many mentioned the mix of staff as something positive, given the contextual knowledge/experience of local staff and technical expertise of international staff, it was evident that tensions remained in various offices throughout the country (for example, perceptions of different/unfair pay scales and benefits between local and international VenSit staff, perceptions that local staff are less technical/knowledgeable on refugees). Furthermore, stakeholders across evaluation countries cited that lack of local language competency among staff presented additional challenges.

- **Ecuador**: The operation had experienced staff, nimble ability to establish new operations, and a more mature relationship with government officials and entities. Successes and effectiveness of UNHCR operations in Ecuador has put it in the spotlight with headquarters and regional leadership, which has often led to increased workload for coordinating international donor visits, audits and other requests. Some respondents noted that the slow hiring process for new specialists and replacement staff within UNHCR creates inconvenient timing for transitions and implementation.

- **Peru**: High staff turnover (including at higher management levels) due to the temporary positions was seen as a limiting factor since operations began, but was also said to have improved in 2019. The lack of Spanish-speaking emergency response teams (ERTs) and new staff with little or no previous knowledge of the UN system were also seen as early challenges as the Peru offices grew in size and number to provide a greater response.

86. UNHCR hiring mechanisms tend to favour staff within UNHCR and do not encourage local hires such as host-country nationals or those of Venezuelan nationality who have relevant contextual knowledge and experience. Hiring internally often also requires greater economic investments inherent in relocating staff, especially internationally. UNHCR's priority for internal staff could represent a missed opportunity to leverage local talent who speak the local language, have established professional networks, and have rapport with local communities. Possessing bilingual (Spanish and/or Portuguese) cross-cultural communication competencies and cultural-awareness skills were reported as important factors in facilitating dynamics and exchanges with migrants and refugees, as well as national civil society, in particular for inter-agency work. In the four countries, the availability of qualified local candidates has been acknowledged and is reflected in the proportions of local staff, such as in Brazil. With the appropriate safeguards, Venezuelan hires or volunteers in Colombia and Ecuador were credited with bringing a valuable perspective to assistance and protection, one which garnered trust among other refugees and migrants. Many staff, however, thought that Venezuelan volunteer opportunities were underutilized.

87. UNHCR staff's mental health and well-being are not adequately addressed. Long hours, heavy workloads, and the emotional and psychological toll involved in working on front lines and in border areas put staff at risk of burnout, further exacerbated by challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many staff across different levels and geographic

locations mentioned long hours and heavy workloads in their day-to-day work and expressed the feeling that their time off is not fully respected. Field staff in particular described the emotional and psychological toll involved in working on the front lines and mentioned that they often lacked adequate psychological counselling, either because it was not available where they worked or was not available in their language. Staff living and working in close proximity to the border expressed the challenges of living and working in areas characterized by low resources, few social/cultural outlets and, in some cases, insecurity, and/or lack of safe transportation options to leave their posts (especially when their workday ended later in the evening or at night). The pandemic exacerbated mental health concerns for UNHCR staff across the board, as staff grappled with the personal, social, economic and professional consequences of COVID-19, including social isolation (for both national and international staff). To different extents across the four countries, some staff expressed that UNHCR's "stay-and-deliver" policy did not adequately address staff's safety or protection needs. Staff indicated that the pandemic generated a lot of stress and anxiety, citing rapid shifts/adaptations in workflow, the psychological demand of addressing the added vulnerabilities in the population of concern, fatigue from back-to-back and long virtual meetings, and a lack of healthy outlets under quarantine. Many staff indicated that workload was even heavier and working hours were even longer since the pandemic began. Staff reported feeling that in general, UNHCR lacks clear, coherent and applicable mental health policies and has a culture where the mental health and well-being of staff are not explicitly acknowledged or consistently promoted. During COVID-19, however, some offices expressed that strong communication and regular meetings/messaging from national leadership, as well as peer-support structures at the local and immediate-team levels, were helpful, but they felt the response and support from the international and regional levels were inadequate.

88. Within countries, UNHCR's vertical (national–field) and horizontal (field–field) communication and information exchange did not always flow smoothly within countries. But it increased and improved due to COVID-19, as digital communication and the need to coordinate remotely enabled more frequent and targeted exchanges.

- **Brazil**. In P1, staff remarked that the very diverse day-to-day realities across field units and offices create challenges to understanding and relating to different priorities and workflows. In P2, staff reported considerable improvements in terms of communication within the country. Reportedly, COVID-19 prompted more frequent and regular meetings between offices in Brazil, and new communication channels were created. Moreover, reporting improved with the strengthening of the Data and Information Management and Analysis (DIMA) unit. Finally, in Roraima, the arrival of a P5 Head of Office in Boa Vista fostered decentralization, improving both communication and workflow, which addressed the need for more decision-making power and faster approval processes for field offices/units in Roraima, as was identified in P1.

- **Colombia.** In P1, UNHCR staff indicated that while the decentralized structure of Colombia's operation was enabling (see above), it was also constraining in that field offices often operated in silos, not sharing information. Many indicated that communication and alignment between field offices, as well as more comprehensive

national strategies, guidelines and coordination from Bogotá, were lacking. In P2, UNHCR staff reported that the recent field coordinator position had a lot of potential to improve coordination and communication between offices and to articulate a more coherent and cohesive national response, though it was too soon to tell.

- **Ecuador**. In both P1 and P2, staff mentioned that sector staff communication between offices was not as strong as it probably should have been, that information and messaging did not always trickle all the way down to staff at field offices, and that field offices were not always cohesive, with some citing the need for more articulated national strategies and coordination.

- **Peru.** In P2, staff mentioned room for improvement regarding relaying of information/insights from binational meetings that did not necessarily reach non-border offices, and the written communication with Lima, which could be challenging given the (very) long response delays.

89. Between countries in the region, UNHCR communication was non-uniform and largely informal in nature, and lacked a regional approach. With the exception of some mirror offices (UNHCR offices on either side of borders), there was little exchange of information between VenSit countries across the region and few established formal communication channels or meetings to share the latest information and data on trends. Staff also cited that information exchange and regular meetings between sectors were non-uniform across countries and that it would be useful to have a sectoral approach at the regional level. Staff across the four countries cited that the absence of information from Venezuela was a major gap. Scenario-building workshops were important exercises but were not done often enough. In Phase 2, staff across countries mentioned that the Bureau was available more quickly and had organized more meetings in 2020, but with mixed results. In large group calls (with more than 20 people), there was a challenge to ensure relevance for all respondents and equal speaking time. Staff did praise the availability of the Bureau and a more horizontal approach to working together with the country operations to develop solutions relevant to the local contexts (such as supporting the development of the emergency roster in Peru). UNHCR's DIMA unit had been particularly highlighted as a good partner at the Bureau. Overall, P2 survey results indicated that to date, the main benefits from regionalization had occurred in coordination and communication (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Impacts of moving the Bureau to Panama

Has moving the Bureau to Panama improved UNHCR's operational response to VenSit? (% yes) P2 (n=88)
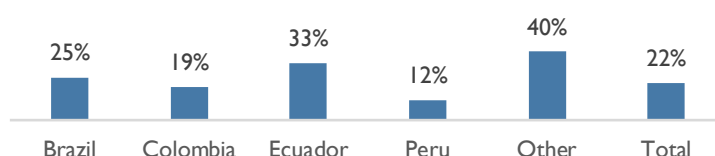
If yes, which of the following has improved? P2 (n=88)

The chart shows bar groups for Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Other, and Total, each with Coordination, Communication, Fundraising, and Data management percentages:

- **Brazil**: Coordination, 100%; Communication, 83%; Fundraising, 17%; Data management, 33%
- **Colombia**: Coordination, 71%; Communication, 100%; Fundraising, 29%; Data management, 29%
- **Ecuador**: Coordination, 50%; Communication, 50%; Fundraising, 50%; Data management, 50%
- **Peru**: Coordination, 50%; Communication, 100%; Fundraising, 0%; Data management, 50%
- **Other**: Coordination, 100%; Communication, 50%; Fundraising, 100%; Data management, 100%
- **Total**: Coordination, 79%; Communication, 84%; Fundraising, 32%; Data management, 42%

90. <u>UNHCR's documentation and exchange of good action-oriented practices were lacking, largely due to lack of resources and time.</u> The four countries have produced a series of good practices from which they, as well as other operations, could benefit. Staff also expressed an interest and need to learn more about activities and/or projects undertaken in neighbouring countries. Most information is exchanged informally, and an updated and centralized repository to facilitate access to good practices would be beneficial. Moreover, staff mentioned that most good practices requested by the Bureau and produced by the offices are meant for donors and that action-oriented good practices are missing. The latter would be useful for implementation, advocacy and capacity-building.

3.3.2 EXTERNAL FACTORS

91. <u>Governments' political will enabled UNHCR's response in general</u>, by permitting access to territory and through strong participation and collaboration with UNHCR throughout the region. UNHCR staff across all four countries cited strong relationships with national and local governments as an enabling factor in the response. In general, national governments in the region have permitted access to territory. In particular, the Colombian and Brazilian national governments were praised by respondents for their political will, tolerance and active participation in the response. Before border closures due to the pandemic, both countries maintained an open-door policy and advocated for other countries in the region to do the same.

- **Brazil**: The existence of a solid asylum system and the implementation of the Cartagena definition was mentioned as an important enabling factor. Respondents also mentioned the existence and remarkable quality of *Operação Acolhida*, led by the government and the army with close support of UNHCR, as a structural enabling factor of the response.

- **Colombia**: The Colombian government maintained an open border policy (before COVID-19) and issued options for regularization (if only temporarily) through the Special Stay Permits (PEPs).

- **Ecuador**: A top enabling factor mentioned by UNHCR staff and government was the enactment of the Human Mobility Law as well as a strong asylum system.

- **Peru**: The relationship with the government has greatly improved due to the articulations of the CR at the higher and regional levels. In addition, all of UNHCR's activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as advocacy, distribution of kits, support to the government in identifying health professionals among the refugees and migrants, has brought UNHCR closer to the government nationally and locally.

92. The presence of multiple and complementary actors, from UN agencies, to international NGOs, to local organizations and civil society, has created a favourable environment in the four countries, enabling the response. Across the four countries, UNHCR staff, partners and government stakeholders reported that having such a wide array of actors, each with their own capacity and expertise in different areas, helped to improve coverage across geography, sectors and targeted profiles. Stakeholders in Colombia and Ecuador also mentioned that the increasing presence of more specialized actors arriving to the scene, especially over the past two years, has increased the provision of assistance and protection. In Brazil, the capacities to deliver assistance and implement activities, from civil society as well as different levels of governments (municipal, state and federal) were particularly highlighted.

93. Collaboration with partners enabled UNHCR's response by reaching more people, reducing gaps in assistance through greater sectoral and geographical coverage, and reducing duplication of efforts. Partners interviewed in Phase 1 reacted positively to UNHCR's collaboration, considering that UNHCR has enabled their organization's response. Partner respondents praised UNHCR's technical expertise, operational capacity and coordination role as particularly effective. Similarly, UNHCR staff reported that coordination with partners increased the response by reaching more people and reducing gaps in assistance through coverage in different sectors and geography. More than half (59 per cent at P1; 56 per cent at P2) of online survey respondents reported that UNHCR has been highly effective in its coordination role in VenSit (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Degree to which UNHCR has been effective in its coordination role in the VenSit response

P2
(n=88)

Don't know, 8%

Not at all, 1%

Highly, 56%

Somewhat, 35%

Highly

Brazil 46%
Colombia 50%
Ecuador 67%
Peru 76%
Other 60%
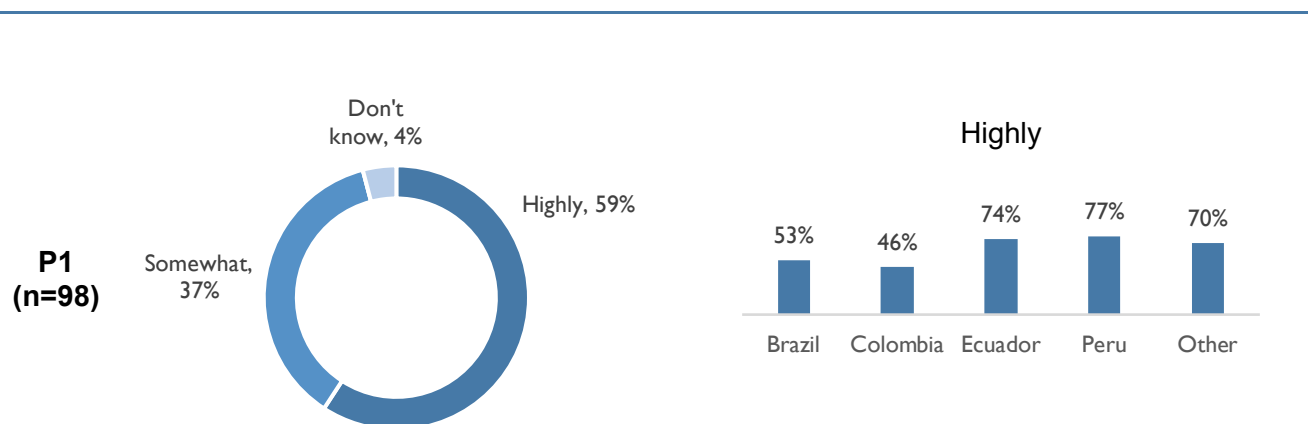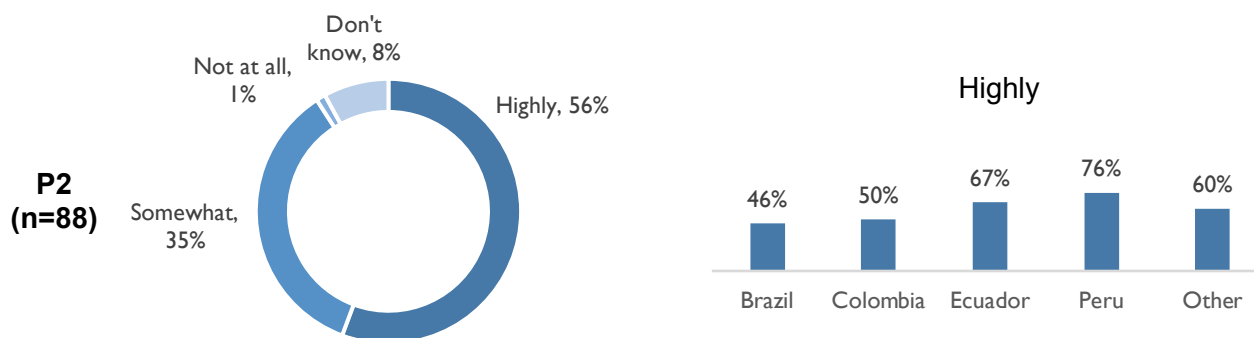
94. <u>Despite increased visibility of VenSit and COVID-19, both of which enabled access to funding, resources remain insufficient to cover the extent of needs of the emergency.</u> In Phase 1, respondents reported that the lack of a historical donor base in Latin America, competing priorities at international level, and the lack of visibility of the Venezuela Situation were barriers, particularly in the earlier years. The resource needs for the response for VenSit are reflected in the annual inter-agency RMRP appeals. For 2019, only 52 per cent of the RMRP appeal ($384 million)[30] was raised for VenSit. By Phase 2, in 2020, key informants and online survey respondents perceived that visibility of the Venezuelan Situation was progressively increasing at the global level, and with it, the response from the international community, including increased funding and participation of different actors. The most important variable in 2020 was the COVID-19 pandemic, which enabled access to funding. As of November 2020, 45 per cent of the COVID-19 adjusted RMRP appeal ($628 million) had been covered, making this the year with highest funding levels since the VenSit emergency began. Yet, 55 per cent of the funding needed to fulfil the appeal request remains unfunded. For more context, while incoming resources became more available in 2020, UNHCR did not increase its overall financial requirements as some activities were either suspended or cancelled due to the pandemic, and country operations instead mainstreamed COVID-relevant activities into their programming. It is important to understand this finding in the context of the related internal constraining factors that hinder long-term planning and implementation of larger budgets in the context of a pandemic emergency.

95. <u>Governments in the region have adopted a migrant narrative over a refugee one, which has constrained UNHCR's response.</u> The political and policy narrative that governments have used in characterizing the flow of Venezuelans in the region has predominantly been one of economic migrants as opposed to refugees, asylum-seekers, or people of concern to UNHCR. The migrant narrative has dictated policy, with negative technical, legal and political implications for the VenSit population, including more restricted access to important rights and protections that refugees would otherwise be entitled to. Among the countries included in this evaluation, Brazil is the only one to have implemented the refugee definition based on the Cartagena Declaration of 1984 for the recognition of Venezuelans as refugees, and announced a prima facie group recognition of

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[30] R4V Platform. *RMRP Funding Update 31 December 2019,* https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/73413 [accessed in November 2020].

Venezuelans in December 2019. Staff also mentioned that HQ and the Bureau were late to recognize and respond to VenSit and felt that UNHCR "lost the refugee narrative"; they explained that UNHCR should have pushed harder at the beginning to characterize VenSit as a refugee situation, which would have enabled stronger protection and access to territory.

96. <u>Border restrictions and closures have constrained UNHCR's response efforts.</u> Border restrictions from the Andean countries (except Colombia) in 2019 became an important constraint in terms of access to territory, with potential consequences for neighbouring countries. Staff in Peru and Ecuador mentioned the visa restrictions as a major constraining factor in 2019. Border closures of all countries in 2020 due to the pandemic exacerbated the situation, with a rise in irregular entries and exits through informal crossings.

97. <u>At times, UNHCR has faced challenges in working with governments and their institutions.</u> Among the list of constraining factors, UNHCR staff interviewed in the four evaluation countries reported challenges when collaborating with the governments at times. Staff in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru cited cases where UNHCR's advocacy efforts were at odds with the government's hesitation to generate pull factors. UNHCR staff also reported difficulty in identifying focal points within government institutions at times and challenges with navigating government bureaucracy and protocols. Frequent turnover of government authorities and staff was also constraining, since changing political roles often meant needing to build new relationships from scratch and conduct training again. In Peru, the dissolved Congress was reported as a constraining factor, preventing UNHCR from signing a host-country agreement.

98. <u>Across the region, political and social instability and unrest, as well as economic challenges, such as high rates of informal employment and unemployment, have constrained the response.</u> The political and economic situations in Ecuador and Peru were mentioned as constraining factors by respective respondents in each country. To a lesser extent, a few respondents in Brazil mentioned the challenges associated with the transition to the current government and the risk that the 2020 municipal elections could increase tensions. The unpredictability of the situation in Venezuela was also mentioned as a constraining factor in Brazil and Colombia. Overall, the VenSit response period coincided with host countries' national or local elections, resulting in changes of leadership and consequences in terms of policymaking. The same period was also marked with domestic political and economic turmoil, which undermined trust in government entities and led to civil unrest in many Latin American countries. Respondents across the four countries also mentioned that the health of national and local economies presented a challenge, in particular in terms of limiting access to (fair) employment. In fact, labour markets in the region have been volatile and dependent on a handful of industries. Reported unemployment rates as of June 2020 are high (Colombia 9.74 per cent; Ecuador 4.23 per cent; Peru 3.196 per cent; Brazil 11.96 per cent),[31] and levels of informal work and underemployment account for a particularly competitive job market. Border sites present fewer livelihoods and integration opportunities.

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[31] Unemployment, total (percentage of total labour force) (modelled ILO estimate). International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database; data retrieved on 21 June 2020.

99. Given the priority on emergency assistance and the lack of capacity of the local economy to absorb refugees and migrants at border locations, there were few economic inclusion activities at the Colombian border offices of Cúcuta, Riohacha and Maicao or the Brazilian border offices of Boa Vista and Pacaraima, for example. To date, UNHCR's economic inclusion activities have been primarily focused on urban settings. Staff in border sites expressed a need to further explore livelihood and socioeconomic inclusion opportunities in border locations. UNHCR staff at Colombian border offices, for example, expressed the desire for a relocation strategy to move refugees and migrants from border areas to cities, which they felt could improve the socioeconomic prospects of many. Staff cautioned that relocation should not be the only strategy, however, and considered that border areas should not be excluded from socioeconomic inclusion activities, such as a graduation model. Improving socioeconomic inclusion prospects at the border remains important since some refugees and migrants choose to stay in border areas given their proximity to Venezuela and the ties they may still have there. Staff in Roraima, Brazil, echoed this perspective, reporting that despite the unfavourable context, it is important to develop solutions for migrants and refugees in border sites who cannot relocate or do not want to be relocated via *interiorização* (detailed below).

100.   <u>Xenophobia and tensions with the host communities are on the rise leading to discrimination in hiring, labour abuse and exploitation</u>. Rising xenophobia throughout the region was considered a major constraining factor, as refugees and migrants are increasingly used as scapegoats in local campaigns and elections, and rhetoric on social media blames Venezuelans for committing crimes and driving down wages. Around half (between 43 per cent and 54 per cent by site) of Venezuelan refugee and migrant respondents in the evaluation team's RDS study reported xenophobia or discrimination since arriving in Colombia. Xenophobia has also manifested in outbreaks of violent protests in countries like Brazil and Ecuador, and in the violent deaths of Venezuelans in countries like Colombia.[32] In some cases, Venezuelans were blamed for the violence and insecurity resulting from some strikes and protests. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Venezuelans were at risk of becoming scapegoats and being blamed for the spread of the virus, which was reported by staff in Ecuador and Colombia as well as in UNHCR's September SitRep. In Roraima, the construction of the Area of Protection and Care (APC) for both the local population and Venezuelans, may become an example of a project that can alleviate tensions between host communities and refugees and migrants (although staff report that at this stage it is too soon to tell). The APC was coordinated by *Operação Acolhida*, with support of partners and UNHCR through the provision of 250 RHUs and 2,000 beds and mattresses to support the intensive care and isolation structures. Staff, partners and the government reported that UNHCR's anti-xenophobia campaigns (particularly in Colombia and Peru) and engagement with host communities have helped to counter xenophobia but that more efforts are needed. In Ecuador, volunteer programmes have been credited with reducing xenophobia and promoting solidarity. One such programme trains and incentivizes Venezuelans, Colombians and Ecuadorians to provide community outreach and to provide information and talks about refugees' rights and protections as well as resources and support channels. In another programme, initiated during the pandemic, Venezuelan volunteers delivered goods to Ecuadorians in need of support.

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[32] 586 Venezuelans have been assassinated in Colombia since 2017. Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses

101.   <u>Venezuelans face discrimination in hiring, labour abuse and exploitation</u>. Many Venezuelan refugees and migrants who participated in interviews and focus groups reported having had personal and direct experience with xenophobia and expressed that it is widespread in local communities. Among those who had not experienced it first-hand, most had either witnessed or heard of cases of discrimination, mistreatment, exploitation or abuse of Venezuelans at the hands of host communities and/or authorities, especially regarding employment.

102.   <u>The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major challenge for the 2020 response.</u> In the Phase 2 online survey, the majority of staff reported that the COVID-19 pandemic constrained UNHCR's operational response (Figure 20). Staff in both the online survey and key informant interviews emphasized that the pandemic limited UNHCR's access to the population. Despite UNHCR's commendable and rapid response to maintain contact with the community through telephone helplines, partners and community contacts, virtual assistance has its limitations. For one, not all Venezuelan refugees and migrants have access to a phone and/or the Internet. Plus, staff cautioned that personal interaction is not the same over the phone as it is face to face, especially in cases of trauma, mental health issues and SGBV, and so on. While phone lines may allow for greater reach in terms of contact, UNHCR staff expressed feeling that they had less operational capacity to respond and address all cases.

Figure 20: COVID-19's impact on UNHCR's operational response

How has COVID-19 impacted UNHCR's operational response (N_{P2}=88)
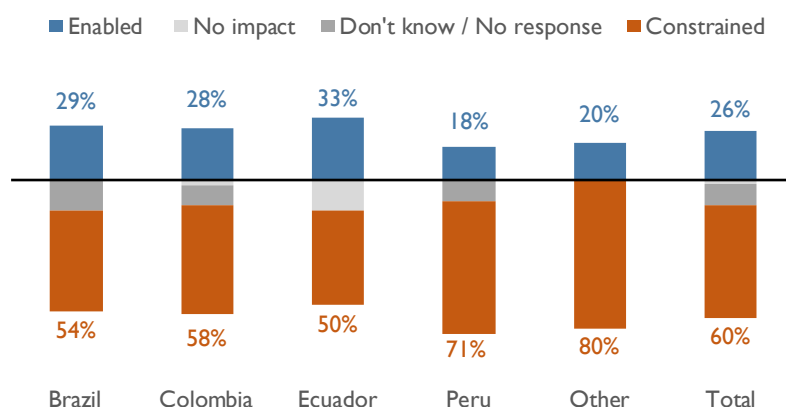
103.   The pandemic also increased vulnerabilities, not only for the Venezuelan population but the native populations as well, who all faced risks of infection with the virus, as well as a psychological toll. COVID-19 has taken a toll on both formal and informal economies, leaving many without work or a source of income. Many people of concern to UNHCR have struggled or been unable to pay rent, resulting in evictions. Evidence suggests that trafficking and SGBV are on the rise. In addition, limited access to the Internet/computers has made access to education even harder. Staff also cited increased discrimination/xenophobia by host communities against the population, who were seen as not following quarantine measures and contributing to the spread of the virus. Return movements to Venezuela also increased during the pandemic. According

to migration authorities, 108,058 Venezuelans returned to Venezuela from or through Colombia between mid-March and mid-September 2020, and 3,625 Venezuelans returned through Pacaraima, Brazil, since March, despite the borders being closed.

3.3.3   MIXED FLOW AND CO-LEADERSHIP WITH IOM

104.   UNHCR's co-leadership with IOM has enabled better planning, maximized limited resources, reduced duplicate work, and facilitated information-sharing, but further clarification of roles and responsibilities is still needed. Given that this was the first time that UNHCR and IOM have officially co-led a response, UNHCR staff cited challenges with defining roles within the dual-leadership mandate, establishing each organization's responsibilities to the platform, and building relationships early on. Staff reported that a major challenge was the absence of an official framework or protocols within the UN system for a joint response like the one being co-led by UNHCR and IOM. While staff across all four countries reported that UNHCR's and IOM's inter-agency coordination role has improved over time, many have expressed that the dual-leadership structure continues to present challenges and should be thoroughly evaluated to determine effectiveness before being replicated elsewhere.

105.   <u>The mixed flow character of VenSit has not influenced UNHCR's delivery of emergency assistance and protection but has catalysed UNHCR to develop mixed strategies for long-term solutions.</u> Across the four countries, staff reported that, operationally, the mixed flow does not influence UNHCR's delivery of emergency assistance and protection because the response is based on vulnerabilities and needs for refugees and migrants that fall within the VenSit mandate.

106.   Strategically, mixed flows add complexity to UNHCR's response but have catalysed UNHCR to develop mixed strategies for long-term solutions. UNHCR protection teams have had to develop mixed strategies to support and maintain access to rights for the VenSit population in each of the host countries, which has meant advocating for alternative protection arrangements for distinct legal statuses (for example, regular Venezuelans, irregular Venezuelans, Colombian returnees, binational indigenous groups). The mixed-flow character was also seen to add complexity to case management since mixed-status families[33] require individualized support, orientation, and routing to potentially different legal partners, all of which are difficult to achieve considering the magnitude of the influx. Finally, staff see co-leadership with IOM as one of the consequences of the mixed-flow character, which posed both strategic opportunities and challenges.

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[33] Mixed-status families in this case are considered to be any family where members have different legal status. In the case of Colombia, for example, perhaps one has a PEP and another doesn't, or one has asylum and another doesn't, perhaps one can claim nationality through Colombian heritage and another can't, perhaps one has binational indigenous status as an indigenous community member and another doesn't, and so on.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

107.   This evaluation documents UNHCR's achievements in its response to VenSit and highlights areas for improvement alongside appreciation of external limitations and barriers. UNHCR's VenSit response has made commendable achievements in the face of a large-scale, multidimensional crisis that has been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and limited funding. Across the four focus countries, the response has been strong, and UNHCR and partners have provided relevant emergency assistance to Venezuelan migrants and refugees (although it was insufficient to cover the massive needs).

108.   Notably, UNHCR has been able to catalyse protection options with various governments, through high-level advocacy around access to territory, asylum, regularization and documentation solutions as well as inclusion of refugees and migrants in national social protection systems and development plans. As an example, Brazil's implementation of a prima facie group recognition of Venezuelan asylum is a result of these efforts, which has the potential to cause a ripple effect across the region. More inclusive and long-term regularization options, including access to formal and recognized documentation, is critical to support the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and migrants throughout the region, and UNHCR's efforts must continue to prioritize access to regularization. In parallel, UNHCR should continue to promote employment for refugees and migrants, facilitate access to work permits and bank accounts for asylum-seekers and migrants, and recognize professional certifications and diplomas. Harnessing governments' understanding of the importance of incorporating refugees and migrants into public health response plans during COVID-19, UNHCR should continue to advocate for the inclusion of Venezuelans in social protection systems and development plans. It is also vital to ensure refugees and migrants have a better understanding and awareness of their rights in order to leverage UNHCR's advocacy successes. Continued support to the Quito Process may also be a good avenue for cross-pollination of good practices between host countries, as well as a platform for capacity-building at the policy level.

109.   UNHCR has also made commendable efforts to harmonize data collection to ensure compatibility of information systems and ultimately address data gaps and overlaps. UNHCR's continued efforts to support governments in upholding and systematizing registration and case management systems, as well as standardizing assessment tools between UNHCR, governments and partners, should be pursued through advocacy and technical support to ensure compatibility of data/information, and ultimately address gaps and overlaps. This includes continued advocacy with higher-level government actors to: (1) facilitate access to administrative data via data-sharing agreements (Bureau); (2) pursue the interoperability of registration systems to manage potential overlaps and gaps with other systems; and (3) provide appropriate capacity-building via training, technical support and monitoring (country operations).

110.   In the face of COVID-19, UNHCR teams across the region deployed creative virtual solutions and adaptations for assistance delivery during the pandemic. As UNHCR staff

resume more in-person work as quarantine measures lift, the Bureau together with country operations should explore the virtual strategies developed and consider integrating enabling and potentially transformative aspects of a virtual/in-person hybrid approach moving forward. For instance, UNHCR could maintain telephone hotlines to maintain a wider reach of the population, with an emphasis on providing information, answering questions, and sharing resources, while reserving face-to-face meetings to address more sensitive cases (with appropriate biosecurity measures). Virtual CBI delivery channels developed with financial service providers should also be evaluated for impact and cost effectiveness to support continued and optimized implementation.

111.   Overall, UNHCR has been highly operational and was widely acknowledged across stakeholder interviews and focus groups for its leadership in the humanitarian assistance and protection response. Most partners and government actors also commended UNHCR for its coordination role and for the collaborative networks it had established among partners. That being said, further documentation and clearer communication are still needed about UNHCR's roles as a catalyst (via advocacy and capacity-building), implementer and coordinator (including inter-agency). Doing so will help to ensure that roles and responsibilities of UNHCR, IOM and other actors are clearly established and understood by stakeholders, including staff, partners and government actors.

112.   Socioeconomic inclusion is an area of opportunity for UNHCR, in coordination with governments and other actors, to expand its response by implementing UNHCR's original 2020 planning documents which prioritize socioeconomic inclusion. Although these plans were largely reprioritized in light of COVID-19, insufficient actions on this front can further deepen the vulnerabilities of an already vulnerable VenSit population while simultaneously limiting UNHCR's ability to access the population and deliver assistance in the future. This is especially true in the context of COVID-19, which has negatively impacted countries' economies, health systems and governments' capacities, and has taken a heavy toll on the physical and psychological health and livelihoods of the VenSit population and host communities alike. At the time of writing, three of the four focus countries in the evaluation (Brazil, Colombia and Peru) ranked in the top 15 of most impacted countries based on the number of confirmed cases,[34] and all four countries ranked in the top 20 of most impacted countries based on mortality.[35] In response to the pandemic, UNHCR activated an unprecedented L2 emergency globally. Although this evaluation did not focus on UNHCR's COVID-19 response, it was able to draw initial insights on how UNHCR had adapted its response early on to meet additional challenges at the onset of the pandemic.

113.   Beyond COVID-19, UNHCR still recognizes the need to shift towards durable solutions, which was mentioned as a much-needed complementary strategy to bridge gaps in assistance coverage. Although balancing emergency assistance and durable solutions will be an important challenge in the uncertain post-COVID-19 economic scenario, UNHCR should increase resource allocation towards its socioeconomic

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[34] Based on confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide, Brazil ranked 3rd (6,204,220 confirmed cases), Colombia 10th (1,280,487 confirmed cases) and Peru 13th (952,439 confirmed cases). Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Research Center: Mortality Analysis, https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality [accessed 27 November 2020].
[35] Based on COVID-19 mortality rates worldwide, Peru ranked 3rd (111.55 deaths/100K pop), Brazil ranked 10th (81.85 deaths/100K pop), Ecuador 15th (77.94 deaths/100K pop) and Colombia 20th (72.55 deaths/100K pop). Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Research Center: Mortality Analysis, https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality [accessed 27 November 2020].

strategy. Stakeholders acknowledged that socioeconomic inclusion is relatively new territory for UNHCR in the Americas region (with the exception of Ecuador), and emphasized that UNHCR should work in synergy with governments and with strong linkage to development actors. As such, UNHCR should leverage its expertise and access to the people of concern to UNHCR to continue catalysing processes that enable long-term protection and open socioeconomic inclusion opportunities. To ensure relevance and applicability of socioeconomic inclusion strategies, UNHCR should emphasize a local approach, backed by market research and assessments.

114.   While the COVID-19 pandemic introduces new challenges unforeseen at the launch of this evaluation, the evaluation team hopes that the results serve as an opportunity not only to reflect on the past two years of UNHCR's operations but also to offer direction regarding opportunities, challenges and potential leverage points for the future responses. More than ever, it is important to continue to monitor and evaluate UNHCR's VenSit response to provide timely feedback, especially as the context may shift dramatically over the next 12 months and potentially beyond.

4.2 Recommendations

115.   In light of the detailed findings, the evaluation team proposes the following recommendations. For each recommendation, reference is made to the structured findings found in Annex 4: Summary findings structured by areas of inquiry and evaluation questions.

116.   The evaluation recommends three key areas for strategic realignment considerations:

1. Build more cohesive socioeconomic strategies and frameworks
Related findings: 2.1.1

– **Regional:** Continue to pursue concerted efforts for socioeconomic integration around livelihood strategies, and in particular, monitor and build on progress towards the 2020 *Stepped up livelihoods strategy for the Americas*, as it pertains to VenSit. The evaluation team recognizes that socioeconomic inclusion is principally the role of governments but considers that UNHCR can do more to complement a government's efforts. This requires that UNHCR define more precisely its role in relation to the role of government and partner agencies in the implementation of socioeconomic inclusion activities, to ensure that UNHCR provides a complementary approach. The Bureau should reinforce guidelines, training, technical support and resources for country operations to articulate the regional socioeconomic strategy into national plans and frameworks. As part of this practice, the Bureau should draw on labour market research and evaluations (following as a best practice, the World Bank socioeconomic surveys and reports), as well as provide guidelines to ensure proper monitoring, evaluation and reporting of socioeconomic inclusion activities and initiatives.

– **National:** With support from the Bureau, UNHCR country operations should develop (or, in the case of Ecuador, revisit and refine) a national framework and guidelines specifically geared towards socioeconomic inclusion in order to give coherence to what the field offices are doing and to promote communication and cross-site learning. National strategies should be designed

with input from UNHCR livelihood staff in field offices as well as key implementing partners to ensure appropriateness, feasibility and relevance in local contexts. Clear goals and progress markers should be established, and progress towards goals should be monitored throughout implementation, counting on ongoing technical support to the field level.

Additionally, successful pilots and projects undertaken in 2019 and 2020 should be leveraged (for example, expansion of GIFMM or GTRM to include more financial institutions, private sector actors and other partners) and consolidated into more holistic national strategies to give coherence to what field offices are doing. These would also help to support the socioeconomic inclusion of indigenous populations and build on existing efforts to pursue diploma equivalence, employment, language skills, and continuing advocacy for indigenous populations and pathways to regularization through labour insertion.

2. Explore new mechanisms for funding cycles that would support long-term programme planning
Related findings: 3.1.2

– **Headquarters:** Develop additional funding strategies to enable longer funding cycles that provide more opportunity for mid/long-term planning and efficient operations. One cycle could focus on annual requirements; and another on activities that require upfront multi-year commitment. This will also be beneficial to implementing partners, providing more visibility and commitment for their multi-year planning and fundraising requirements.

3. Consider alternative strategies for assistance for irregular entries, since UNHCR presence at informal crossings is limited
Related findings: 3.2.2

– **National:** UNHCR's network of partner and community contacts along borders gives UNHCR eyes and ears on the ground and provides a net of protection for refugees and migrants in those areas. Thus, efforts should be made to bolster CBP activities and continue building and maintaining communication channels within CBP networks in order to provide a general picture of new routes and trends in movements, and to amplify the protection response, especially where UNHCR presence is limited. Wherever possible, UNHCR should also consider investing in the establishment of unmanned information points along known crossing points, such as billboards with key information and contacts (for example, telephone helplines, local partners, safe spaces in transit, websites) to direct refugees and migrants towards assistance and resources. Information billboards should be durable enough to withstand the elements but easy enough to relocate should knowledge of different routes become available. It is important that this exercise, if put into practice, is done with the approval of and in close collaboration with local governments and other local stakeholders.

117. In addition, the evaluation team recommends 11 key areas for improvement and strengthening:

4. Strengthen mid- and long-term strategies and the link between humanitarian assistance and development programming
Related findings: 2.2.1, 2.2.2

– **Headquarters, Regional and National:** Continue to build strong partnerships and coordinate with development actors (such as the World Bank, UNDP) at the regional level, and support operations to articulate with governments, development actors, financial institutions and the private sector at the national level. This includes both strengthening existing relationships as well as bringing in new actors to support national and local efforts where appropriate. To achieve the latter, UNHCR should encourage national governments and international donors to advocate for more development actors and resources. UNHCR should also draw from its own pool of development practitioners worldwide to bring in more staff with development expertise and experience to the VenSit operation, which would enable UNHCR to develop a smoother transition between humanitarian and development programming.

5. Strengthen mental health support for both UNHCR staff and Venezuelan refugees and migrants
Related findings: 1.1.2, 3.1.2

– **Headquarter, Regional and National:** Institutionalize and implement mental health support to UNHCR staff. Although UNHCR has made a commitment to staff safety, security and well-being in UNHCR's People Strategy 2016–2021, regional- and country-level management should provide guidelines and ensure the enforcement of existing policies, which are all the more necessary during crises including the COVID-19 pandemic. In the latter context, support from HQ, including the provision of guidelines in terms of teleworking and telecommuting, security measures and so on, needs to be timelier and continually emphasized and monitored. As part of this effort, work-life balance should be fostered through the implementation of enabling measures (for instance, early release on Wednesday or Friday to compensate for heavy workloads during the week, mental health days). In addition to mental health training, resources should be allocated to ensure counsellors/psychologists are available in staff's local language for one-on-one sessions, either in person or remotely. Finally, HQ should liaise with UNDSS to ensure that all field offices/units have a hardship classification, that the appropriate support conditions and remunerations are provided to all staff in these units, and to ensure harmonization of measures across the region. Certain newly created units in Brazil (Pacaraima, Manaus) and Peru (all except Lima) have not yet been classified.

– **National:** Strengthen mental health support for Venezuelan refugees and migrants by conducting a review of current detection and monitoring mechanisms as well as a specific assessment of mental health needs, with refugees' and migrants' participation across different sites to identify gaps and opportunities for intervention. Collaboration with national governments and field partners is critical in conducting an assessment of mental health needs, developing actions and proper referral networks to address them, and effectively integrating these actions into protection and livelihood strategies. A concerted effort should be made to invest in the capacity of the government, whose responsibility it is to ensure the highest attainable standard of mental health well-being, and to target actors who focus on mental health (and consider bringing in specialized actors/experts if country actors are absent).

6. Improve internal communication both across and within countries, as well as vertically and horizontally
Related findings: 3.2.1

- **Regional:** Facilitate opportunities for more fluid and regular cross-country exchanges and meetings. UNHCR staff reported that more communication across countries would increase efficiency and effectiveness and that more efforts should be made by the Bureau to share experiences, ideas, challenges, and insights across countries through formal channels. Moreover, the Bureau should structure and standardize cross-country communication flows, providing guidelines about the purposes of each communication channel (for example, WhatsApp, email, calls). The Bureau should support the establishment of formal and regular binational meetings between UNHCR staff in mirror offices and, if appropriate, provide authorization for transborder in-person meetings and monitoring activities to aid in understanding and responding to flows. Finally, the Bureau should facilitate more communication and information from Venezuela to host countries in the region, including more emphasis on scenario-building.

- **Regional and National:** Improve vertical and horizontal UNHCR communication. Further systematize communication through increased collaborative work culture and reporting structures to support upward, downward and lateral information-sharing to ensure that messages effectively reach all involved parties. This requires careful consideration of (and safeguards against) potential breaks in the communication chain (for example, regional messages successfully reach country operations but then are not communicated to field offices, or field messages successfully reach country operations but then are not communicated to the Bureau). To achieve this, UNHCR should institutionalize new (good) practices in terms of digital communication beyond the social isolation period to continue improving upon regularity of multidirectional communication.

7. Evaluate communication and awareness-raising efforts with refugees and migrants as well as public anti-xenophobia campaigns with host communities
Related findings: 1.2.3

- **Regional:** Increase efforts to evaluate the top communication and awareness campaigns in the region, notably *Somos Panas* in Colombia, the Chatbot in Ecuador, and *VenInformado* in Peru. Evaluations should measure the effectiveness, reach and coverage of the campaigns, as well as barriers to refugees' and migrants' access to, and comprehension and retention of the information. Understanding if/how these campaigns are effective, which components are/are not working, and what could be optimized and improved would allow UNHCR to draw lessons learned for use in other countries, scale up to a regional campaign, and/or harmonize information platforms and campaigns to ensure that accurate and timely information is provided to refugees, migrants and host communities (who are reportedly underinformed). Building on the findings of the R4V 2019 communication and information needs assessment, UNHCR should also take into account the information needs and gaps that exist both among refugees and migrants, and within host communities and how they can be better addressed.

- **Regional:** Evaluate anti-xenophobia campaigns and peaceful coexistence initiatives, notably *Histórias en Movimento* in Brazil, *Somos Panas* in Colombia, *Abrazos que Unen* in Ecuador and *Tu Causa es Mi Causa* in Peru. UNHCR should assess current anti-xenophobia strategies from large-scale public campaigns to smaller-scale initiatives targeting subgroups of the population (such as incentivizing local landlords for refugee housing placements) to inform

future efforts, especially in areas with a higher density of refugees and migrants. Ongoing work to counter xenophobia and promote solidarity should consider: (1) monitoring media and official statements to dispel xenophobic messages; (2) ensuring host communities benefit from projects and initiatives (such as including a percentage of spots in training programmes/workshops for host community members); and (3) promoting local inclusion activities (through sports, arts, and so on) and local organizations that support migrants and refugees.

8. Evaluate platform and inter-agency response
Related findings: See "Limitations"

– **Headquarters:** Conduct an evaluation specifically focused on the inter-agency coordination dimension of UNHCR's response and take inter-agency dynamics fully into account for all future evaluations. A major limitation of this evaluation is the exclusive focus on UNHCR's response, which in agreement with terms established with the Evaluation Service, did not assess the UNHCR–IOM-led Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform. UNHCR's inter-agency work has an important multiplier effect on operability since coordination allows for better geographical, sectoral and population-specific reach and coverage, and thus, future evaluations should take on an inter-agency approach.

9. Review hiring mechanisms to consider qualified local staff and those of Venezuelan origin
Related findings: 3.2.1

– **Headquarters:** Continue to review and update the hiring mechanisms (as much as possible) and ease the requirements to allow qualified local staff to be hired in more permanent positions where appropriate. In addition, UNHCR may explore contracting more staff of Venezuelan origin and/or expanding UN volunteer posts for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, since Venezuelan volunteers may be particularly adept at reinforcing community-based protection mechanisms and assistance, information and orientation provision, and empowerment activities. They may also be able to liaise with trusted Venezuelan associations, which play a strategic role in providing information and orientation on legal issues and social services in host communities. The inclusion of Venezuelan refugees and migrants as staff and/or volunteers should be carefully considered on an individual basis to protect both Venezuelans themselves and UNHCR. Finally, it is critical to ensure that cross-cultural communication competencies and cultural-awareness skills are incorporated as hiring requirements, especially for international staff, and that appropriate training is provided, especially for posts involving CwC, CBP or inter-agency work.

10. Invest in developing faster and more frequently implemented assessment tools and leverage field staff input to ensure feasibility, efficiency and appropriateness of tools, given field realities
Related findings: 1.3.2

– **Regional:** Invest more in the development of improved assessment tools. These tools should be: (1) faster to implement; (2) implemented more frequently; and (3) standardized within and potentially across countries, while still allowing for certain adaptations to local context. Field staff should be involved in the development of regional tools and consulted on their experiences in delivering the Protection Monitoring Tool (PMT) and

participatory diagnostics to increase feasibility, efficiency and appropriateness of tools, given field realities. Similarly, the input of IM officers at all levels should be taken into account in planning the design of the tool to support the systemization, processing and analysis of data. Upon implementation, the Bureau must share and clearly communicate guidelines at all levels, provide training and technical support, and commit to ongoing monitoring of implementation and evaluation of its effectiveness.

11. Invest in building the evidence base to inform strategies and advocacy efforts
Related findings: 1.1.3, 2.1.1

- **Regional:** Invest in building the evidence base on irregular movements. In the absence of data and/or poor-quality estimates on irregular movements, the Bureau should invest (either in-house or externally) in developing innovative tools and data collection methods to improve estimates on the numbers and patterns of irregular movements throughout the region. UNHCR staff suggested that it would be beneficial to systematize binational border monitoring through rapid profiling exercises (such as a brief Kobo survey) as this information is key for advocacy with governments as well as informing UNHCR's own strategies moving forward. Further discussion and analysis of regional policy options are needed to address this sensitive and delicate issue. In the short term, and especially in light of the rise of irregular movements during COVID-19, UNHCR should prioritize the adaptation of strategies related to UNHCR's presence at the border and assistance to refugees and migrants entering irregularly. Strategies should include contingency plans for changes in quarantine measures and border openings, include plans for protecting and addressing the needs of groups with pendular movements, and be accompanied with clear guidelines and technical support for staff on the ground.

- **Regional:** Invest in building the evidence base on socioeconomic inclusion. The Bureau should continue to conduct and support more research to inform socioeconomic inclusion efforts, including market assessments, studies on the socioeconomic profiles of refugees and migrants, and research on income-generating initiatives (for example, innovative financing, social impact bonds, seed capital initiatives, microcredit opportunities, entrepreneurial activities and cooperatives). Additional research could inform regional, national and local socioeconomic strategies, highlight opportunities for engagement, and provide leverage for advocacy efforts. While the latter two points could be done through partnerships with universities and/or contracted out, UNHCR still needs more technical staff dedicated exclusively to socioeconomic inclusion and livelihoods throughout the region to ensure complementarity and cohesive implementation of strategies. The Bureau should also conduct rigorous evaluation of existing socioeconomic inclusion activities to determine effectiveness and provide inputs for scaling and replication.

12. Improve documentation and sharing of action-oriented good practices throughout the region
Related findings: 3.2.1

- **Regional:** Lead the documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned across countries and field sites to lessen the burden on country teams that do not have the time and/or resources to do so. Documenting, consolidating and giving more visibility to implementation-oriented good practices can enhance donor relations, inform the scaling up or

scaling out of initiatives, and promote cross-learning, among other benefits. Thus, the Bureau should explore creative avenues to both capture and communicate good practices and lessons learned. For example, it was suggested that hiring an external consultancy team, paired with UNHCR regional staff, could be a good solution. An initial selection of good practices is provided in Annex 5.

13. Assess the impact of capacity-building efforts with government institutions, authorities and partners to inform future investment in additional human and financial resources for training and technical support
Related findings: 1.2.1, 2.1.3

– **National:** Assess the impact of UNHCR's capacity-building work with governments and rule of law entities, such as ombudspersons, public defenders and authorities involved in refugee status determination systems and labour control, as well as those who work at border and transit points. This exercise should aim to understand whether UNHCR's sensitization trainings for these actors support and strengthen the quality of information provided to the population about their rights, and whether appropriate referrals for assistance and protection are made. The same is also true for capacity-building work with assistance-providing partners, to ensure that they have protection knowledge and response capacity, and with the private sector (in particular banks and employers) to inform them about the rights afforded to refugees (such as the right to work) and ensure that forms of documentation are recognized. Since staff rotation is common among these actors, UNHCR should explore how best to maintain institutional knowledge (for instance, new staff training, refresher training). UNHCR should also explore new pedagogical strategies for virtual training based on the lessons learned in the pandemic, including ongoing training on virtual platforms and virtual communication channels for technical support.

14. Improve UNHCR's detecting and addressing of rights and protection violations
Related findings: 1.3.3

– **National:** Country operations, in coordination with and in support of field staff, should evaluate whether UNHCR's assessment tools and the way that they are delivered (especially in light of virtual adaptations during COVID-19) are nuanced enough to detect violations, that they are accompanied by appropriate referral and risk of harm protocols, and that staff are trained on both detection and referral procedures. UNHCR should consider investing in the expansion of a robust referral network of specialized partners and institutions with the capacity to respond to such cases and regularly revisit referral lists to ensure that contact information is up-to-date and accurate. UNHCR should also dedicate time and resources to conduct monitoring and follow-up of cases. The evaluation team understands that caseloads are large and recommends periodic exercises that draw a random sample of referred cases and contact the responding entities to assess whether cases were appropriately addressed. This will also provide opportunities for capacity-building, technical support or changes to referral pathways, should course correction be needed. In addition, UNHCR's CwC and CBP activities should include the provision of information and, where appropriate, training (i.e. with community leaders or volunteers) to host communities specifically tailored towards detecting violations among the refugee and migrant population, and referring cases to the proper channels. Finally, it is critical that (1) refugees and migrants know their rights and options

for protection so that they can recognize when these are being violated; and (2) that they are informed about and have access to pathways to denounce any violation and get proper attention and assistance. This could empower refugees and migrants to seek solutions to address their own rights violations and encourage them to approach and/or contact support networks directly.

Annex 1: Detailed timeline and context

Based on interviews and a desk review, the evaluation team developed a characterization of each year cycle in a timeline (Figure 21) to appraise the relationship between events and the response, with four main phases:

- **2016–2017:** Increased flow of refugees and migrants from Venezuela: UNHCR emergency preparedness
- **2018:** Increased flow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants to host countries: UNHCR response with international protection mandate, deployment of new UNHCR's offices, and L2 emergency declarations for VenSit
- **2019:** Increased flow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants to host countries: host country issued border restrictions for Venezuelans, Scaled up UNHCR emergency response
- **2020:** COVID-19 pandemic: host country issued border closures and quarantine measures, increased reverse flow of Venezuelan returnees, UNHCR's global L2 emergency declaration and response in the context of COVID-19

Figure 21: Refugees and migrants from Venezuela in destination countries
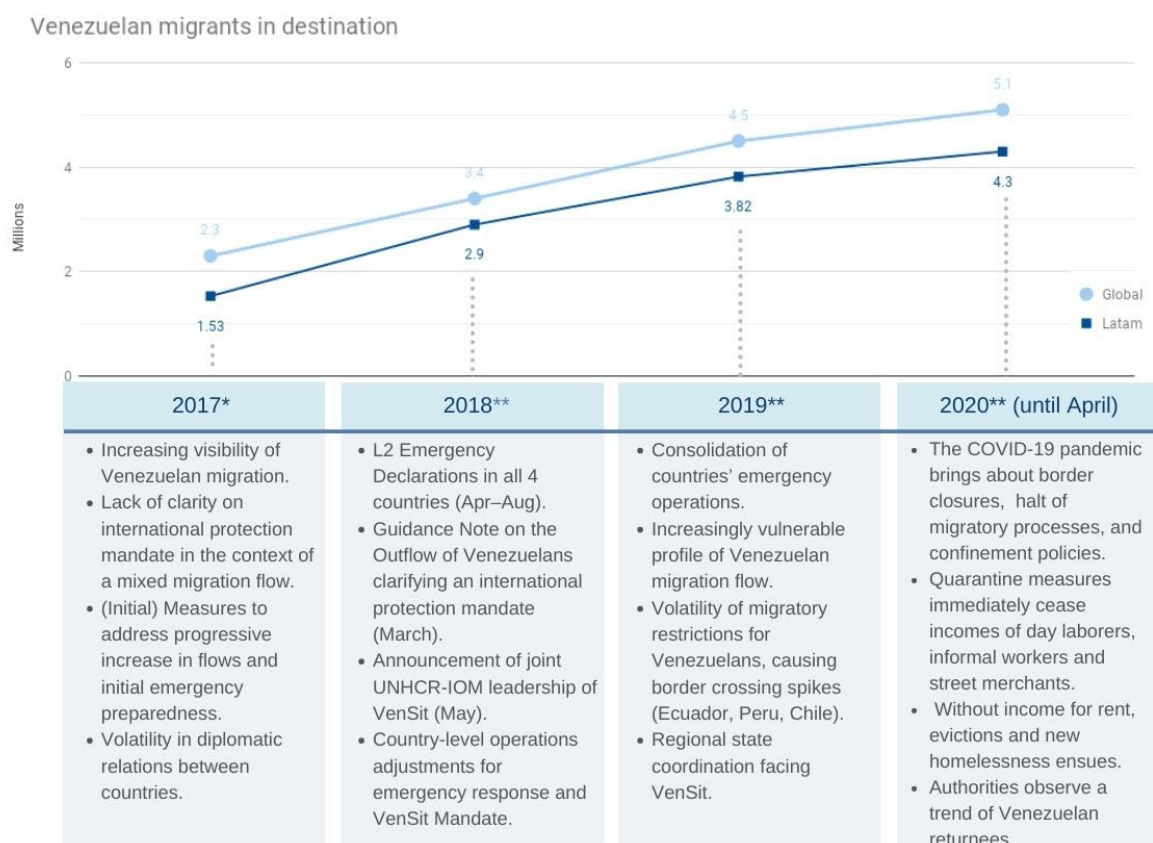
Figure by authors based on :
* IOM. Migration Trends in the Americas: Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (July 2018)
**UNHCR-IOM. RMPR 2020 for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (Dec 2019)
***UNHCR-IOM. RMPR 2020 for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (May 2020 COVID Revision)

2016–2017: Increased flow of refugees and migrants from Venezuela and UNHCR emergency preparedness:

In 2016 and 2017, the context was characterized by a notable increase in flow and corresponding emergency preparedness activities by humanitarian operations but without a clear international protection mandate. The narrative cast by host states was one of "economic migrants" with some humanitarian implications but no claim to asylum. Thus, Venezuelans relied on alternative administrative solutions. In Latin America, between 2015 and early 2018, more than half a million residence permits were issued to Venezuelan nationals by ordinary and extraordinary migration normative tools.[36] During this period, asylum applications from Venezuelans in Colombia and Ecuador rarely received positive decisions, and many migrants faced numerous obstacles to receiving fair and efficient asylum procedures. In some cases, this was due to fragile diplomatic relations between host countries and Venezuela (such as in the case of Colombia, during geopolitical tensions); in others, it was due to the protection responsibilities incurred by the host government in granting asylum to Venezuelans (for instance, offering recognized refugees the right to work, education, and healthcare). In Brazil, Venezuelan asylum applications reached a peak in 2017, overwhelming CONARE's operating capacity. Peru began to see an increase in asylum requests as well.

During this time, UNHCR began emergency preparedness activities. In May 2017, the L1 emergency in Colombia was declared, although some respondents considered that by this point, they were already seeing symptoms of an L2 emergency and the situation should have been treated accordingly.[37] Table 4 presents the 2017 context per country.

Table 4: 2017 Context by country

Brazil	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru
– Consolidation of first shelters in Roraima – Venezuelan asylum applications reach 17.8k cases. CONARE reports a maximum capacity of case management of 1.1k cases per year – Portaría Interministerial N°9 signed by 4 National Ministries, allowing a 2-year temporary residence for Venezuelan nationals and fee exemption in some cases – Opening of UNHCR Boa Vista Office	– 1st Humanitarian Country Team Response – Launch of Border Mobility Card, Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronteriza (TMF) and first Special Stay Permit, *Permiso Especial de Permanencia* (PEP) – First establishment of Field Unit Riohacha (3-person team) in August 2017	– Ecuador considered transit only – Venezuelan population profile: professionals or adults migrating alone – No clear mandate to respond to the incoming flow	– No UNHCR office in Peru – Presence established through a Liaison Officer in Lima between September 2017 and February 2018 – Increasing flows and exponential rise of asylum requests

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[36] IOM. July 2018. *Migration Trends in the Americas: Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*

[37] An L1 emergency is activated when a country operation must actively prepare for a humanitarian emergency but faces significant gaps in resources, staffing or expertise. It triggers human, financial, and material support from the Regional Bureau, and Divisions of Emergency, Security and Supply. An L2 emergency unlocks additional Regional Bureau support, including authorization to mobilize and/or re-allocate resources and may also trigger specific support from Headquarters Divisions. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response, 2017, available at https://www.refworld.org/docid/59d4d4c54.html [accessed 3 February 2020]

2018: Increased flow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants to host countries and UNHCR response with international protection mandate, deployment of new UNHCR's offices, and L2 emergency declarations for VenSit:

Border crossings by Venezuelans peaked in all four countries in 2018. By March 2018, UNHCR issued the first version of the *Guidance Note on the Outflow of Venezuelans*, clarifying as follows: 'While individual circumstances and reasons for these movements vary, international protection considerations have become apparent for a very significant proportion of Venezuelans. UNHCR's concern for Venezuelans outside their country of origin implicates UNHCR's mandate.' The Guidance Note also mentioned the following: 'UNHCR considers that the broad circumstances leading to the outflow of Venezuelan nationals would fall within the spirit of the Cartagena Declaration' based on border protection-monitoring interviews conducted at the time. This was reported to be a key enabling milestone for UNHCR country operations building a response to VenSit. The mandate clarification was followed by official L2 emergency declarations in all four countries between April and August 2018, which added operational capacity to the teams on the ground.

As border crossings to Ecuador and Peru peaked in May and July 2018 and their governments imposed additional requirements for refugees and migrants, UNHCR's border operations grew. Border crossing restrictions took the form of additional documentation requirements, such as valid Venezuelan passports, original apostilled criminal records, consular visas, and processing fees, which in practice leave a large portion of refugees and migrants ineligible to access the territory through authorized border crossings. By August 2018, both countries instituted a passport requirement for Venezuelans attempting entry into Ecuador and Peru, but the policy was struck down by the courts in Ecuador (August) and suspended in Peru (October) soon after. The cumulative result of these closures of southward paths for Venezuelan migrants had a bottleneck effect: the number of Venezuelans in Colombia had reportedly increased by 50.7%, as the only border that remained open throughout the year.

In September 2018, 11 host country governments launched the Quito Process (Quito I), taking steps to improve communication and coordination regarding the influx. The multilateral initiative aimed to harmonize domestic policies among host countries and to promote solidarity across the region through regularization, humanitarian response, access to rights, cooperation and dialog with Venezuela.[38] In November of the same year (Quito II), member governments adopted a regional plan of action. Among other things, signatories to the plan committed to facilitate the social and economic integration of Venezuelans into host States and improvements in the process of granting legal status to Venezuelans in their respective countries. Table 5 presents the 2018 context per country, and Figure 22 visually shows the progression of border restriction announcements, border crossing spikes, and judicial decisions suspending such requirements.

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[38] Quito Declaration on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region. 4 September 2018.

Table 5: 2018 Context by country

Brazil	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru
– Federalization of government response & launch of Operação Acolhida (OA) – Beginning of the voluntary relocation interiorização programme from Boa Vista to Sao Paulo and Manaus – Fast growth and expansion of UNHCR activities and operational reach	– Highest inflow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants into the territory – Official request from Colombian Government for support from UN system and international community and establishment of Presidency's border management office – Second, third and fourth phases of the PEP implemented – Establishment of FO Barranquilla in October, and consolidation of FO Riohacha (from 3 staff in Jan to 18 staff in Dec 2018) – Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants (RAMV) mass registration exercise took place between April and June (442k irregular Venezuelans registered) – Elections and transition to Duque administration	– Highest flow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants into the territory during spikes (up to 6k people a day) – Profile of refugees and migrants becomes more diverse, family units migrating together or with need for reunification – Open border policy until the government implements border crossing requirements in August	– High inflow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants into the territory – Establishment of UNHCR Peru offices (Lima, Tumbes, Tacna) – Open border policy until August, when Peru instituted a passport requirement for Venezuelans attempting entry at the border

Figure 22: Border crossings and restrictions - 2018 timeline
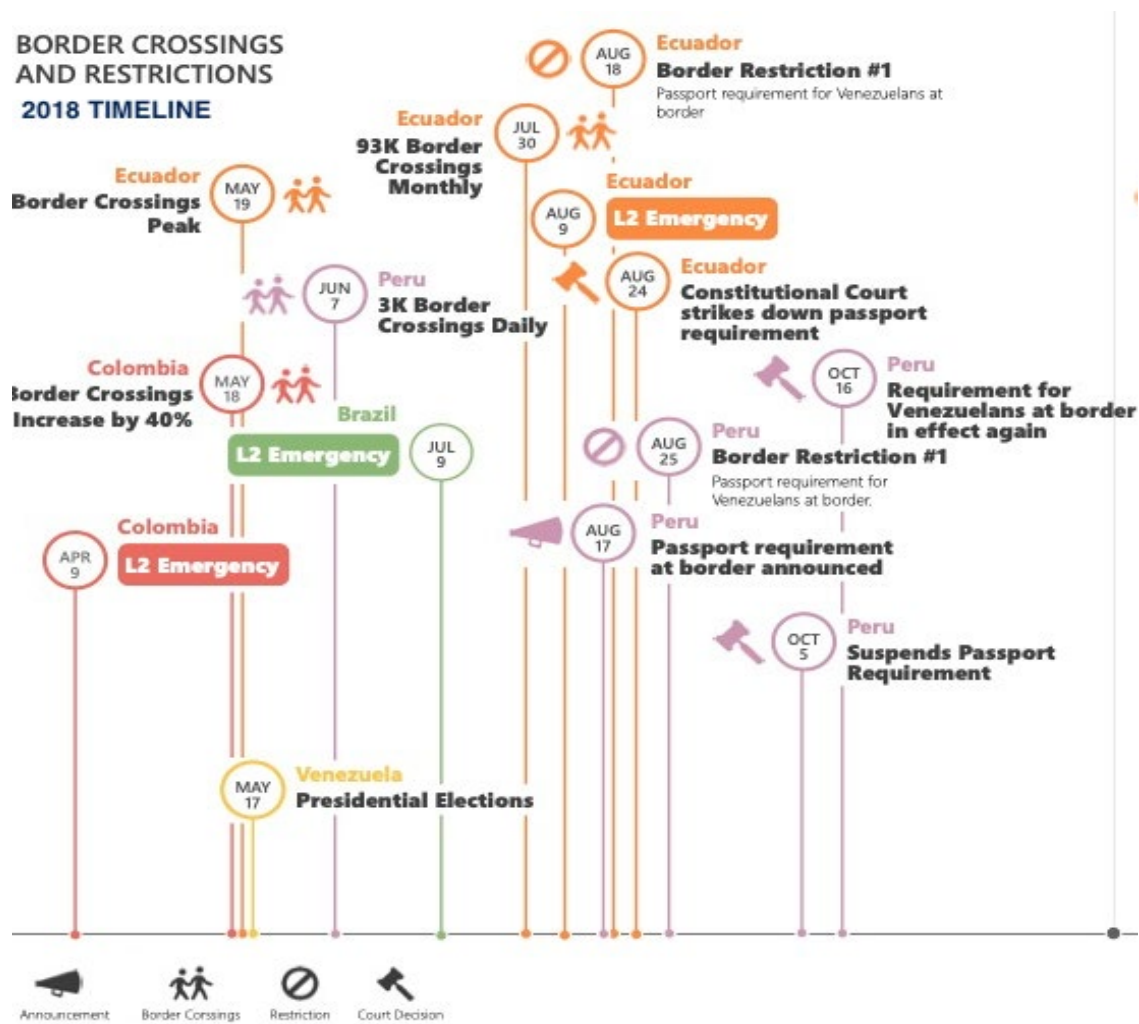
2019: Increased flow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants to host countries, host country issued border restrictions for Venezuelans, and scaled up UNHCR emergency response

UNHCR continued scaling up its operational capacity in 2019, responding to a larger influx of Venezuelan migrants and refugees as well as a border emergency due to migratory restrictions that began in late 2018. Towards the end of 2019, additional border crossing requirements in Ecuador, Peru, and Chile hindered the flow of refugees and migrants across the Andean corridor and resulted in a quasi-closure of the Colombia-Ecuador border. UNHCR responded to these new challenges through an increased advocacy engagement, including through the issuance of Update 1 to the Guidance Note International Protection Considerations for Venezuelans,[39] which calls for receiving states to allow Venezuelans to access their territory.

Throughout the region, both internal Venezuelan push factors (i.e. elections, economic conditions, human rights conditions and political violence) and external pull factors (i.e. host country announcements of border restrictions) triggered peaks in the number of arrivals. Host country governments announced restrictions anywhere from 30 to 3 days in advance of implementation, triggering spikes in refugees and migrants on the move, scrambling to cross before restrictions took effect. For instance, the day after Peru announced new visa requirements in June 2019, the country saw a record 9,000 daily border entries[40] and 4,000 asylum applications.[41] The day after the visa requirement took effect, border crossings dropped to 400.[42] Announcement of entry restrictions also caused friction among neighboring countries. Following the announced implementation of Peru and Ecuador's new visa requirements, the Colombian government appealed to both countries, requesting they reevaluate their decision and proposed a 'humanitarian corridor' for Venezuelan refugees and migrants stranded at southern borders.[43] Entry restrictions have also caused friction within countries' own governments, with instances of local courts striking down or suspending policies. This occurred twice in Ecuador and once, partially, in Peru.

At the same time, additional pathways to temporary administrative alternatives for those already in-country grew in Ecuador, through a new humanitarian visa, *Visa De Residencia Temporal De Excepción Por Razones Humanitarias (VERHU)*, and in Brazil, through an accelerated prima facie asylum-granting procedure to recognize asylum seekers as Cartagena Declaration refugees. A migratory alternative such as a humanitarian visa in no way equates to prima facie recognition, yet, they both have the effect of offering legal solutions in the short term. Host country governments continued to coordinate efforts

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[39] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Guidance Note on International Protection Considerations for Venezuelans – Update I, May 2019, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/5cd1950f4.html [accessed 15 April 2020]

[40] BBC. 16 June 2019. Crisis de Venezuela: en qué consiste la visa humanitaria que pide Perú a los venezolanos y por qué genera polémica. Accessed from https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-48651272

[41] El Comercio Peru. 17 June 2019.Venezolanos sin visa optan por presentar solicitudes de refugio para entrar al país. Accessed from https://elcomercio.pe/peru/tumbes/venezolanos-visa-optan-presentar-solicitudes-refugio-entrar -pais-noticia-ecpm-645951

[42] El Comercio Peru. 22 June 2019. Venezolanos en Perú: disminuye el ingreso por la frontera con Ecuador. Accessed from https://elcomercio.pe/peru/venezuela-venezolanos-peru-disminuye-ingreso-frontera-ecuador-noticia-648233

[43] El Universal. 9 September 2019. "Colombia solicitó corredor humanitario para venezolanos a Ecuador y Perú". Accessed from /www.eluniversal.com/politica/50232/colombia-solicito-corredor-humanitario-para-venezolanos-a-ecuador-y-peru

through the Quito Process, which held meetings in April, July, October, and November (Quito III, IV and V, respectively), strengthening their follow-up measures to their commitments in the 2018 Plan of Action. As well, the World Bank released a number of socio-economic reports on the effects of Venezuelan migration in the region with a focus on ways in which host countries can "capitalize on the potential of an adequate integration of the migrant and refugee population".[44] Table 6 and Figure 23 illustrate 2019 events.

Table 6: 2019 Context by country

Brazil	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru
– Increasing focus on Interiorização as a durable solution – Expansion of operations and activities (OA & UNHCR) to Manaus – Asylum application process goes online (SIS CONARE) – Prima facie group-based accelerated procedure: recognition of 21k Venezuelan asylum-seekers	– Increased consolidation of operations in territory with opening of Bogotá Field Office, consolidation of presence in the Caribbean coast and main receiving cities, including a new sub office in Cali (October) and set-up of the Integrated Assistance Centre (CAI) in Maicao – Xenophobia and discrimination on the rise (local elections) – Citizenship granted to Colombian-born children of Venezuelan parents since 2015 (39k by end of 2019) – "Bottle-neck" effect in Colombia due to Venezuelans in transit being unable to cross into countries further south	– Border crossing restriction in January (criminal record documentation requirement) – Final border crossing requirement of a humanitarian visa is implemented in August alongside an announcement of issuance of humanitarian visas for Venezuelans already in-country – Xenophobia and discrimination on the rise along with political unrest and national strikes in October	– Changes in CEPR pre-interview process for qualifying asylum seekers – Border crossing requirement of a consular humanitarian visa obtained with a Venezuelan passport is implemented in June – Consolidated UNHCR border operations to attend border crossing spikes – Xenophobia reported to be on the rise

[44]World Bank. 2019. An Opportunity for All: Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees and Peru's Development. World Bank, Lima. Accessed from https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32816

Figure 23: Border crossings and restrictions - 2019 timeline
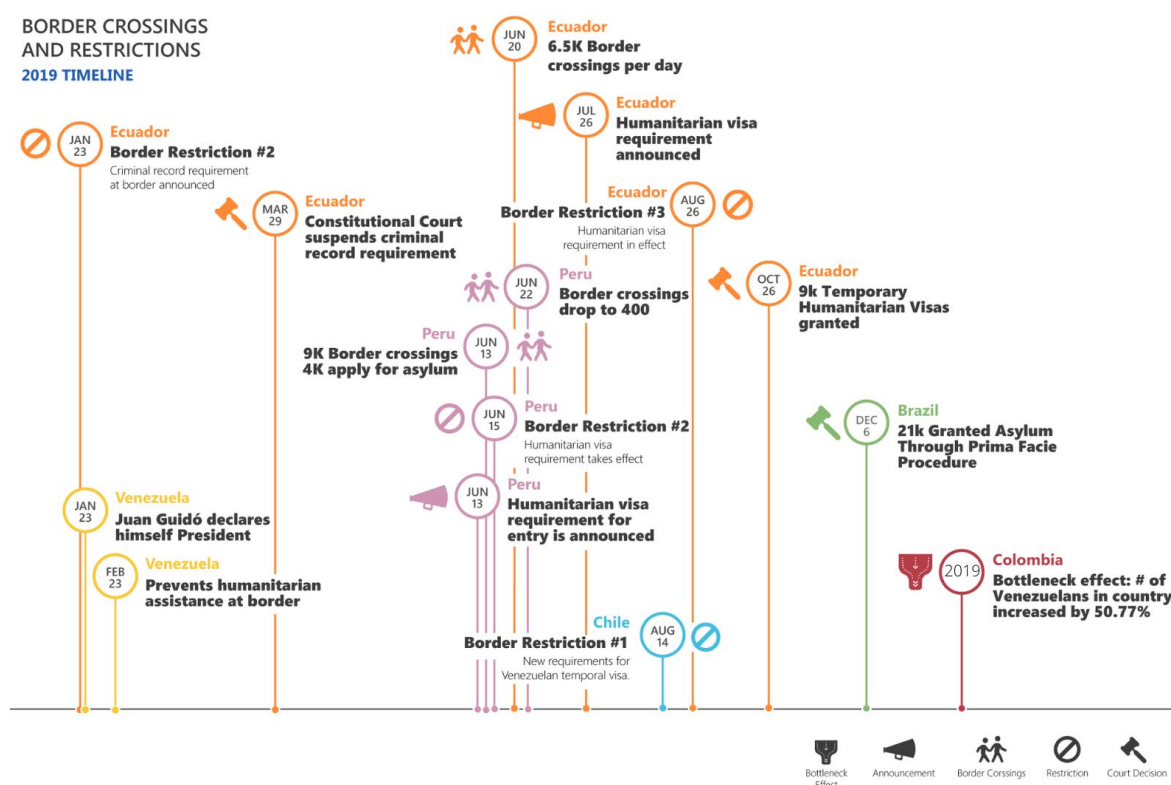
2020: the COVID-19 pandemic, host country issued border closures and quarantine measures, an increased reverse flow of Venezuelan returnees, and UNHCR's global L2 emergency declaration and response in the context of COVID-19

At the beginning of the year 2020, UNHCR was already adapting in the face of a constantly changing context. As emergency border circumstances stabilized with limited legal border crossings due to new entry requirements for Venezuelans, UNHCR's regional VenSit response was shifting towards local inclusion through socio-economic programming. Those plans were interrupted, however, with the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. On March 25, 2020, the UNHCR High Commissioner activated Global Level 2 emergency for the COVID-19 situation citing "an unprecedented challenge to ensure protection, assistance and delivery of essential services to people of concern, including refugees, stateless, IDPs and others." This is the first time in history that UNHCR internally declared an L2 emergency across the globe.

UNHCR teams have had to respond to the challenges of operating within the parameters of quarantine measures, border closures, and a near halt of economic and educational activity - in addition to the public health emergency itself. In countries with weak healthcare systems and entrenched inequalities, the pandemic revealed systemic challenges and hit those most vulnerable the hardest. The four host countries examined in this evaluation are no exception. Quarantine measures across the region had a particularly devastating effect on Venezuelan refugees and migrants who depended on street commerce (or panhandling), informal jobs and day labor. Incomes for much of the population diminished, most of all for those who depended on industries affected by the pandemic. With this, Venezuelan migrants

experienced a wave of evictions[45] from their rental units for lack of payment, despite bans and freezes on rent hikes and evictions[46] at the central and municipal levels across the region.

While some Venezuelans were already returning to their country of origin before the pandemic,[47] authorities observed a more accelerated trend in return movements during the pandemic (83,000 by June,[48] 110,917 by 6 October[49]), most likely prompted by the precarious circumstances of refugees and migrants and loss of livelihoods due to quarantine measures in all four host countries. In this context, Venezuelan refugees and migrants returning to their home country fell further into circumstances of vulnerability as they attempted crossing through irregular means. In response to the rising number of Venezuelans trying to cross borders to return to their home country, Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil initiated humanitarian corridor programmes during the early months of the pandemic. While the numbers of returnees did decrease once quarantine measures loosened, borders have remained closed. Table 7 presents the context per country. Figure 24 shows the rise in daily confirmed COVID-19 cases during the first eight months of the pandemic as well as the law and policy context for each of the countries, highlighting border closures, ceased operations of migratory authorities, and other relevant policies affecting Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region.

With a more regional perspective, the Quito Process resumed its work in August and September, virtually, where member states established a Technical Secretariat, through which UNHCR and IOM formalize their role and support to the process. Another key development was the launch of the Group of Friends of the Quito Process, with the formal adhesion of the Swiss Confederation, the United States of America, the Kingdom of Spain, the Federal Republic of Germany, Canada and the European Union with a view to "maintaining technical collaboration, financing and international awareness regarding the Venezuelan migratory and humanitarian crisis."[50]

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[45] UNHCR. As COVID-19 pandemic roils Latin America, Venezuelans face wave of evictions. October 2, 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2020/10/5f6929854/covid-19-pandemic-roils-latin-america-venezuelans-face-wave-evictions.html (accessed 6 October 2020).

[46] In Colombia, 'Ni desalojos ni aumento de arriendos durante cuarentena' Semana, 31 March 2020, www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/ni-desalojos-ni-aumento-de-arriendos-durante-cuarentena/660598/ (accessed on 6 October 2020). In Ecuador, 'Prohibición de desalojo a inquilinos en la emergencia sanitaria se amplía hasta el 15 de noviembre del 2020' www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/prohibicion-desalojo-inquilinos-emergencia-sanitaria.html (accessed 6 October 2020). In Peru, no official regulatory measures bans evictions, but the Ombudsman's office, through a Pronouncement, warns of serious harm to the rights of vulnerable people if such evictions take place. 'Defensor[ia del Puevlo Exhorta a Evitar Desalojos por mora en Arriendos durante Emergencia Sanitaria.' www.dpe.gob.ec/defensoria-del-pueblo-exhorta-a-evitar-desalojos-por-mora-en-arriendos-durante-la-emergencia-sanitaria/ (Accessed 5 October 2020). Brazil has had no policies in place to prevent evictions, and is perhaps the country with the most serious statistics regarding evictions during the pandemic: 'Brazilian housing movements fight surging evictions amid coronavirus' PRI, 12 August 2020, www.pri.org/stories/2020-08-12/brazilian-housing-movements-fight-surging-evictions-amid-coronaviru s (accessed 5 October).

[47] Internal Flash Update on Venezuela Situation # 73. In October 2019 UNHCR identified a weekly increase of border crossings of Venezuelans from Ecuador into Colombia, including Venezuelans who cited increased xenophobia and discrimination in neighbouring countries and either intend to remain in Nariño, near the border, or transit through Colombia to return to Venezuela.

[48] R4V Response for Venezuelans - Regional Situation Report: April–June 2020. reliefweb.int/report/colombia/r4v-response-venezuelans-regional-situation-report-april-june-2020

[49] UNHCR Internal Flash Update on Venezuela Situation 6 October 2020 (update #121).

[50] Joint Declaration of the VI International Technical Meeting on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region. Santiago Chapter. September 23 & 24, 2020. https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/informe_ppt_chile_vi_ronda_22sep2020_002.pdf

Table 7: 2020 Context by country

All four countries operate under states of emergency and confinement measures, reaching hospital ICU unit saturation points within the first 200 days of the pandemic.

Brazil	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru
− Opening of 12 Operação Acolhida (OA) offices for interiorização (voluntary relocation) across the country − Initial lack of clarity with regard to COVID-19 quarantine measures at federal, state, local levels − No ban on evictions for lack of rent payment	− Necessity of complex response: continuing emergency, returning movements and increasing inclusion − Coordinated restrictions on access to territory in Ecuador, Peru and Chile continue to affect Colombia − Increase in irregular border crossings	− Regular migration comes to a halt as all borders are closed − Rise in irregular crossings and challenges for both new migrants and returnees − Pre-election year in Ecuador − Ecuador reached COVID-19 contagion peak on day 50 of the pandemic − The Humanitarian visa for Venezuelans VERHU has its deadline extended until October 13 − World Bank - UN Inter-Agency report published - on potential of positive fiscal effect of Venezuelans in Ecuador[51]	− Overall trickling flows as result of border closures, with a rise in irregular crossings and challenges in reaching at-risk populations − Political instability − Pre-election year in Peru − Potential proposal to regularize irregular entries

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[51] World Bank. July 2020. "Challenges and Opportunities of Venezuelan Migration in Ecuador."

Figure 24: 2020 Context by country, within the COVID-19 pandemic

I. COVID-19 and Migratory Regulations - Regional

COVID-19 deaths

259
(Col) 14
(Ec) 62
(Per) 24
(Br) 159

7,570
(Col) 278
(Ec) 883
(Per) 943
(Br) 5,466

37,429
(Col) 890
(Ec) 3,334
(Per) 4,371
(Br) 28,834

75,543
(Col) 3,223
(Ec) 4,502
(Per) 9,504
(Br) 58,314

2020

March

legal and regulatory changes

- **(Col)** Preventative Obligatory Isolation, restricting mobilization (*Decree N°457, 24 March*),closure of all borders with few exceptions.
- (**Ec**): State of Emergency, closure of all borders with few exceptions (*Decree 1017, 16 March*), validity of Legal Stay Extended and deadline for applying for humanitarian visa for Venezuelans VERHU extended (*Ministerial Acuerdo N°35, 19-March*)
- (**Per**): National Health Emergency Declaration (*N°008, 11 March*) ; Closure of all borders with few exceptions (*N°044 16 March*), automatic extension of migratory status.
- (**Br**): Closes land borders to all migrants minus Uruguay (19 March, for 15 days).

April

- **(Col)** 13,400 returnees reported (27 April, *IADB*)
- **(Per)** Temporary affiliation of migrants to Health Insurance system (12 April). Digitization of Migratory Services and foreigners pending regularization are considered regulars (29 April, *Resolución de Superintendencia N° 000124-2020*)
- **(Br)** extends border closure for 30 days (3 April)

May

- **(Col)** Protocol for Voluntary Return of Venezuelans (28 May, *Resolution 1265*)
- **(Ec)** Borders to reopen partially 1 June (*COE resolution of 22 May*)
- **(Per)** Online Migration Service Launched for virtual renewal and processing of migration status (28 May)
- **(Br)** extends border closure for 30 days (23 May)

June

- **(Col)** 43.787 returnees (22 June, *UNHCR Situation Update # 8*), National Quarantine extended until 15 July
- **(Ec):** State of Emergency, extended for another 30 days. (15 June, *Exec Decree N° 1074*). Emergency visa for humanitarian reasons VERHU process reactivated (19 June)
- **(Per)**: Asylum-seeker appointment system reopens (22 June). State of Emergency extended until 7 December (10 June, *Decree N° 020-2020*)

*Source: COVID-19 dataset of OUr World in Data, from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) raw data.

II. COVID and Migratory Regulations - Regional

COVID-19 deaths

125,751
(Col) 9,810
(Ec) 5,657
(Per) 19,021
(Br) 91,263

175,535
(Col) 19,364
(Ec) 6,555
(Per) 28,788
(Br) 120,828

212,457
(Col) 25,828
(Ec) 11,312
(Per) 32,396
(Br)142,921

219,127
(Col) 27,017
(Ec) 11,702
(Per) 32,914
(Br) 147,494

2020

July

legal and regulatory changes

- **(Col)** Special Stay Permits for Venezuelans (PEP) renewal for 2 years (3 July, *Resolution No. 1537*)
- (**Per**): National Health Emergency Declaration (N°008, 11 March) ; Closure of all borders with few exceptions (N°044 16 March)
- (**Br**) extends border closure for another 30 days (1 July)

August

- **(Col)** All borders closed until October 1 (25 August, *Decree N° 1168*)
- **(Ec)** State of Emergency, extended until 12 September. (16 August, Exec Decree N° 1074)
- **(Br)** extends border closure until 26 September (29 August)

September

- **(Col)** New online CheckMig Protocol for airtravel into Colombia (19 September, Resolution No. 2232)
- **(Br)** extends border closure for another 30 days (26 September)

October (7)

- **(Ec)** border with Colombia won't reopen as previously announced. will remain closed "until 2021" (1 October, COE)
- **(Col)** Reported 111k returnees to Venezuela between March and 4 October, yet authorities estimate 200k Venezuelans will enter Colombia before end of 2020
- **(Per)** Reopens air travel for specific regional flights and to seven countries 11 destinations (1 October, *Ministerial Resolution*)
- **(Ven)** Plan Vuelve a la Patria reports 17522 beneficiaries of repatriation programs (2 October)

*Source: COVID-19 dataset of OUr World in Data, from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) raw data.

Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

The following table presents the Evaluation Matrix. COVID-19 related questions (italicized) were explored in Phase 2 only as a cross-cutting theme and meant to give a preliminary glimpse at how COVID-19 has impacted UNHCR's response and what measures UNHCR has taken to address early challenges related to the pandemic. The evaluation did not aim to answer COVID-19 questions authoritatively but, rather, to document preliminary insights for future efforts. In the Matrix, Online survey is abbreviated to "OS", Key informant interviews to "KII" and Focus groups to "FGs".

Area of Inquiry		Evaluation Questions	Sub-questions	Data collection instrument
Outcomes of intervention areas	1. Assistance and protection response: What have been the results of UNHCR's regional and country-level assistance and protection responses for refugees and migrants in the VenSit? (OECD-DAC Criteria: Relevance, Coverage, Coherence, Effectiveness)	1.1. Assistance: To what extent are refugees and migrants provided with life-saving goods and services according to their needs?	1.1.1. How relevant are UNHCR's emergency assistance strategies to the needs of refugees and migrants?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials, persons at risk) c. FG guide (Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian returnees, Brazilian Warao, host communities) d. Secondary document review
			1.1.2. What strategies did UNHCR implement to assess the emergency assistance needs of the target population? How were the needs of persons at risk and/or with specific needs (children at risk including unaccompanied minor, indigenous communities, elderly people, pregnant and lactating women, LGBTI, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, and others) taken into account in the strategies implemented by UNHCR to provide life-saving goods and services?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review

		1.1.3. To what extent was the target population reached in terms of life-saving goods and services provided (e.g. food and non-food items, emergency shelter, health and nutrition, education, legal assistance, transport, and CBI)?	a. Secondary data review
		1.1.4. To what extent are refugees and migrants perceived to have their needs met regarding provision of life-saving goods and services? Are there any perceived gaps in terms of assistance?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials, persons at risk) c. FG guide (Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian returnees, Brazilian Warao, host communities)
	1.2. Protection: To what extent are refugees and migrants aware of and enjoying rights and protections?	1.2.1. What strategies has UNHCR implemented to promote awareness of rights and protections among refugees and migrants?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		1.2.2. To what extent do refugees and migrants perceive that UNHCR has increased their awareness of rights and protections?	a. KII guides (persons at risk) b. FG guide (Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian returnees, Brazilian Warao, host communities)
		1.2.3. To what extent are the rights and protection needs (access to territory, asylum systems, regularization processes, and documentation) of refugees and migrants met?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
		1.2.4. To what extent do refugees and migrants perceive that their rights and protection needs (access to territory, access to asylum, and regularized migration status) are met?	a. KII guides (persons at risk) b. FG guide (Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian returnees, Brazilian Warao, host communities)

	1.3 To what extent are refugees' and migrants' needs assessed? Do assessments allow UNHCR's staff and partners to address rights and protection violations?	1.3.1. To what extent have the methods/procedures used to assess refugees' and migrants' (lack of) rights and protections allowed UNHCR's staff and partners to address rights and protection violations?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
		1.3.2. To what extent does UNHCR continue to provide protection for those who are already receiving protection services and to those with irregular entries within each respective country?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials, persons at risk) c. FG guide (Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian returnees, Brazilian Warao, host communities) d. Secondary document review
2. Socio-economic inclusion and mid/long-term perspectives: To what extent has UNHCR been successful in advocating for and developing government capacity to ensure socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants, and incorporating mid/long-term protection perspectives in the design and delivery of the operational response? (OECD-DAC Criteria:	2.1. Socio-economic inclusion: To what extent has UNHCR been successful in advocating for and developing government capacity to ensure socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants?	2.1.1. To what extent has UNHCR been successful in *advocating* to ensure socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
		2.1.2. To what extent has UNHCR been successful in *developing government capacity* to ensure socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
		2.2.3. To what extent has UNHCR *directly implemented programmes* towards the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
	2.2. To what extent has UNHCR been successful in incorporating mid/long-term protection	2.2.1. What strategies has UNHCR implemented to incorporate mid/long-term protection perspectives in the design and delivery of the operational response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review

	Coverage, Effectiveness, Connectedness)	perspectives in the design and delivery of the operational response?	2.2.2. To what extent do key stakeholders perceive that UNHCR has incorporated mid/long-term protection perspectives in the design and delivery of the operational response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials, persons at risk) c. Secondary document review
Contextual factors and challenges	3. What factors (internal and external) constrained or enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection? To what extent were those influenced by the mixed flow character of the Venezuela Situation? (OECD-DAC Criteria: Effectiveness, Efficiency, Connectedness)	3.1. What internal factors constrained or enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection?	3.1.1. What are the major internal factors that enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection, and how did they affect UNHCR's response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
			3.1.2. What are the major internal factors that constrained UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection, and how did they affect UNHCR's response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
			3.1.3. How did the declaration of the L2 emergency enable or constrain UNHCR's response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
			3.1.4. How did the declaration of a global L2 emergency declaration for COVID-19 enable or constrain UNHCR's response since March 2020?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR) c. Secondary document review
		3.2. What external factors constrained or enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection?	3.2.1. What were the major external factors that enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection, and how did they affect UNHCR's response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
			3.2.2. What were the major external factors that constrained UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection, and how did they affect	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review

		UNHCR's response?	
	3.3 To what extent is UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection influenced by the mixed flow character of the Venezuela Situation?	3.3.1 To what extent is UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection influenced by the mixed flow character of the Venezuela Situation?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
		3.3.2. What are the main successes and challenges UNHCR has faced in its co-leadership role?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR, partners, government officials) c. Secondary document review
COVID-19	4. How has COVID-19 impacted UNHCR's response and what measures has UNHCR taken to address challenges related to the virus?	4.1. How has COVID-19 impacted UNHCR's response?	4.1.1. How has COVID-19 impacted UNHCR's access to funding?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR c. Secondary document review
			4.1.2. How has COVID-19 impacted UNHCR's operational delivery of the response?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR c. Secondary document review
		4.2. What measures has UNHCR taken to address challenges related to COVID-19?	4.2.1. What measures has UNHCR taken to address challenges related to COVID-19?	a. OS questionnaire (UNHCR) b. KII guides (UNHCR c. Secondary document review

Annex 3: Interviews and focus groups conducted by stakeholder and country

Key Informant Interviews	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru	Brazil	Panama & Geneva	Other countries	TOTAL
Phase 1: In-person (Nov 2019 - Feb 2020)							
UNHCR staff	27	18	17	25	13	-	100
Partners	6	6	5	12	1	-	30
Government	7	3	4	13	-	-	27
Refugees and migrants	12	12	13	18	-	-	55
Phase 1 Subtotal	52	39	39	68	14	-	212
Phase 2: Virtual (Sep 2020)							
UNHCR Staff	11	11	11	11	-	-	44
KIIs (Phase 1+2) total	63	50	50	79	14	-	256

Focus groups (Phase 1 only)	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru	Brazil	Panama & Geneva	Other countries	TOTAL
Known recipient	30 (6 FG)	13 (6 FG)	30 (7 FG)	60 (12 FG)	-	-	133 (31 FG)
Unknown recipient	26 (6 FG)	18 (6 FG)	30 (6 FG)	30 (6 FG)	-	-	104 (24 FG)
Waraos	-	-	-	19 (4 FG)	-	-	19 (4 FG)
Colombian returnees	9 (2 FG)	-	-	-	-	-	9 (2 FG)
Refugees and migrants Subtotal	65 (14 FG)	31 (12 FG)	60 (13 FG)	109 (22 FG)	-	-	265 (61 FG)
Host community	27 (6 FG)	22 (6 FG)	22 (5 FG)	47 (9 FG)	-	-	118 (26 FG)
Focus groups (Phase 1) total	92 (20 FG)	53 (18 FG)	82 (18 FG)	156 (31 FG)	--	--	383 (87 FG)

Online Survey with UNHCR staff	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru	Brazil	Panama & Geneva	Other countries	TOTAL

Phase 1	39	19	13	17	2	8	98
Phase 2	36	6	16	23	2	5	88
Online survey (Phase 1+2) total	75	25	29	40	4	13	186

KIIs + focus groups + online survey (P1 + P2)	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru	Brazil	Panama & Geneva	Other countries	TOTAL
TOTAL[52]	230	128	161	275	18	13	825

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[52]May count some respondents multiple times (maximum 4 times if respondents were key informants in both rounds and participated in the online survey both rounds)

Annex 4: Summary findings structured by areas of inquiry and evaluation questions

Area of inquiry 1: Assistance and protection response
What have been the results of UNHCR's regional and country level assistance and protection responses for refugees and migrants in the VenSit?

Evaluation Questions	Main findings
1.1 Assistance: To what extent are refugees and migrants provided with life-saving goods and services according to their needs?	**1.1 Assistance.** **1.1.1 The emergency assistance provided by UNHCR is relevant to the needs of refugees and migrants.** − UNHCR's strategic decision to employ a needs-based approach, targeting the most vulnerable, improved the relevance of the VenSit response. − Despite COVID-19 limiting access to the population of concern, UNHCR reacted quickly to adapt and deliver emergency assistance by virtual means, shifting towards telephone helplines and cash-based interventions (CBI). **1.1.2 The provision of life-saving goods and services is insufficient to cover the full extent of needs of the population.** − The scale of the VenSit population's needs exceeded available resources and capacity of UNHCR and humanitarian actors. − The most pressing needs of refugees and migrants sampled in Phase 1 were health, shelter/housing, food, and employment. − In general, the specific needs of persons at risk are taken into account in UNHCR strategies and operations, but coverage is still lacking for certain groups. − Refugees' and migrants' mental health needs are not sufficiently addressed in the assistance response. **1.1.3 In coordination with governments and partners, UNHCR has established robust assistance structures to address the most pressing needs at formal border points. However, monitoring irregular entries and providing assistance at informal crossings remain a challenge (except for Brazil)** − The border assistance response provides information and orientation, emergency assistance, and emergency shelter for those most at need. − Monitoring of irregular crossings and providing assistance at informal crossing points are major challenges for UNHCR, complicated by border restrictions and closures, geographical access limitations, and insecurity.

1.2 Protection: To what extent are refugees and migrants aware of and enjoying rights and protections?	**1.2 Protection.**

1.2 Protection.

1.2.1 Protection rights: With the support of UNHCR, governments are providing access to territory, asylum, regularization processes and documentation to different extents across the 4 countries.

– Access to territory differed by country, depending on national policies.
– Through advocacy and technical support, UNHCR has helped improve asylum systems and procedures in all of the countries to different degrees, depending in large part on the asylum system infrastructure already in place prior to the VenSit.
– UNHCR has advocated with governments and provided technical support to authorities throughout the region to foster access to Venezuelan refugees' and migrants' rights to documentation and regularization.
– Most refugees and migrants did not feel their rights were respected in host countries (except in Brazil), citing experiences of labor exploitation, poor/no access to health services, discrimination, and xenophobia.

1.2.2 Protection strategies: Multiple protection strategies enable UNHCR to target different needs.

– Community-based protection (CBP) has been central to UNHCR's protection strategy.
– Registration and case management are important means of protection but duplications and gaps in assistance between UNHCR and other actors remains a concern.
– There are multiple mechanisms for refugees and migrants to share feedback and/or complaints, but they may not be widely known or accessible to all.

1.2.3 Awareness of rights: UNHCR has made significant achievements promoting rights awareness, but coverage and quality remain uneven.

– UNHCR has developed several information and communication channels to promote awareness about rights and protection options among refugees and migrants, with good practices throughout the region.
  – UNHCR's information campaigns and websites are widely recognized.
  – Communication with Communities (CwC) is a key strategy to amplify the spread of information and orientation messaging.
  – UNHCR has expanded virtual channels for information and orientation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
– Improvements are still needed to ensure better coverage and understanding from refugees and migrants.
– Most of UNHCR's information and communication strategies have not been assessed to determine their effectiveness.

| 1.3 Needs and rights assessments: To what extent are refugees and migrants' needs assessed? Do assessments allow UNHCR's staff and partners to address rights and protection violations? | **1.3 Needs and rights assessment.**

1.3.1 UNHCR has developed and implemented multiple strategies to assess emergency assistance and protection needs, with improvements over time.
– UNHCR has developed and implemented various strategies to assess the emergency assistance and protection needs of the target population, which are key inputs for strategy development and inform programme planning.
– Strategies to assess the emergency assistance needs of the VenSit population have improved over time.

1.3.2 UNHCR assessment tools still have a number of limitations.
– Assessment tools don't always reflect field realities or allow for adaptation to local contexts.
– Assessments are not rapid or regular enough to fully understand trends of people in transit.
– Lack of harmonization of assessment tools used by different actors hinders the systematization of data.

1.3.3 Assessments are adept at detecting most rights and protection violations but UNHCR has neither an adequate budget nor the capacity to respond to cases of rights violations directly and thus relies on partners and institutions to do so.
– While assessments were adept at detecting most cases of rights and protections violations, there are still gaps for certain populations and for certain types of violations.
– When violations are detected, UNHCR relies heavily on referrals to partners and institutions, particularly for very vulnerable and complex cases. |

Area of inquiry II: Socio-economic inclusion and mid/long-term perspectives To what extent has UNHCR been successful in advocating for and developing government capacity to ensure socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants, and incorporating mid/long-term protection perspectives in the design and delivery of the operational response?	
Evaluation Questions	Main findings

| 2.1 Socio-economic inclusion: To what extent has UNHCR been successful in advocating for and developing government capacity to ensure socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants? | **2.1 Socio-economic inclusion.**

2.1.1 Context: <u>UNHCR has undertaken a multi-pronged approach to promote both social and economic inclusion throughout the region, mainly via advocacy and capacity building, and to a lesser extent, via implementation</u>.

– UNHCR's focus on the emergency response has taken priority over socioeconomic inclusion activities for the VenSit.
– Socio-economic inclusion was set as a higher priority for 2020 than in previous years, but COVID-19 caused setbacks to socio-economic plans throughout the region.
– A more strategic approach to socio-economic inclusion is needed to magnify UNHCR's work in this field. |

- Overall, UNHCR's socio-economic inclusion activities are perceived to be small-scale, opportune, and specific to a place, population and/or partner, and the regional strategy has not translated into cohesive national socio-economic strategies.
- Few socio-economic strategies and activities are being monitored and evaluated; thus, it isn't clear which are most effective or have had the greatest impact.
- UNHCR lacks technical staff dedicated exclusively to socio-economic inclusion, especially at the field level.
- There is a lack of sufficient evidence on economic markets and the Vensit population's socio-economic profiles needed to contextualize inclusion opportunities and help define the socio-economic strategy.

2.1.2 Advocacy: UNHCR's advocacy efforts towards social inclusion have been largely successful, but advocacy efforts towards economic inclusion are scattered with little uniformity across countries.
- High-level advocacy for documentation and regularization is a necessary priority and precursor for achieving socio-economic inclusion.
- Advocacy for social inclusion: UNHCR has successfully advocated for inclusion of refugees and migrants in social welfare programmes and development plans.
- Advocacy for economic inclusion: UNHCR's advocacy for economic inclusion has taken different shapes in different countries, with varying levels of success.

2.1.3 Capacity building: UNHCR has provided capacity building and technical support to the government and partners on multiple fronts.
- Capacity building for socio-economic inclusion: UNHCR has a strong record, not only of sensitizing government officials at all levels about guaranteeing rights and incorporating protections for refugees and migrants, but also providing technical support and training to governmental institutions throughout the four countries.
- Frequent turnover of government actors and administrations requires equally frequent efforts to maintain institutional capacity and knowledge.

2.1.4 Implementation: In terms of socio-economic inclusion, UNHCR has served in a supportive and complementary role to governments and partners, prioritizing advocacy and capacity building over direct implementation of projects.
- Implementation of socio-economic inclusion activities depends on articulation and coordination with national governments, which are primarily responsible, with UNHCR playing a supporting, technical role.
- UNHCR relies on a multi-partner approach to implement economic inclusion activities, involving financial institutions, the private sector and host communities to expand operability and increase sustainability.
- UNHCR's implementation of social inclusion activities, including projects to counter xenophobia and promote coexistence and solidarity among communities, was widely recognized and perceived as effective, though insufficient to address the magnitude and complexity of this issue.

2.2 Mid/long-term perspectives: To what extent has

2.2 Mid/long-term perspectives

2.2.1 UNHCR's design and delivery of mid/long-term protective

UNHCR been successful in incorporating mid/long-term protection perspectives in the design and delivery of the operational response?

perspectives is uneven across countries.

– UNHCR has made strides to incorporate long term protection perspectives in the response, mainly via socio-economic integration, as also mentioned in 2.1.1

– With variations across countries, UNHCR has incorporated mid/long-term protection strategies in the *design* of the response, but these strategies have not uniformly translated to the implementation of mid/long-term activities in the *delivery* of the response.

– Stakeholders, especially in Colombia and Brazil, emphasized that while border areas were still overwhelmingly focused on the short-term, offices farther from the border/located in larger cities had higher potential to implement more forward-looking protection perspectives.

2.2.2 The link between UNHCR's strategies for humanitarian assistance and permanent solutions isn't clearly developed.

– With regard to UNHCR's mandate, the VenSit response has been effective for humanitarian assistance, but less so for permanent solutions, where there is room for improvement.

– The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted progress towards implementation of long-term strategies for durable solutions as UNHCR had to shift priorities back to emergency assistance.

Area of inquiry III: Internal and external factors What factors (internal and external) constrained or enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection? To what extent were those influenced by the mixed flow character of the VenSit?	
Evaluation Questions	Main findings

3.1 Internal Factors

3.1.1 Enabling internal factors

3.1 What internal factors constrained or enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection?

– Although efforts to set up and scale up UNHCR's country operations have presented significant challenges, offices in all four countries have achieved notable successes in a short time frame.

– UNHCR's emergency mechanisms, including emergency declarations, have enabled UNHCR's response.

– UNHCR's human capital is a major internal asset. The knowledge and expertise of UNHCR personnel, paired with their dedication, commitment and professionalism was considered a strong enabling factor across the four countries.

3.1.2 Constraining internal factors

Operations and institutional strategy

– UNHCR's one-year funding cycles, along with the late and/or sporadic arrival of funding and resources limited the response, especially in terms of long-term planning.

– Varying levels of rootedness and limited operational experience delivering emergency responses presented challenges at the onset of the VenSit, as all offices had to transition, adapt and scale, to respond to the Venezuelan influx.

– Competing priorities have pushed UNHCR to work on multiple fronts and adopt roles as a catalyst, an implementer, and a coordinator.

Human Resource systems and mechanisms

- The fast growth of the operation presented new challenges for human resource management, especially at the onset of the VenSit.
- UNHCR hiring mechanisms tend to favor staff within UNHCR and do not encourage local hires such as host country nationals or those of Venezuelan nationality, who have relevant contextual knowledge and experience.
- UNHCR staff mental health and wellness are not adequately addressed: Long hours, heavy workloads, and the emotional and psychological toll involved in working in frontlines and border areas put staff at risk of burnout, further exacerbated by challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Communication flows and documentation of good practices
- Within countries, UNHCR's vertical (national-field) and horizontal (field-field) communication and information exchange didn't always flow smoothly, but increased and improved due to COVID-19, as digital communication and the need to coordinate remotely enabled more frequent and targeted exchanges.
- Between countries in the region, UNHCR communication was non-uniform and largely informal in nature and lacked a regional approach.
- UNHCR's documentation and exchange of good action-oriented practices was lacking, largely due to lack of resources and time.

| 3.2. What external factors constrained or enabled UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection? | **3.2 External Factors**

3.2.1 Enabling external factors
- Governments' political will enabled UNHCR's response in general, by permitting access to territory and through strong participation and collaboration with UNHCR throughout the region.
- The presence of multiple and complementary actors, from UN agencies, to international NGOs, to local organizations and civil society, has created a favorable environment in the four countries, enabling the response.
- Collaboration with partners enabled UNHCR's response by reaching more people, reducing gaps in assistance through greater sectoral and geographical coverage, and reducing duplication of efforts.

3.2.2 Constraining external factors
- Despite increased visibility of the VenSit and the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which enabled access to funding, resources remain insufficient to cover the extent of needs of the emergency.
- Governments in the region have adopted a migrant narrative over a refugee one, which has constrained UNHCR's response.
- Border restrictions and closings constrained response efforts.
- At times, UNHCR has faced challenges working with governments and their institutions.
- Across the region, political and social instability and unrest, as well as economic challenges, such as high rates of informal employment and unemployment, have constrained the response.
- Border sites present fewer livelihood and integration opportunities.
- Xenophobia and tensions with the host communities are on the rise, leading to discrimination in hiring, labor abuse, and exploitation.
   - Rising xenophobia throughout the region was considered a major constraining factor, as refugees and migrants are increasingly used as scapegoats in local campaigns and elections, and rhetoric on |

	social media blames Venezuelans for committing crimes and driving down wages. – Venezuelans face discrimination in hiring, labor abuse, and exploitation. – The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major challenge for the 2020 response.
3.3 To what extent is UNHCR's operational delivery of assistance and protection influenced by the mixed flow character of the Venezuela situation?	**3.3 Mixed Flow** **3.3.1 The mixed flow character of VenSit has not influenced UNHCR's delivery of emergency assistance and protection but has catalyzed UNHCR to develop mixed strategies for long-term solutions.** – Operationally, the mixed flow does not influence UNHCR's delivery of emergency assistance and protection because of UNHCR's needs-based approach, targeting the most vulnerable.

Annex 5: Good practices and lessons from VenSit to the wider organization

The list below is not an exhaustive repertory of all good practices encountered through this evaluation, but a selection of the most cited/ reported by staff.

Practice	Location	Lesson Learned
Needs-based approach, targeting the most vulnerable	Regional/ Transversal	Improved the relevance of the response, given limited resources.
Prima facie	Brazil	Result of a combination of factors that include high-level advocacy with Brazilian Government on both migratory and asylum systems, capacity-building investments in Brazilian authorities, technical support (e.g. how to apply Cartagena) among other actions. All of which was possible due to a favorable local context of historically good relations and proximity of UNHCR with Brazilian Federal Government and willingness of several actors inside the government to implement it.
Interiorização	Brazil	Stakeholders considered *interiorização* as a successful strategy towards socio-economic inclusion, especially in light of low inclusion prospects at the border state of Roraima and of the social and geographical challenges for refugees and migrants to travel independently to other parts of Brazil. Despite its results, the programme requires intensive resources, involves certain protection risks (e.g. trafficking and labor exploitation) that require attention, and monitoring is challenging (i.e. how to monitor refugees and migrants across 600 different municipalities?). Lessons learned from Brazil's experience may inform relocation strategies of refugees and migrants from the border to inner cities in neighboring countries, such as Colombia.
Indigenous strategy	Brazil	One of the main challenges in the Brazilian response has been the inclusion of indigenous communities, particularly regarding social inclusion. Stakeholders considered to be very important the creation of specific indigenous shelters (even though there are improvements needed) the development of communication materials with the indigenous community translated to their language, and most of all, the implementation of creative durable solutions, such as successful relocation to a shelter in a semi-rural area, and employment allocation for indigenous refugees and migrants.

		High- and local-level advocacy was also considered fundamental for an indigenous response The inclusion of indigenous populations in the government's *interiorização* programme.remains a challenge
Articulation with the Army	Brazil	The army is one of the main actors in the Brazilian government's response with responsibilities going far beyond its original logistic role in *Operação Acolhida*. Although the army is mentioned by stakeholders as a crucial enabling factor, its increasing autonomy to lead OA also presents challenges in terms of aligning approaches and priorities, particularly at Roraima and regarding *interiorização*. Lessons learned from Brazil's experience of daily basis work with the army may inform other operations and produce a document of good practices.
help.unhcr.org platforms	Brazil, Ecuador	In Brazil and Ecuador, the help.unhcr.org platforms were considered an effort to centralize up-to-date information, where refugees and migrants could access up-to-date and accurate information and resources.
Graduation model	Colombia, Ecuador, Peru	Colombia's (Medellin), Ecuador's and Peru's graduation models are considered to be resource-intensive but effective, with a long-term impact on beneficiaries aimed at durable solutions.
Telephone helplines	Colombia, Ecuador, Peru	Stakeholders reported that UNHCR's telephone helplines were important for UNHCR to maintain contact with the population of concern and to expand their reach. In Colombia, Bogota's telephone helpline was established before the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR converted PAOs across the country into hotlines. Many stakeholders believed that the hotlines should continue post-COVID-19 to assist those in transit, those with mobility limitations, and those in rural or hard-to-reach areas. In Ecuador, UNHCR also established hotlines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Peru: UNHCR developed a national toll-free decentralized hotline. There were already helplines in Peru before the pandemic, but the conversion of lines into just one number for the entire country, free of charge and the possibility of providing assistance in a decentralized manner were fundamental to its success. Stakeholders believed that the hotline should continue after COVID-19, but with the support of partners and specialized staff to answer calls.
Anti-xenophobia	Colombia,	Stakeholders considered UNHCR's large-scale

campaigns	Peru	public information campaign *Somos Panas* in Colombia and *Tu Causa es Mi Causa* in Peru to be effective at combating xenophobia, promoting peaceful coexistence and solidarity among communities, and providing information and orientation to refugees and migrants. Harnessing the lessons learned from these campaigns, such as the involvement of public figures, Venezuelan leaders and organizations via social media, could serve as the active ingredients and leverage points for campaigns in other countries or for a regional campaign.
Attention and Orientation Points (PAOs)	Colombia	UNHCR Colombia's 29 PAOs were considered by staff, partners, the government, and refugee/migrant stakeholders to be relevant and effective at providing legal assistance, orientation, and information at key points.
Integrated Assistance Centre (CAI)	Colombia	At the request of the government, UNHCR set up an integrated assistance centre (CAI) in Maicao in March 2019, with a planned capacity for up to 1,400 people to stay for about a month in RHUs. Although funding restraints capped maximum capacity at 350 in 2019, UNHCR and partners provided camp management and coordination, protection monitoring and case referral, identification of persons with specific needs, psychosocial support, and NFI distributions. Refugees and migrants contributed to CAI maintenance through cash-for-work activities and participated in events and activities hosted by various actors. The CAI received praise from all stakeholders interviewed, including staff, partners, the government, refugees and migrants, and the host community.
Whatsapp Chatbot	Ecuador	The Whatsapp Chatbot was seen as an innovative and wide-reaching tool to deliver key messaging to the population of concern. According to a May 2020 UNHCR report, 294,253 messages have been disseminated by UNHCR since March 2020 through the WhatsApp Chatbot in Ecuador.
Community volunteer programmes	Ecuador, Brazil	In Ecuador, community volunteer programmes were credited with building solidarity between refugees and migrants and host communities. In one programme, trained Venezuelan, Colombian and Ecuadorian volunteers provided information and orientation to refugees and migrants. In another, Venezuelan volunteers delivered kits to Ecuadorians affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
Primes/ProGres with government and HIAS	Ecuador	In Ecuador, both the government and UNHCR's largest implementing partner, HIAS, are using

		ProGres. Though this required considerable time and resource investment from UNHCR, stakeholders in Ecuador felt it had greatly improved efficiency and helped to reduce duplications and gaps. Ecuador's experiences harmonizing the government and UNHCR's biggest implementing partner, HIAS, under PRIMES/ProGres can be measured for effectiveness to explore the potential of a similar investment with other key actors throughout the region and to provide good practices and lessons learned to support replication where appropriate.
Articulation with religious groups	Peru	In Peru, articulation through the CIREMI with religious entities (of different religions e.g. Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, etc.) has been cited as a major channel to reach population of concern especially during COVID-19. Those entities have their own networks and resources and have been valuable partners in reaching the community. In Peru, articulation with religious entities (e.g. Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish) has been cited as a major channel to reach populations of concern, especially during COVID-19. Those entities have their own networks and resources and have been valuable partners in reaching the community. Staff thought it a good idea for UNHCR to have an inter-religious coordinator in Peru.
Online asylum system and ID card	Peru	Peru's virtual system for asylum claims was seen as an innovation that enabled the continuity of asylum claim procedures, even with strict quarantine measures in the country. The transition from a paper document to a plastic ID card was mentioned as an important change that improved credibility of the document.

Annex 6: RDS Survey Report Abstract

Title: Remote Respondent Driven Sampling Survey of Refugees and Migrants in Bogotá and Norte de Santander, Colombia.

Objectives: Quantitatively assessing the characteristics and experience of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia.

Methods: The study adopted Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS), a chain-referral sampling method, to recruit survey participants. This sampling approach reduces the risk of bias associated with snowball sampling and enables the use of statistical analysis to provide results that are representative of hard-to-reach populations like refugees and migrants. Due to COVID-19, a novel remote RDS procedure was implemented via either interviewer-led phone surveys (phone RDS) or self-administered online surveys (online RDS). Eligible participants were adults born in Venezuela who arrived in Colombia after 2014 and resided at the study sites for a least a month. Two study sites were selected to represent different displacement contexts with high influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants: Bogotá and Norte de Santander. Limited connectivity hindered the ability to complete online RDS in Norte de Santander, resulting in three different samples with a total of 907 surveys: phone RDS in Bogotá (n=305), online RDS in Bogotá (n=302), and phone RDS in Norte de Santander (n=300).

Findings: Refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the assessed locations are, on average, highly educated. A majority are women (56% to 74%) and among women, over one in five is a single mother. A small proportion of refugees and migrants self-identify as part of the LGBTQI community. Young adults between the age of 18 and 30 years old make up half the adult refugee and migrant population. Few refugees and migrants self-identify as members of indigenous community (1% or less). One in five refugees and migrants present a potentially vulnerable profile including being a single mother, having a disability or being 60 years or older: 21% in Bogotá (phone) and 18% in Norte de Santander. Across locations, about half refugees and migrants are in an irregular situation.

The most frequently mentioned drivers of forced displacement are a lack of access to basic needs, services and employment. However, over 80% of refugees and migrants report having difficulties meeting basic needs, especially food, housing and employment. In addition, over one in ten Venezuelan refugees and migrants report chronic health issues. Between 5 and ten percent refugees and migrants have a disability.[53] In terms of mental health and wellbeing, over one in five refugees and migrants report constant or persistent worrying and over one in ten report frequent anxiety.

Despite these on-going needs, two out of five refugees and migrants in the study areas have not received any assistance from any organization, agency or government institution since arriving in Colombia. This RDS study further shows that few refugees and migrants feel integrated in the economy: less than one fifth (between 8% and 17%) feel fully integrated

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[53] [1] Using the Analytic Guidelines of Washington Group Short Set's "disability3" cut off, which measures disability as any 1 question/domain (Q13a-f) with a response of "A lot of difficulty" (3) or "Cannot do at all" for at least one of the 6 domains. Accessed from: https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/analysis/wg-short-set-on-functioning-wg-ss-syntax/. It is worth noting that this study potentially represents an underestimation of the real prevalence given that data was collected via phone or online survey, and thus, may exclude individuals with severe visual, auditory or communication disabilities.

into the local Colombian economy. Almost half of refugees and migrants worked in the informal economy, often with no pay or less pay than agreed on.

Nine out of ten refugees and migrants report some exposure to violence since their arrival in Colombia. Acts of xenophobia are among the most common forms of violence encountered by refugees and migrants (48%), followed by separation from immediate family (45%), robbery (39%), and psychological and emotional abuse (17%).

COVID-19 has worsened the situation for refugees and migrants: Almost all had trouble earning income since the introduction of COVID-19 isolation measures, and the median reported monthly income decreased by half in Bogotá and by 30% in Norte de Santander. Few, however, reported experiencing difficulties complying with physical distancing measures and few experienced common symptoms consistent with COVID-19 within the last two weeks.

Implications: The findings taken together have important implications for assistance efforts in three key areas. First, assistance efforts should continue to target and register vulnerable profiles and tailor assistance to their needs. Second, efforts must be undertaken to scale-up assistance, especially toward those with an irregular status. This should include continued focus towards improving access to regularization, as well as inclusion of refugees and migrants in national social protection systems and development plans. Third, more cohesive socio-economic strategies and actions are needed, especially in the context of COVID-19 and its socio-economic impact on refugees, migrants and host communities alike.