More than four million Venezuelans have left the country, the majority of them since 2015. That makes Venezuela the second country of origin for people displaced across international borders after Syria, which has been immersed in a civil war since 2011. Despite its magnitude, the Venezuelan crisis has only received a fraction of the international attention and funding dedicated to other conflicts, and is still seen as regional problem. The Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, a joint effort of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International
Organization of Migration (IOM), called for $738 million to assist migrant-receiving countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2019. By July 2019, however, only 23.9 percent of the funds needed had been raised.

The purpose of this document is to explain the intertwined social, economic, and political factors causing the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela that has prompted millions to flee. The document will also analyze the flows of migrants and refugees, their legal status within the region, and international funding to attend to the crisis.

What Are the Drivers of Venezuelan Migration?

One of the reasons that the crisis has not received enough international attention or funding is that it defies the conventional understanding of what drives people to leave their country en masse. The United Nations defines the stream leaving Venezuela as a “mixed flow” of migrants and asylum-seekers, and has for the first time in its institutional history created a joint platform of the UNHCR and IOM to assist them. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group or political opinion. While some of the people leaving Venezuela fit into that category, it does not apply to the majority of those who have fled. Nor does the conventional definition of a migrant, someone who voluntarily leaves his or her country of origin in order to seek a better life and who does not face impediments to returning home.

Venezuelans are fleeing a profound economic and political crisis, characterized by the systematic violation of human rights and a deepening humanitarian emergency. Because of developments inside the country, the UNHCR has called on the international community to recognize Venezuelans as a group as refugees, based on the wider criteria outlined in the Cartagena Declaration of 1984. The majority of Latin American states have signed the declaration, which extends protection to “persons who have fled their country because their lives, security or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of
human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order.”[1]

The humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, manifest in widespread poverty and chronic shortages of food, medicine, and other basic necessities, is the product of years of economic mismanagement and official corruption as well as a sharp decline in oil prices between 2013 and 2016. Even though the price of oil reached a historic high under the administration of President Hugo Chávez (1999-2013), oil revenues were channeled into consumption, not into maintenance of key infrastructure or economic diversification. The long-time dependence of the Venezuelan economy on oil left the country vulnerable to fluctuations in the global market. In 2018, Venezuela’s oil exports represented 99 percent of all export revenue and 35 percent of GDP, according to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. The price of oil tumbled from $97.5 per barrel in 2013—when Nicolás Maduro assumed the presidency following Chávez’s death—to a mere $34.7 per barrel in 2016, the lowest price in more than a decade. The value of oil has seen a modest recovery since, reaching $61.25 per barrel in 2018. However, oil production in Venezuela has plummeted due to mismanagement and corruption, falling from 2.4 million barrels a day in 2013 to a historic low of 1.43 million barrels a day in 2018.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the economy contracted 45 percent between 2013 and 2018, and GDP is expected to decrease an additional 25 percent in 2019. The loss of income earning opportunities, combined with an inflation rate that is predicted to reach 10 million percent this year, has made daily life a struggle for survival for the majority of the population. According to ENCOVI, a household survey carried out by four leading Venezuelan universities, 94 percent of the population was living below the poverty line in 2018. In June 2019, the research center CENDA calculated that the minimum wage was worth $5.43 a month, which could only purchase 2.8 percent of the basic food basket for a family of five.

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problems since 2017, which grew more severe in 2019: a nongovernmental group recorded 23,860 power failures nationwide between January and May, an average of 158 a day. The year 2019 has also seen four major national blackouts, the latest of which took place in July, in which the majority of the country was left without electricity for several days. The government implemented a rationing plan in response to the blackouts; it mandates daily power cuts of three hours and affects an estimated 18 million Venezuelans as well as hundreds of hospitals and schools. However, the actual cuts tend to be longer and more frequent than what is outlined in the plan, sometimes lasting more than a week. Access to water is also a serious problem. An analysis of state and regional hydrological plans by the news site Prodavinci found that 9.78 million people had their water rationed during 2016 and 2017, receiving it an average of two days a week. The situation continued to worsen in 2018: 38 percent of households received water a few days a week in 2018, up from 31 percent the previous year, while 33 percent received it once a week or less, compared to 23 percent the previous year. Moreover, 23 percent of the households did not have access to potable water.

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An Impending Famine
Finding food in Venezuela has become a Herculean task. In June 2018, the Ministry of Food (Ministerio de Alimentación) reported that 84 percent of items in the basic food basket were not available in supermarkets. Behind these glaring shortages is a simultaneous reduction in national food production and in food imports. According to the Venezuelan Health Observatory (OVS), food production decreased by more than 60 percent between 2014 and 2018. The Chávez and Maduro administrations crippled the agricultural sector by expropriating farms and companies, implementing price controls, monopolizing the distribution of agricultural inputs, and requiring that a portion of crops be sold to government companies. Last year, the National Association of Farmers announced that agricultural production could only satisfy a quarter of the national demand and had been declining steadily for the past eleven years. This reduction coincided with a decrease in food imports, which fell by 70 percent between 2014 and 2016, according to a study by Harvard University.

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The economic and political crisis has also led to the collapse of the national healthcare system, where conditions had been deteriorating for years. Medicine imports decreased by 70 percent between 2012 and 2016 due to price controls, a dysfunctional currency exchange system, and rising debt. Only 15 of the 56 pharmaceutical companies that used to exist in the country are still operational, and more than 150 pharmacies have closed since 2016. In October 2018, the Venezuelan Pharmaceutical Federation announced that 85 percent of essential medicines were scarce; this means that Venezuelans were only able to find one-and-a-half out of every ten medications they needed. The main victims of these shortages are patients suffering from cancer, heart problems, and chronic illnesses such as diabetes and HIV, who either have stopped receiving treatment or do so irregularly. According to a 2019 internal UN document, the lives of 300,000 people are at risk because they have not received needed medicines for more than a year.

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An additional reason that many Venezuelans are fleeing concerns the exorbitant levels of violence and insecurity. According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV), there were 81.4 violent deaths per 100,000 people last year, the highest rate in Latin America. That means Venezuela is the most violent country in the region, well ahead of El Salvador and Honduras, which had homicide rates of 51 and 40 per 100,000 people, respectively. The organization found violence to be “epidemic” in 88 percent of Venezuelan municipalities, based on WHO standards, given that the number of violent deaths exceeds 10 per 100,000 citizens. In addition to the high rate of homicides, citizens are often subjected to armed robbery and kidnapping. It is difficult to find reliable data on these crimes, which are usually not reported to the authorities, but estimates suggest that Venezuela has one of the highest kidnapping rates in the region.

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Violations of Civil and Political Rights

There are numerous reports of FAES targeting Venezuelans from poor neighborhoods who participate in demonstrations against the government. This practice is part of a larger pattern of government repression of civil and political rights, something documented extensively in the OHCHR report. Since May 2016 Venezuela has been governed under a state of exception, which gives the president wide, vague, and discretionary powers to preserve “internal order.” The police, armed forces, and intelligence agencies have been responsible for the excessive use of force during demonstrations and the arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and torture of political opponents and their relatives, according to the OHCHR report.

Government repression began to rise during the opposition protests of 2014. According to the Venezuelan Penal Forum, a leading human rights group, more than 15,000 people were detained for political reasons between January 2014 and May 2019, the majority of them in the context of demonstrations. As of May 2019, almost 800 people remained arbitrarily detained and close to 8,600 had been conditionally released but were facing lengthy criminal proceedings. In the majority of the cases analyzed by the OHCHR, detainees had been submitted to one or more forms of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The report also documented the use of excessive force during demonstrations by the National Police and National Guard, sometimes with fatal outcomes. Data from PROVEA and OVCS show that 35 people died as a result of attacks on demonstrators during 2014 and at least 238 were killed between 2017 and 2019.

In addition to these abuses, the OHCHR reported that trade union leaders and workers have been fired and detained for demanding decent salaries and working conditions; health professionals for denouncing the state of the healthcare system; university faculty and staff for criticizing the government; and military and government officers for being perceived as opponents to the regime. Many of these individuals have been forced into exile.

The Complex Drivers of Venezuelan Migration
The conditions described above all constitute important push factors behind Venezuelan migration. The OHCHR lists violations of the rights to food and health as the primary drivers, with the majority of migrants seeking protection of their right to live with dignity. At the same time, many Venezuelans are fleeing the collapse of basic services and rising violence and insecurity, which have become endemic problems. An increasing number of Venezuelans are also fleeing political persecution, which qualifies them to claim political asylum under the traditional definition of the term.

Quantifying the Numbers and Destinations of Venezuelan Migratory Flows

According to the United Nations, almost 4.3 million Venezuelans were living abroad as of August 2019, more than 12 percent of the total population. The vast majority—over 3.6 million—have left the country since 2015. With an estimated 5,000 people leaving every day in 2018, the number of refugees and migrants is expected to continue rising. Using a linear model, the United Nations estimates there will be 5.39 million Venezuelans living in the region by the end of this year, and up to 7.5 million by the end of next year if the situation does not improve substantially. A recent study by the Brookings Institution provides higher estimates, arguing that there could be up to 8.2 million Venezuelans abroad in the next two or three years. The authors base their estimates on the number of Venezuelans whose caloric needs would not be met even if the government were to use all of its net income from oil to feed the poor.

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Source: UNICEF Ecuador 2018, Flickr

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The rise in extrajudicial executions is especially troublesome. In 2017, the government created a rapid-response unit to combat organized crime and drug trafficking, known as the Special Action Forces (FAES). The group has carried out numerous extrajudicial executions in the context of security operations in poor neighborhoods, according to the report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The nongovernmental organization PROVEA registered 205 deaths at the hands of FAES during 2018 and 275 in the first quarter of 2019 alone, and other organizations tracking violence report higher figures. The actual number is likely to be even greater than those estimates: more than 7,500 of the 23,000 violent deaths registered by the OVV in 2018 were caused by “resistance to authority,” a term authorities use to classify killings resulting from security operations. Between January and May of 2019, the organization reported more than 2,100 of such incidents. Information analyzed by the OHCHR “suggests many of these killings may constitute extrajudicial executions.”

Violations of Civil and Political Rights
There are numerous reports of FAES targeting Venezuelans from poor neighborhoods who participate in demonstrations against the government. This practice is part of a larger pattern of government repression of civil and political rights, something documented extensively in the OHCHR report. Since May 2016 Venezuela has been governed under a state of exception, which gives the president wide, vague, and discretionary powers to preserve “internal order.” The police, armed forces, and intelligence agencies have been responsible for the excessive use of force during demonstrations and the arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and torture of political opponents and their relatives, according to the OHCHR report.

Government repression began to rise during the opposition protests of 2014. According to the Venezuelan Penal Forum, a leading human rights group, more than 15,000 people were detained for political reasons between January 2014 and May 2019, the majority of them in the context of demonstrations. As of May 2019, almost 800 people remained arbitrarily detained and close to 8,600 had been conditionally released but were facing lengthy criminal proceedings. In the majority of the cases analyzed by the OHCHR, detainees had been submitted to one or more forms of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The report also documented the use of excessive force during demonstrations by the National Police and National Guard, sometimes with fatal outcomes. Data from PROVEA and OVCS show that 35 people died as a result of attacks on demonstrators during 2014 and at least 238 were killed between 2017 and 2019.

In addition to these abuses, the OHCHR reported that trade union leaders and workers have been fired and detained for demanding decent salaries and working conditions; health professionals for denouncing the state of the healthcare system; university faculty and staff for criticizing the government; and military and government officers for being perceived as opponents to the regime. Many of these individuals have been forced into exile.

The Complex Drivers of Venezuelan Migration

The conditions described above all constitute important push factors behind Venezuelan migration. The OHCHR lists violations of the
rights to food and health as the primary drivers, with the majority of migrants seeking protection of their right to live with dignity. At the same time, many Venezuelans are fleeing the collapse of basic services and rising violence and insecurity, which have become endemic problems. An increasing number of Venezuelans are also fleeing political persecution, which qualifies them to claim political asylum under the traditional definition of the term.

Quantifying the Numbers and Destinations of Venezuelan Migratory Flows

According to the United Nations, almost 4.3 million Venezuelans were living abroad as of August 2019, more than 12 percent of the total population. The vast majority—over 3.6 million—have left the country since 2015. With an estimated 5,000 people leaving every day in 2018, the number of refugees and migrants is expected to continue rising. Using a linear model, the United Nations estimates there will be 5.39 million Venezuelans living in the region by the end of this year, and up to 7.5 million by the end of next year if the situation does not improve substantially. A recent study by the Brookings Institution provides higher estimates, arguing that there could be up to 8.2 million Venezuelans abroad in the next two or three years. The authors base their estimates on the number of Venezuelans whose caloric needs would not be met even if the government were to use all of its net income from oil to feed the poor.

Source: IOM, Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, Response for Venezuelans

According to a June 2019 report by the Organization of American States (OAS), Venezuela has produced the third highest number of migrants and refugees in recent history, behind only Syria and Afghanistan. But it is second today, trailing only Syria. The Syrian civil war led to the displacement of at least 6.79 million people across international borders between 2011 and 2018, and the Soviet-Afghan War produced 6.3 million migrants and refugees between 1978 and 1989. Even though Venezuelans are not fleeing armed conflict, more than three million have left in less than four years, and
the country could soon overtake Syria as the largest source of refugees and migrants in the world.

The Syrian and Venezuelan refugee crises are similar in that the vast majority of those who have fled are living in other countries of the region. Of 6.65 million Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, 5.66 million are in Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq. Similarly, 3.3 of the 4 million Venezuelans who have left the country are in Latin America and the Caribbean. As of August 2019, the main receiving countries are Colombia (1.4 million), Peru (853,400), Chile (288,200), and Ecuador (330,400). While hosting a smaller number of Venezuelans in total, small island states in the Caribbean have received the most in relative terms. In Aruba (16,000) and Curaçao (26,000), Venezuelans represent more than 15 percent of the population, creating intense competition for employment and posing a significant challenge to government institutions.

The two countries outside the region that host the most Venezuelans are Spain, which had 323,575 at the beginning of 2019, and the United States, which had 351,144 in 2017, the most recent date for which data is available. In both countries, Venezuela has become the main source of asylum petitions. In January, 31 percent of all claims filed with the United States Citizenship and Immigration services were from Venezuelans, a far greater number than the petitions received from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Similarly, 36 percent of all the asylum cases open in Spain as of May were from Venezuelans. The country has become the third source of asylum claims in all of Europe, after Syria and Afghanistan. In addition to Spain, many have fled to Italy and Portugal given the history of migration between both countries and Venezuela.[3]

Source: Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform[i]

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons why the crisis in Venezuela has not received as much attention or funding as crises in countries like Syria and South Sudan is that it was not caused by an armed conflict. The majority of Venezuelans are therefore not considered refugees by their host countries, and many of them do not view themselves as such, either. By August 2019, only 601,341 of the four
million who have left the country had filed asylum petitions. Another 2,022,116 had residency permits or some other document that allowed for regular stay in their country of destination. The rest—over a million and a half—were undocumented or at risk of becoming so soon.

Even though the number of asylum petitions is small relative to the amount of Venezuelans who have fled, Venezuela was still the main source of new petitions globally in 2018, accounting for one out of every five asylum applications that year. Venezuelans filed 341,800 new asylum claims in 2018, a sharp increase from the 116,000 filed in 2017, 34,200 filed in 2016, and 10,200 filed in 2015. The main recipients of asylum petitions are Peru (287,114) and Brazil (103,697), followed by the United States (85,796) and Spain (48,690). Given the large influx of Venezuelans, Peru is now the second largest recipient of new asylum applications in the world, after the United States.

Despite the desperate conditions that Venezuelans are fleeing, only 21,000 had been recognized as refugees as of June 2019. The asylum systems of countries in the region are overwhelmed, and the process for achieving refugee status is often lengthy. William Spindler, a spokesperson for UNHCR Latin America, suggested in an interview with Spain’s El País that that is one of the reasons many Venezuelans opt for alternative forms of documentation, which can be obtained more quickly and provide more immediate benefits.

Several countries of the region have instituted visas or temporary residence permits that allow Venezuelans to work and access public services for up to two years. In Colombia, more than 596,000 Venezuelans have been granted a Special Stay Permit (PEP) based on the date on which they entered the country. Similarly, Peru has granted the Temporary Stay permit (PTP) to almost 342,000 Venezuelans, with an additional 150,000 cases pending. Other countries such as Ecuador and Argentina have granted Venezuelans residency through regular channels as well as migration agreements tied to MERCOSUR or UNASUR. In Brazil, Venezuelans are eligible for a two-year temporary residence permit granted to nationals of border countries; 68,500 Venezuelans have taken advantage of this option. The process is more stringent in Chile,
which in 2018 instituted a Democratic Responsibility Visa that Venezuelans must apply for in Chilean consular offices within Venezuela. Only 26,000 such visas had been granted by February 2019. However, Chile has granted more than 300,000 residence permits since 2015.

Source: UNICEF Ecuador 2018, Flickr

Challenges and Paths Forward

Despite the extraordinary efforts made by countries in the region to welcome and regularize the status of Venezuelans, many remain undocumented or are at risk of becoming so soon. It is extremely difficult to obtain in Venezuela the documents required for some visa and residence permits. Documents that should be easily accessible to any citizen, such as passports and criminal records, can cost large sums of money and take years to be processed, if available at all. The costs of visa and permit applications are also prohibitive for many Venezuelans. As a result, new legal requirements that are intended to organize and formalize the flows of Venezuelans to countries in the region function in practice as restrictions.

As the number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the region increases, tensions with host communities have flared, increasing the pressure on governments to restrict migration. In June 2019, the Peruvian government began requiring that Venezuelans have a Humanitarian Visa to enter the country. In order to qualify, migrants must have a certificate of criminal records and a passport, which can either be valid or expired. Moreover, the visa can only be processed at two Peruvian consulates in Venezuela or, for “exceptional reasons,” in select diplomatic offices in Colombia and Ecuador. These requirements make it considerably harder for Venezuelans to enter Peru, now the second largest destination of Venezuelan migrants and refugees. The flow of people arriving at the border swelled considerably in the days before the June 2019 measure became effective: 5,400 Venezuelans entered the country on June 12, almost 5,500 on June 13, and more than 5,800 on June 14, compared to an average of 3,000 a day the weekend prior. The rush to get to
Peru also increased the number of people arriving in Colombia and Ecuador, with intentions to head south.

Restrictive immigration measures like this one tend to have a domino effect throughout the region. Shortly after the Humanitarian Visa was implemented by the Peruvian government, the Ecuadoran government announced that it would also require visas for Venezuelans to enter the country. Ecuador’s Temporary Visa for Humanitarian Exception has similar requirements to Peru’s: applicants must have a passport and a certificate of criminal records, and applications can only be processed by the Ecuadoran consulates in Lima, Bogotá, and Caracas. The flow of Venezuelans arriving at Ecuador’s northern border increased dramatically before the measure became effective on August 26, 2019, with more than 11,000 people entering the country over the weekend, up from an average of 2,500 a day the prior month. An upside of the policy is that it will regularize the status of Venezuelans currently in Ecuador who have not violated migratory laws, granting them temporary residence through a humanitarian exception.

The lack of coordination among regional governments with respect to migration creates both peaks and bottlenecks in the flows of Venezuelans traveling through South America. In June 2019, more than two hundred Venezuelans were stuck at the Chacalluta border crossing in Peru in an effort to enter Chile, where officials argued that they did not meet the legal requirements. Such episodes illustrate why refugee advocates are calling for greater coordination among regional governments and the creation of a uniform protection regime that affords Venezuelans security and legal status.

One of the options under discussion is recognizing Venezuelans as a group as refugees, based on the Cartagena Declaration. This would not only expand the number of people eligible for refugee status but also save migration authorities the need to review individual claims, thus expediting the asylum process. The UNHCR and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights have called on Latin American states to take this step, along with nongovernmental organizations like Amnesty International and Refugees International. The call has been seconded by the task force for Venezuelan
migrants and refugees at the Organization of American States, which recently released a detailed report on the subject.

The Cartagena Declaration is a non-binding legal instrument that provides guidance to states in developing their refugee protection frameworks and has been incorporated into domestic law by fifteen Latin American states. The Declaration is particularly useful in the context of the Venezuelan crisis because it expands protection to people fleeing “massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order.” However, according to the UNHCR, the clause referring to “other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order” is the least frequently applied by national adjudication bodies when determining refugee status under the definition of the Cartagena Declaration. Therefore, “states need to carefully consider, in some cases without much in the way of domestic precedent to draw on, the extent to which their laws give rise to valid claims of protection by Venezuelans who have fled the country for humanitarian reasons rooted in the ongoing crisis,” according to Human Rights Watch.

So far, the only country heeding the call to grant Venezuelans group recognition as refugees has been Brazil. On June 14, 2019, the Brazilian National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) formally recognized the existence of severe and generalized human rights violations in Venezuela. The decision makes possible the adoption of a simplified procedure to determine refugee status and expedite the processing of asylum claims. As of July 2019, there were approximately 100,000 cases awaiting a decision from CONARE, the first 174 of which were approved on July 24, 2019.

Another option under discussion involves the creation of a document to facilitate the movement of Venezuelans within the region. This was one of the priorities established during the July 2019 meeting of the Quito Process, a forum established last year to harmonize the policies of states affected by the Venezuelan refugee crisis. The “Information Card on Regional Mobility” is aimed at harmonizing, supplementing, and strengthening the documentation and registration processes already underway at the national level.

Funding Is Not Sufficient
The influx of Venezuelan migrants and refugees has placed considerable strain on the resources of host countries, particularly the health and education systems. It has also increased competition for jobs in the areas where Venezuelans are concentrated, which has the potential to inflame xenophobic sentiments among locals. Countries in the region need international assistance to provide emergency relief to and ensure the protection of Venezuelans. Host countries are also in need of funding for job training and job creation, not only for Venezuelans but also for the benefit of their host communities.

The 2019 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan called for $738 million to provide direct emergency assistance and protection to Venezuelans, promote socio-economic and cultural integration, and strengthen the capacities of host governments to respond to the crisis. If successful, the plan would reach 2.2 million Venezuelans and more than 580,000 people in host communities. However, as of July 31, 2019, only 23.9 percent of the plan had been funded. More than two-thirds of that funding had come from the United States, with the European Union providing less than six percent.

One of the reasons why the international community has failed to provide enough financial support is that the Venezuelan crisis is seen as a regional problem, not a global one. With the exception of the United States and Spain, the flow of migrants and refugees has mostly been confined to the region. And the international community is already directing considerable funds to other refugee crises around the world, such as those in Syria and South Sudan. Even though Venezuela is now the second source of refugees and migrants around the world, and may even surpass Syria in the coming year, it has received only a fraction of the funding. Since 2012, the international community has provided more than $17 billion in assistance for Syrian refugees, approximately $3,000 per person. In the case of Venezuela, the Organization of American States estimates the number is a scant $100 to $200 per individual.

Urgent and Coordinated Action is Needed

The intertwined political, economic, and humanitarian crises in Venezuela show no signs of abating, and in fact show steady signs of
worsening. Until the drivers of migration from Venezuela are addressed in a comprehensive and systematic way, Latin America and the Caribbean will continue to receive multitudes of Venezuelans seeking relief from the economic ruin and repression of their home country. The region urgently needs to adopt coordinated strategies to handle these refugee flows, but it cannot do so alone. It needs governments and civil society around the world to view Venezuela’s crisis as a priority for national and global policy, for which responsibility should be broadly shared.

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[1] The Cartagena Declaration from a meeting of key stakeholders from ten Latin American countries in 1984 to discuss the system of regional protection for refugees. The region was facing unprecedented refugee flows from the civil wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua and repressive dictatorships in South America, but lacked the legal and institutional infrastructure to respond effectively. The declaration they agreed upon is a non-binding legal instrument that provides guidance to states in developing their refugee protection frameworks. It was the beginning of an ongoing forum among Latin American countries, which meet every ten years, and has since expanded to include countries in the Caribbean. The document has so far been signed by 15 countries in the region, and several of them have incorporated it into law.
[2] The predictions through the end of 2019 in the RMRP are of refugees and migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean only.

[3] Venezuela welcomed large numbers of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian immigrants after the Second World War. The government of Marcos Pérez Jiménez instituted an “open door policy” toward European immigrants as part of a national project of modernization and industrialization. Between 1948 and 1961, more than 614,000 foreigners were granted a national identity document, and a total of 800,000 are estimated to have immigrated to the country. Of these, 78 percent came from Italy, Portugal, and Spain. At the time, Venezuela’s population was a scant 7.7 million.

[4] The number of permits may reflect, in some countries, documents that are not currently valid, as well as duplications and triplications (one person carrying multiple permits). It does not include tourist visas.