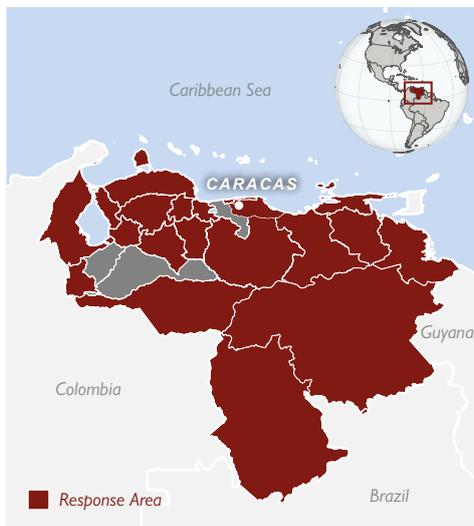


OVERVIEW

VENEZUELA 2020 / COMPLEX CRISIS

CRISIS	Complex crisis, October 2018 onwards (UN scale-up strategy for humanitarian needs in Venezuela)
PEOPLE AFFECTED	7 million people in need*
PEOPLE DISPLACED	5.4 million people , including refugees and migrants living abroad and 4.6 million of them in Latin America and the Caribbean**
LOCATIONS	Amazonas, Anzoátegui, Apure, Bolívar, Carabobo, Cojedes, Delta Amacuro, Distrito Capital, Falcón, Guárico, La Guaira, Lara, Miranda, Monagas, Nueva Esparta, Portuguesa, Sucre, Táchira, Trujillo, Yaracuy, and Zulia.
PEOPLE SUPPORTED IN THE RESPONSE	515,395 people received assistance to improve their shelter conditions, have access to energy and basic NFI distributions



RESPONSE OUTPUTS	<p>239,092 people received kits and NFI distributions</p> <p>249 solar street lamps installed</p> <p>237,493 people benefited from repair of community spaces in collective centers</p> <p>84 collective centers rehabilitated.</p> <p>217 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) were installed. 117 for health and collective facilities.</p> <p>56 health establishments rehabilitated</p> <p>16 state-led institutions repaired</p> <p>23 trainings for 763 people in CCCM</p>
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SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE

As a result of economic instability compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the dynamics of human mobility, humanitarian shelter and NFI needs in Venezuela increased in border states and in migrants' areas of origin (AoO). The Cluster contributed to improving safe access to essential services, including better access to energy. Shelter activities, included construction, repairs, and expansions in community centers, temporary shelters (collective centers) and key institutions such as health centers and schools.

* Source: Humanitarian Response Plan (July 2020).
 ** Source: Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan 2021 (R4V)



- By Oct 2018** the ongoing political, human rights and socio-economic developments in Venezuela had led to the outflow of more than three million Venezuelans into neighbouring countries and beyond.
- 1 Oct 2018:** UN Scale-up Strategy.
- 2 First half of 2019:** Shelter, Energy and NFI was set up as a working group within the Protection Cluster.
- 3 Jul 2019:** Shelter, Energy and NFI Cluster activation.
- 4 Dec 2019:** Increase in spontaneous returns to Venezuela.
- 5 Feb 2020:** Strategy Advisory Group (SAG) formed.
- Mar 2020:** COVID-19 State of Alarm and government request to UN for support.
- 6 Jun 2020:** CCCM functions assumed by Shelter Cluster.



With people on the move within Venezuela, and mass migration to neighboring countries, there was a need for NFI support along with other forms of Shelter and Energy assistance.

CONTEXT

As a result of a contraction affecting Venezuela's economy, exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the country experienced a deterioration of essential services, including power outages and limited access to fuel. Hyperinflation affected purchasing power, impacting access to food and livelihoods. The population suffered reduced access to health care and education, water shortages, and increased levels of insecurity.

The ongoing political and economic situation in Venezuela led to more than five million nationals leaving Venezuela into other countries. This led to humanitarian needs related to Shelter, Energy and NFI and impacted dynamics of human mobility. In general, migrants moved towards the Colombian-Venezuelan border for daily work in Colombia or migrated to a third country (e.g. Brazil or Ecuador) in search for social and economic integration.

Within Venezuela, people moved to large urban areas such as Distrito Capital where the access to basic services and livelihoods was not heavily affected. The human mobility to border states and urban areas has also increased the need to access the already limited basic services and livelihood opportunities. Given the limited economic capacity of most of the persons on the move, they were not able to access decent accommodation or hotels. This led to many people living in overcrowded homes or in substandard conditions, either without access to basic services or in poor quality shelter.

Since the last quarter of 2019, an influx of Venezuelan returnees led to a corresponding escalation in humanitarian needs. People returning to their areas of origin (AoO) represented a new complex humanitarian challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Temporary shelter arrangements (collective centers), including the Government-led Puntos de Atención Social Integral (PASI) were established, mainly in border locations to support the influx of individuals and families, with different shelter conditions, and different levels of access to NFIs and essential services.

SITUATION BEFORE THE CRISIS

Shelter conditions in Venezuela have been affected by significant demographic growth and oil booms linked with a massive increase of its urban population, especially in the northwest of the country. Urbanization trends, accelerated by the oil incomes, have been impacted by an unequal wealth distribution and a lack of urban planning, leading to informal settlements categorized as:

- consolidated (located in areas that do not present any geotechnical issues and have basic and acceptable infrastructure);
- to be consolidated (located inside and outside the urban perimeter, in some cases located on unstable land areas with limited access to sanitary services, inadequate shelters and overcrowded conditions); and
- unstable neighborhoods (located in areas that are at high risk of flooding).

In Venezuela, according to the most recent national census (2011), 70% of people live in their own accommodation, including urban and rural houses and apartments. Several policies have been put in place to reorganize populations in urban and rural areas and provide partial shelter solutions.

In the decade from 2000-2010, social and economic advances took place in Venezuela, namely poverty reduction and improved access to essential services. These improvements have been associated with an increase in social expenditure linked to high returns from the petroleum industry and increased public expending.

However, more recently, Venezuelans suffered from the impact of a significant contraction in their economy, devaluing the national currency and negatively impacting private consumption, public spending, investment and prices.



Within Venezuela, people moved to large urban areas, often into existing informal settlements. Many migrants have also moved to other countries in the region, including Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador.

NATIONAL SHELTER, ENERGY AND NFI STRATEGY

Humanitarian needs were identified for shelter, energy and NFIs, with a focus on persons on the move and vulnerable people living in communities impacted by the crisis. Assistance was given to improve shelter conditions and provide better access to energy and NFIs. The response was focused on the following main areas:

1. SUPPORTING THE NETWORK OF COLLECTIVE CENTERS

During 2020, despite movement restrictions due to COVID-19, more people were moving locations than prior to the pandemic. Persons on the move, including returnees, needed improved access to safe and dignified collective centers and basic NFI assistance across the main routes in central and border states. Part of the Cluster response focused on supporting the network of collective centers through shelter repairs and rehabilitation. NFI distributions were also made, targeting both returnee populations and vulnerable persons on the move. Also, some Refugee Housing Units were installed in collective centres to increase their capacity.

2. COMMUNITY-LEVEL INTERVENTIONS

Access to essential services, such as electricity and domestic gas deteriorated, worsening living conditions in communities also impacted by COVID-19. Limited access to energy had a negative effect on other essential services such as water, health, and telecommunications. Partners' responses focused on improving access to energy at the community level. Key interventions included electric solutions such as the installation of solar street lamps and photo voltaic systems. These were installed in institutions, community spaces and centers that provided essential services to affected populations (i.e. health centers and schools).



Community-level interventions included the rehabilitation of water pipelines.



Community-level interventions included the creation of recreation areas such as soccer fields and playgrounds, creating safe spaces where vulnerable children are able to play.



Before & after. Part of the response involved rehabilitating buildings that could be used as collective centers.

3. IMPROVING SUB-STANDARD SHELTERS IN BORDER AREAS

Border closures from March 2020 impacted living conditions, including livelihoods, economic opportunities, and the quality of essential services mainly in border states. Cross-border movements continued through irregular pathways, leading to an escalation of protection risks in host communities, especially where shelter conditions were deficient. The Cluster response targeted individuals and families living in overcrowded conditions and/or inadequate shelters in host communities, with repairs and NFI distributions. This included areas of high returns with a focus on achieving durable solutions for returnee populations.

4. COVID-19 RESPONSE

Within the Venezuela Intersectoral COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan published in April 2020, the Cluster strategy was adapted to address the escalation of humanitarian needs in shelter, energy and NFIs due to the COVID-19 emergency and the influx of returnees.

National authorities established temporary collective shelters in locations such as schools, public buildings and hotels. Called Puntos de Atención Social Integral (PASI), these were mainly in border municipalities where returnees had to remain for quarantine. These sites required better access to dignified and safe shelter, including access to energy and basic NFI distributions. The Cluster temporarily assumed Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) functions to support authorities in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 Cluster response was focused on the provision of assistance in PASIs through shelter repairs and NFI distributions, adapting NFI kits with articles to prevent the virus and shelter support in prioritized health facilities (in coordination with authorities and Health Cluster), and also the mapping of temporary shelter arrangements.

Some Refugee Housing Units were set up in health facilities to create triage areas and quarantine zones. Some solar lighting was also installed.



Before and after: housing rehabilitations supported durable solutions for returnees.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Security. Some of the prioritized areas had inadequate security conditions and limited humanitarian access. The presence of irregular armed groups, as well as robbery and vandalism during the implementation impeded distribution of basic NFIs and equipment to communities and institutions. Liaison with authorities at local and national level was established in order to improve security conditions and expand humanitarian access in prioritized areas.

Alternative energy sources. Local organizations had limited technical knowledge and resources to integrate alternative energy generation systems. In order to strengthen local capacities, the Cluster organized trainings for partner organizations with a focus on sustainable sources of energy including solar energy for cooking and for electricity generation.

Operational level. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in order to prevent the spread of the virus, mobility has been significantly affected by the restrictions on air, sea and land travel in the country. Fuel shortages further limited the response capacity of the organizations.

Presence and capacity of organizations. Partners' limited operational capacity and the restricted number of organizations operating in prioritized states (especially in the eastern region of the country), is a challenge to ensure the delivery of the required assistance. Efforts have been made to strengthen organizations' capacities and coordination in the eastern region of the country, including the possibility to activate the subnational Cluster. However, this remains a priority challenge to be addressed.

Funding. The funding of the organizations that are part of the Cluster has been limited, affecting the capacity of the partners to respond to the identified needs of the target populations. Partners' activities and operational functioning have also been affected by the ongoing currency devaluation and other financial challenges such as foreign exchange operation. The Venezuelan Humanitarian Fund was established in late 2020 to generate an alternative financial mechanism to support the humanitarian response in Venezuela.



Politicization of humanitarian assistance: Humanitarian assistance in Venezuela is at risk of being used for political purposes. This constitutes a risk for humanitarian action.

Appropriate timing for activities like NFI distributions is evaluated considering political activities like regional and national elections to minimize the risk of politicization. Where possible assistance is directly delivered to affected people to mitigate this challenge.

Limited access to countrywide data: There is a need to gather primary data on humanitarian needs to be able to inform strategic decisions on the main priorities of the affected population, to support actors working in the context of the Venezuelan crisis more effectively, and to provide an analysis of the humanitarian situation.

Multi sectoral efforts have been made to access the most recent official statistics in order to prioritize the response. Cluster approaches to national authorities have been put in place to obtain specific information regarding Shelter, Energy and NFI needs.

WIDER IMPACTS

The COVID-19 pandemic enabled better relations and liaison capacities with relevant Governmental authorities at both national and local levels. As a result the overall humanitarian access improved. Partners became more aware of the need to work jointly with the authorities and working relations have improved.



The COVID-19 pandemic created multiple operational challenges, but also led to building better relationships with Government authorities, more joined-up working between partners, and improvements in humanitarian access.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Drawing from lessons learned and evidence-based actions, the COVID-19 emergency flagged the need to advocate for a prompt and joint response together with the relevant national and local authorities in order to support the actions of the state and its primary role in the humanitarian assistance. A closer coordination with authorities has strengthened humanitarian actions in relation to Shelter, Energy and NFIs.
- Early response of the Cluster to recurrent disasters such as floods needs further coordination and preparedness. Civil society groups and other relevant stakeholders need to work on contingency plans for recurrent disasters and other emergencies that may have an impact on the populations in Venezuela.
- Subnational coordination is required to have an effective and timely response to humanitarian needs related to Shelter, Energy and NFIs.
- In early 2020, the first Strategic Advisory Group of the Shelter, Energy and NFI Cluster was established. This group supported the technical validation of project proposals for HRP 2020 and 2021 and the development of the first strategy for HNO/HRP 2021. Further active collaboration in decision making strategies and in the advocacy strategy for resource mobilization is required.