



Los Desplazados

JRS's Response to the Venezuelan Diaspora

INTRODUCTION



Venezuelans at the Rumichaca Bridge border entry from Ipiales, Colombia into Tulcán, Ecuador.

Venezuela is in the midst of a humanitarian emergency. Approximately 5,000 people leave Venezuela every day due to severe economic contraction, hyperinflation, political turmoil, persecution, and an inability to access food, medicines, and healthcare.² As a result of hyperinflation, prices have increased 50 percent per month since 2017.³ Due to hyperinflation, nearly 4 million Venezuelans suffer from malnourishment in the country, with many losing weight, skipping meals, and going to bed hungry.⁴

The deteriorating situation has driven many people to flee to neighboring countries. It is now estimated that there are more than 4 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants who have fled worldwide.⁵ As long as the political, institutional, and humanitarian crisis afflicting Venezuela persists, the numbers will continue to rise, with UNHCR projecting these numbers to reach 5 million by the end of 2019.

In response to this growing crisis, Jesuit Refugee Service is committed to accompany, serve, and advocate for displaced Venezuelans. Here we share the stories of the displaced - Los Desplazados - and their journey to find a better life for their families.

There has been a
4,000 %
increase in the number
of Venezuelans
seeking refugee
status worldwide
since **2014**.¹

THE JOURNEY

Approximately eight out of every 10 Venezuelan migrants and refugees are in neighboring countries. Colombia and Perú have been the largest recipients of displaced Venezuelans, followed by the United States, Chile, Ecuador, and Spain.

Several of these Venezuelans, often with few or no resources, travel by foot throughout South America.



Neighboring Countries



Waiting for transit at Rumichaca Bridge between Colombia and Ecuador.

Venezuelans are entering countries which have internal challenges and constrained resources, making it difficult to respond to needs of the displaced Venezuelans. Colombia, for example, has taken in more Venezuelans than any other country (see map on page 3), while trying to maintain peace and manage existing internal displacement. After decades of conflict, Colombia still struggles with the presence of armed groups and continued violence, resulting in persistent, internal forced displacement. The influx of Venezuelans has placed a burden on these resource-constrained host countries and has caused tensions among host community members and refugees over resources.

Refugee Status

Almost 500,000 Venezuelans had sought asylum through legal channels in neighboring countries by the end of 2018.⁶ Due to restrictive migratory regulations, stricter entry requirements in receiving countries (e.g. a background check from Venezuela and a valid passport, which many Venezuelans cannot obtain), and a lack of acknowledgement of Venezuelans' rights, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans are unable to seek appropriate legal protections or access employment, education, health care, and other vital social services.

In May of 2019, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, called for the recognition and protection of Venezuelans based on the 1951 Refugee Convention saying it applied in Latin America due to "the threats to their lives, security or freedom resulting from circumstances that are seriously disturbing public order in Venezuela."⁷



Venezuelans gather for a free meal at a community dining room in Tulcán, Ecuador.
Photo Credit: Josh Utter, JRS/USA

In 2018 alone, a total of **350,000** Venezuelans sought asylum in other countries, while only **21,000** have been recognized as refugees.

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE'S RESPONSE

JRS and Jesuit partners are responding throughout Latin America to the needs of refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers. In addition to our work within Venezuela, JRS is serving Venezuelans in Colombia and Ecuador. Our work includes legal assistance, psychosocial support, emergency aid (food, medicine, hygiene kits), shelter, capacity building for local government and grassroots organizations, livelihoods support, and reconciliation efforts to build community among the host and migrant populations.

Funding from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) allows JRS to assist Venezuelan refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations in Ecuador. JRS provides legal assistance and sponsorship for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Ecuador and "know-your-rights" trainings both in field offices and in remote, hard-to-reach areas where there are underserved Venezuelan populations. This legal advice increases refugees' awareness of the immigration process in Ecuador and other countries of destination. JRS also provides support to 12 temporary shelters and three community kitchens

throughout Ecuador for refugees and asylum seekers that focus on providing access to basic needs.

JRS also provides livelihoods assistance for Venezuelan refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. This support includes employability training, business development training, and the provision of seed capital and micro-credit to refugee entrepreneurs to start up their businesses. JRS is working to improve social cohesion and reduce tensions between host and refugee communities with a focus on local integration, community-based development plans among refugee and host populations, and an anti-xenophobia multimedia campaign.



JRS/Ecuador Country Director, José Fernando López, observes JRS livelihoods programming in Quito, Ecuador.



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The Venezuelan crisis, in general, is very dramatic. They do not have access to basic needs, travel with uncertainty and emotional burdens, along with a lot of stress because they don't know where they are going. They are significantly impacted and need support in many ways, notably emotional and psychological support.

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MÓNICA SALGADO, PSYCHOLOGIST AND
PSYCHOSOCIAL COORDINATOR FOR JRS/ECUADOR

THE STORIES

Luisa: A Critical Need to Access Healthcare



Like many, Luisa left Venezuela because of the economic crisis. Her family was directly impacted by the rising medical costs that prevented members of her family from receiving needed medical treatment. Due to the inflated costs of health care, many of her relatives died, including her sister who died of breast cancer, because she was unable to afford treatment.

Not long after her sister's death, Luisa was also diagnosed with cancer. Due to the high costs of chemotherapy, she began to sell all her household items. "As a single mother of three, I couldn't leave them as orphans," she said. "Who would take care of them?" She eventually was left with an empty home. Her only possessions were a bed and a refrigerator. When she sold her fridge, she realized that if she remained in Venezuela she would die. Ultimately, the selling of her fridge allowed her to receive the last dose of chemotherapy that she needed to adequately treat her

cancer. Despite her improved health, Luisa realized that the economic situation in Venezuela was depriving her children of a future, so she left without any money and began her journey to Colombia, and eventually Ecuador, to find work.

She went days without eating as she journeyed across Venezuela and Colombia. She recounted, "Many called me 'crazy', but I would tell them, 'No, I'm not crazy.' Just imagine if you were in Venezuela persecuted, threatened, hungry, losing hope, and not seeing a future for your daughters. I don't want my daughters to have the mentality that their only hope is marriage. I don't want to deny them an ice cream treat because I don't have the money. They deserve more."

In Ecuador, Luisa briefly reunited with the father of her youngest child, but facing domestic violence, she searched for help. She was referred to JRS Ecuador, who arranged a place to stay at a JRS-run shelter in Quito that gave her the emergency support needed to get on her feet. "JRS gave me the strength I needed," she said. "They brought me calm and safety. JRS helped move me forward. They fortified me for the journey."



Luisa was staying at the shelter when she found out that her eldest daughter, still in Venezuela, had appendicitis. Due to the current economic situation in Venezuela, this minor operation became a major expense, a “tragedy” as Luisa put it. Despite all the hours she had worked in Ecuador, she couldn’t afford the operation, so Luisa’s daughter was induced into a coma. Luisa had to work long hours in great anxiety in order to send enough money to Venezuela for the operation. “My world collapsed, I wasn’t there for her. It felt like the end of the world.”

After the operation and 20 days in a coma, Luisa’s daughter was able to call her and say “Mama, I miss you!”

Today, Luisa still resides in Quito and has been reunited with her eldest daughter. “I am grateful for all the help that I’ve received along the journey from people who don’t even know me but cared for me as a fellow human being,” she said.

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LUISA, VENEZUELAN IN QUITO, ECUADOR

THE STORIES

Estefani: A Better Life for a New Baby



Estefani was pregnant when she left Venezuela in order to provide adequate care for her baby. Due to the economic and political situation in Venezuela, she could not find the prenatal care she needed during pregnancy. Hospitals were either too full or were closed due to non-functioning equipment and a lack of medications and health care professionals. Facing such difficulties, Estefani and her partner left Venezuela with the intention of reaching Perú. Upon arrival at the border between Venezuela and Colombia, she thought they would be one of few; instead, they became one of millions making the journey on foot across Colombia.

Afflicted by bad weather and ailing health, Estefani arrived in Ecuador

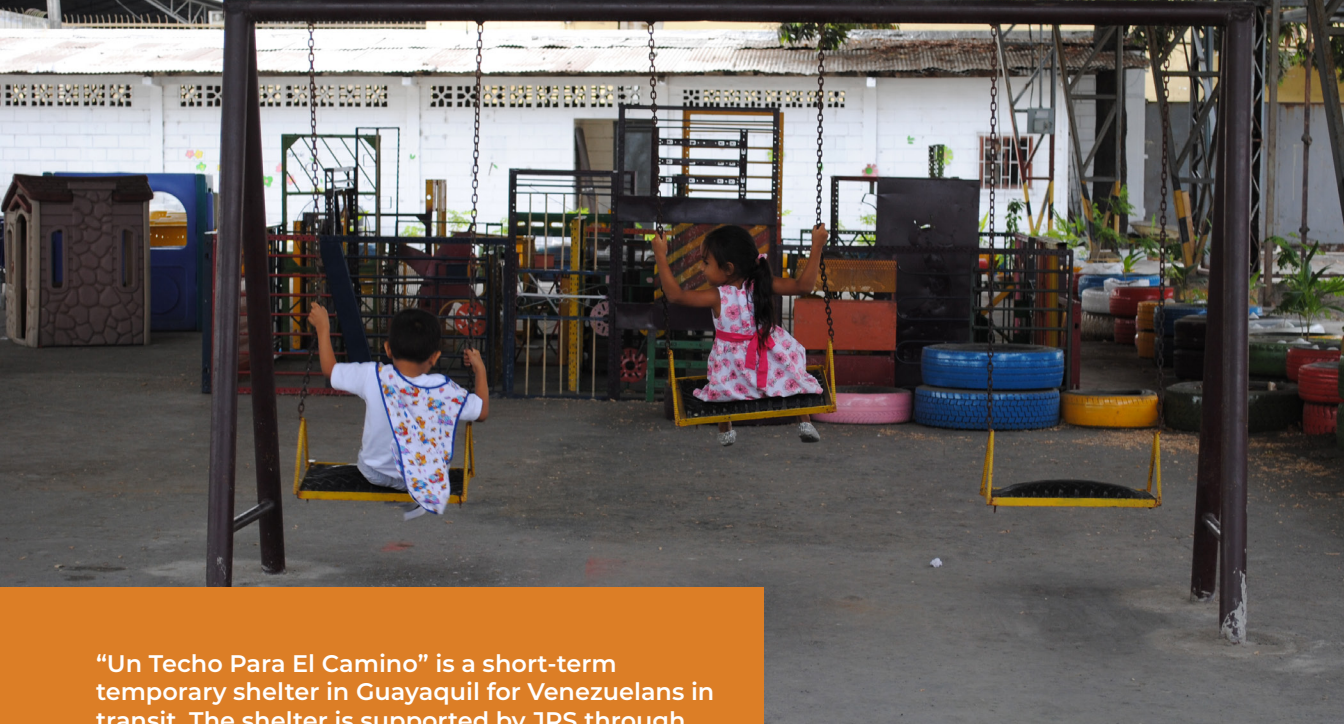
much weaker than anticipated. She had to beg for food, as all her money had been spent on the journey. She was also on her own at this point, because her partner had to continue to Perú for a work commitment. Alone, tired, and hungry, she never imagined that this would be her life.

Then one day while out on the street, she suffered a heart attack. It was a harrowing experience that almost resulted in losing her baby, but she made a full recovery after a few weeks in the hospital. Fortunately, someone at the hospital referred her to Jesuit Refugee Service-funded Nuestra Señora de la Paz women's shelter in Quito, where she was able to recover. The shelter serves as a place where women can receive basic needs and safe, temporary shelter, look for work, and receive assistance with childcare. A couple of months later, Estefani returned to the hospital to give birth to a healthy baby girl. She plans to continue fighting for the best for her daughter. Estefani encourages other young migrating parents to have courage and practice gratitude along the journey.

“ I am here, fighting for the best and striving to move forward.

ESTEFANI, VENEZUELAN
IN QUITO, ECUADOR





“Un Techo Para El Camino” is a short-term temporary shelter in Guayaquil for Venezuelans in transit. The shelter is supported by JRS through PRM funding. People can stay two to three days, or even longer for vulnerable cases. JRS also provides psychosocial and legal assistance for those staying at this shelter.

“

JRS has provided me with unconditional support. The attention they have given to my children is so important, as they are always checking in to see if they are well and if they’ve eaten. They’ve always been and will continue to be there for us.

”

MARIANA, VENEZUELAN IN QUITO, ECUADOR

THE STORIES

Yorbelys and Rafael: Traveling on a Wish and a Prayer



Yorbelys and Rafael are a young couple from Portuguesa, Venezuela. Raising a family with two young boys in Venezuela was becoming exceptionally difficult. They no longer had electricity or gas in their home and couldn't afford medicine when Yorbelys became sick. Rafael would often find work in Colombia to make ends meet, but eventually the family had to leave Venezuela behind to find a better life.

Rafael left the family first to travel to Bogotá, Colombia. He spent nights sleeping on the street as he looked for work and lodging. Yorbelys soon followed, bringing their two boys. Although Yorbelys had her passport,

she had to make an illegal crossing for the sake of their children who did not have passports and could not obtain them in Venezuela. It was a risky journey and the boys suffered from illness along the way.

The family was reunited in Bogotá, but it was extremely difficult to secure housing. Bogotá proved to be a difficult place to find a home. Facing discrimination - no one would rent to them - they had to sell items on the street in order to pay for their lodging every night at a hotel. This quickly became unsustainable, forcing the family to make the move to Ecuador. In Ecuador, the family once again entered a desperate situation. Funds were running low, as they paid for a hotel room in Quito until they were referred to a shelter run by JRS.

"We were so surprised, our mouths wide open because we saw a beautiful space made for families to build a community," said Rafael. This shelter was exactly what the family needed to get themselves back on their feet. Each family is given their own home, which has a bathroom, kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms. "We are still surprised that they supported us, providing food, toiletries, and a beautiful temporary house to raise our boys. We found



Christian (1) and Cristopher (7), sons of Yorbelys and Rafael, with their friend, Dannelys (8), at a JRS shelter in Quito, Ecuador.

a community with the other families in the shelter. Here we all are family and offer help when it's needed," said Yorbelys.

More than anything, the shelter provides the family with stability, something Yorbelys and Rafael wanted for their children in Venezuela. Now they have the possibility to enroll their eldest son in school. JRS provides transition support to families like Rafael and Yorbelys' so that they can obtain sustainable housing solutions outside of the shelter.

Rafael and Yorbelys expressed gratitude for the refuge they found through JRS. The couple said, "They helped us when we needed it most and they will continue to help us. We're thankful for JRS."

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**YORBELYS, VENEZUELAN
IN QUITO, ECUADOR**

THE STORIES

Ana: A Mother's Fight for A Better Tomorrow



Ana is a young woman from Barinas, Venezuela, and mother of two children – a boy and a girl ages 14 and eight. Her son has cerebral palsy and often could not receive needed medical attention due to the lack of medicines and the prohibitively expensive costs of health care. The situation became worse when her employer, the government of Barinas, denied her benefits and coverage for care and medication that her son needed.

Her son suffered many complications due to the lack of treatment, so Ana decided to take him across the border into Cúcuta, Colombia, where he was hospitalized and able to recover. With his health temporarily stabilized, they returned to Venezuela to reunite with her daughter, collect a few belongings, and make their journey out of Venezuela.

In June 2018, the family began their journey to Barranquilla, Colombia. With both of her children lacking passports, they took informal paths to cross the border. Passing through a forested, mountainous region, their journey to reach Colombia took five hours on foot. They arrived in Maicao, Colombia, where someone helped them with their passage and gave them money for food. They eventually arrived in Barranquilla, but after three months Ana decided that the family should continue to Perú for a better life, especially for her son.

Upon arrival at the bus terminal of the Colombian capital, she noticed that thousands of her fellow Venezuelans were in the same situation, without direction or money and with a long way to go. “People asked me how I could go on like this with my children, and I would say to them, ‘God is great and God has to help me,’” she said.

Mostly traveling on foot, it took seven days to reach the border of Ecuador. Once at the border between Ecuador and Colombia, she spent about three hours sitting on her suitcases thinking about what to do – should she stay in Ecuador or keep going to Perú? She chose to continue to Quito, where it was less populated



with other Venezuelans in need. She arrived in Quito on September 15, 2018, and a few days later she met with JRS Ecuador, where she received support in a shelter that houses people in situations of high vulnerability. At the JRS shelter they connected with a JRS psychologist, who helped her to recover emotionally and develop positive coping mechanisms. Ana's advice to those making the journey is, "Yes, you can do it! The journey is not easy, but you can meet good people along the way. I kept asking God to be with me and I kept holding on to hope as I told myself that I could make this journey. I did it not just for myself, but for my children."

Hogar de las Madres San Francisco Javier is a JRS-run long-term shelter for vulnerable Venezuelans and Colombians. Funding for the shelter comes from UNHCR to serve Colombian cases awaiting resettlement, and the rest comes from PRM to serve vulnerable Venezuelan families requiring more assistance, protection, and a longer stay. Families are provided an apartment with beds and basic furniture, food, legal, psychosocial, health, and school enrollment assistance.

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**ANA, VENEZUELAN
IN QUITO, ECUADOR**

THE STORIES

Lina: Supporting Venezuelans at the Border



Lina Mena, a specialist in psychological care, has been working with Jesuit Refugee Service since 2013. Her work is based in Tulcán, a city on the northern border of Ecuador, which sees the largest number of Venezuelans entering Ecuador through Colombia. Recently, the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and unrest in Colombia has led to an increase in the number of Colombian and Venezuelan refugees entering the city. She explained that for many years now, JRS has offered “psychosocial accompaniment, legal assistance, humanitarian help, and institutional support to strengthen other grassroots organizations” within Tulcán and the surrounding communities that receive refugees.

In Lina's opinion, everyone in Tulcán shares a feeling of familiarity and has close relationships with immigrants from Colombia and Venezuela. Many people in Tulcán have family members that are from Colombia and have been integrated into the society. The feeling of solidarity from the people of Tulcán has helped the recent refugee population slowly become a part of their community. That said, instances of xenophobia do occur but less often in Tulcán than other cities in Ecuador. JRS works to create community development plans among refugees and host community members, where their needs are collectively identified and prioritized so they may work together in enhancing local services, social cohesion, and sustainable integration.

Lina hopes that JRS will continue to provide assistance on the border and care for the emergency needs of communities there. She says it is important that JRS both responds to the situations of the refugees and continues “strengthening the social fabric, working with the communities, and aiding refugees to integrate into their new communities.”

She hopes the communities that take in refugees can work to give a more hospitable welcome to those who have been displaced.

Lina hopes that countries in the region will move towards a state where “the people that arrive in cities and at the border can begin their lives here and are given not only the materials, but also the personal, social, and community tools in order to better their quality of life.”



Venezuelans waiting to cross Rumichaca Bridge from Colombia into Ecuador.
Photo credit: Richard Fischer, JRS/USA



Due to JRS’s presence in Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador, JRS is able to coordinate among country offices and ensure that highly vulnerable migrants in Venezuela know where they can find JRS along the route in both Colombia and Ecuador. Many Venezuelans cross into Colombia at Cúcuta and Arauca, pass through Bogotá and Pasto, meet JRS again in Tulcán, and then find shelter and assistance in Quito or Guayaquil before moving to Perú and Chile.

THE STORIES

Fabiola: Helping Those in Need Strive for Success



Based in Quito, Fabiola Cordero works diligently everyday with refugees and asylum seekers from Venezuela and Colombia to develop the necessary skills to enter the local economy. As the JRS Ecuador Livelihoods Coordinator, Fabiola collaborates with refugees in building their employable skills, developing business plans, and putting them into action.

Most importantly, Fabiola helps guide those she proudly serves in discovering their motivations and unlocking their entrepreneurial potential. The livelihoods trainings provide business development and management skills, creation of micro-business plans, access to start-up business capital, and follow-up support to ensure that their businesses become a sustainable

source of income for their families. “It’s a joy for us to see how someone can become a part of the local economy, and we must keep supporting them until they can achieve their dreams,” said Fabiola.

One of Fabiola’s students, Daniel, was able to start his own business as a sunglasses vendor.

With the help of Fabiola, Daniel developed a business plan, and with start-up capital provided by JRS Ecuador, he was able to buy his first stock of sunglasses. He is currently able to pay for his living expenses in Ecuador, and now not only sells sunglasses, but umbrellas and headphones too. He plans to keep expanding his business and employ fellow refugees.

CONCLUSION

The stories of Estefani, Luisa, Yorbelys, Rafael, and Ana reveal their strength, determination, and resilience as they seek out a better life for their families. Their journeys came with a great cost, leaving familiarity behind and moving toward the unknown of life in a new country. With millions of other stories like theirs needing to be heard, Jesuit Refugee Service is committed to accompanying, serving, and advocating for the Venezuelan migrant population in their time of displacement. We invite you to join us by sharing these stories and becoming a voice for all those displaced.



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Although my body is in Ecuador, my heart and soul are in Venezuela. I will continue to show what I'm made of. As I always say to myself, I am made of strong wood and, although at times I feel broken inside, I am still strong.

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**SÓCRATES, VENEZUELAN IN
TULCÁN, ECUADOR**

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The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organization with a mission to accompany, serve, and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, that they may heal, learn, and determine their own future. JRS programs are found in 56 countries serving more than 677,000 individuals, providing assistances to: refugees in camps and cities, individuals displaced within their own countries, asylum seekers in cities, and those held in detention centers.

JRS/USA, based in Washington, D.C., provides support to the broader JRS network, through funding, oversight, monitoring, and evaluation; and to JRS projects and programming throughout the world. JRS/USA also serves forcibly displaced migrants in the U.S. through our Detention Chaplaincy Program.

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