

# 9. VENEZUELA

COVID-19 compounds years-long economic crisis



## KEY FACTS

Population: **28.7 million**

**7 million** people in need of humanitarian aid (25% of population)

**9.3 million** facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+) before COVID-19

**5.4 million** Venezuelans displaced abroad (second-largest external displacement)

**90%** of hospitals face shortages of medicine and critical supplies

**70%** of hospitals do not have regular access to water

**30%** of medical personnel estimated to have left the country

**176th** (of 195 countries) for capability to prevent and mitigate epidemics

**84th** (of 167 countries) for women's equality

**134th** (of 181 countries) for resilience to climate change

**4/5** score for severity of access constraints

**20%** of funding received for 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan

Above: A mother consults with a healthcare provider in a resource center on the Colombian border with Venezuela, where the IRC is also providing medical services to displaced Venezuelans.

## PROBABILITY

**6** HUMAN THREAT

**7** NATURAL THREAT

## IMPACT

**5** CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE

**5** EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION

**COVID-19 – and the restrictions and wider humanitarian crises it is creating – are deepening needs inside Venezuela, driving new humanitarian, political and economic crises for the country, and compounding one of the largest external displacements in the world.**

Venezuela is five years into a spiraling economic crisis that has devastated the health system, massively increased food insecurity, caused catastrophic shortages of basic items and triggered one of the largest displacement crises in the world. COVID-19 restrictions leave Venezuelans stuck in limbo as needs deepen inside the country but they are unable to leave to seek safety or services abroad. Meanwhile, lockdowns in Latin America are forcing displaced Venezuelans to return home to a country unable to meet existing needs. As the pandemic exacerbates the existing economic crisis, it is likely to fuel greater social unrest. Venezuela has moderate quantitative scores on Watchlist due to extremely limited official data but maintains a high ranking due to the IRC's qualitative analysis of the situation and indicators of rising need.

“The humanitarian emergency in Venezuela is unfolding with little support from the international community. Needs are far outstripping available services both inside Venezuela and in host communities across the region. The UN's Humanitarian Response Plan for Venezuela and the regional response plan are severely underfunded. The international community must step up its funding if we are to have any hope of meeting needs and addressing a pandemic on top of it all!”

- Marianne Menjivar  
Country Director, IRC Venezuela and Colombia



## HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2021

- ▶ **COVID-19 is deepening Venezuela's economic and hunger crises.** The economy has contracted by a further 26% in 2020 ([OCHA](#)). The collapse of Venezuela's oil industry - which [historically](#) accounted for 25% of GDP and 95% of exports - has been a key factor in the deepening economic crisis in Venezuela in recent years. Oil exports dropped in October 2020 to the lowest levels for [70 years](#) and ever-tightening US sanctions mean there is little likelihood of major recovery in 2021. In fact, Venezuela's economic crisis is likely to deepen even further in 2021 due to the pandemic, while restrictions aimed at controlling the pandemic have eliminated many people's livelihoods. Moreover, key countries that are hosting Venezuelans - like Colombia (1.7 million) and Peru (1 million) - are also being affected by the economic consequences of COVID-19 ([R4V](#)). Remittances, which reached 35% of households, fell as Venezuelans abroad lost their incomes ([The Inter-American Dialogue](#)). The economic crisis creates the conditions for deepening poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition in 2021 in what was already the world's fourth-largest food crisis ([WFP](#)).
- ▶ **Drivers of displacement are rising and yet Venezuelans' legal routes to leave are increasingly limited, deepening needs inside the country.** The top factors driving Venezuelans to leave the country are food shortages, high food prices and lack of jobs – all challenges that have drastically worsened due to the pandemic ([WFP](#)). Humanitarian needs are certain to rise as borders remain closed, not only for those seeking to flee abroad but also for the 50,000 Venezuelans who entered Colombia each day to access goods and services ([International Crisis Group](#)). At least 130,000 Venezuelans abroad returned home in 2020 as restrictions aimed at containing COVID-19 caused them to lose their livelihoods ([HRW](#)). Once COVID-19 restrictions ease across the region, there will likely be mass movements out of Venezuela once again.
- ▶ **Social unrest is likely to continue to grow.** The pandemic and deteriorating economic situation are leading to reductions in public services, shortages of food and fuel, and growing government restrictions that are likely to worsen already high tensions and grievances. By September 2020 Venezuela averaged an estimated [40 protests a day](#) – nearly a [doubling](#) since July. Criminal violence is also rising. In 2019 the country saw [16,506](#) murders and a rate of 60.3 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants - one of the highest rates in the world.
- ▶ **The already strained humanitarian response is likely to face even greater constraints.** Venezuela's Humanitarian Response Plan was the second-least funded in the world in both 2019 and 2020 ([FTS](#)). At the same time, growing fuel shortages in late 2020 continue to drive up the costs for humanitarian operations, including transportation of goods and personnel. [OCHA](#) also reports that administrative restrictions are a key factor restricting the ability of humanitarian actors, particularly international NGOs, to respond to the growing needs in Venezuela, restricting both the entry of personnel and supplies to the country and their movements within it. According to [ACAPS](#), humanitarians working in Venezuela face “very high” access constraints, the second highest level possible.

### THE IRC IN VENEZUELA

The IRC has supported vulnerable populations inside Venezuela by working with nine local partner organizations since 2018. Our partners provide vital access to quality maternal healthcare (including birthing kits for pregnant women), sexual and reproductive healthcare, GBV prevention and response, child protection services, cash assistance and child malnutrition services. We also support the COVID-19 response inside Venezuela through the provision of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for doctors and nurses. The IRC is in the process of building relationships with local partners in Táchira on the border area with Colombia. Learn more about the [IRC's Venezuela response](#).



CARACAS