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Colombia's Support for Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees: President Petro reaffirms commitment to integration, but continued progress requires more international support

About the Author

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This paper explores the commendable policy efforts made by successive Colombia administrations to pursue economic and social integration of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the face of crisis. Compared to other humanitarian situations, however, Colombia is notably underfunded. The global community hopes Colombia will provide a new model for migration and refugee response. To do so, it needs more international support.

“Venezuelans who want to remain in Colombia should enjoy rights, not simply immigration protection, but the right to health, education, childcare, validation of a title...all of this must be established.”—Colombian President Gustavo Petro¹

There are over six million Venezuelan migrants and refugees globally, more than 1.8 million of whom live in neighboring Colombia.^{2,3,4} These individuals have fled a country suffering from years of economic hardship and political strife. And still today, the situation in Venezuela continues to deteriorate leading to projections that emigration will continue, with Colombia receiving an

¹ Ahrens, Jan Martínez and Juan Diego Quesada, “Gustavo Petro: “Si fracaso, las tinieblas arrasarán con todo,” *El Pais*, June 27, 2022, <https://elpais.com/america-colombia/elecciones-presidenciales/2022-06-28/gustavo-petro-si-fracaso-las-tinieblas-arrasaran-con-todo.html>.

² Interview data used in this article was collected in the Fall of 2020 in collaboration with Lucía Espinal Solórzano, Bren Flanigan, Sami Sternberg, and Xin Tong as part of the course, Migration and Human Development taught by Professor Daniel Naujoks at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University.

³ UNHCR USA, “Venezuela situation,” *UNHCR USA*, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/venezuela-emergency.html>.

⁴ Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, “RMRP 2022 Colombia,” December 7, 2021, <https://www.r4v.info/en/document/colombia-two-pager>.

International support is urgently needed both to enable Colombia's sustained commitment to Venezuelan migrants and refugees, and to signal to the world that such a rights-based act of solidarity does not only rely on national efforts but will also garner international backing

outsized proportion of migrants.⁵ Just this year, over 753,000 Venezuelans have left home.⁶

Distinct from most migrant and refugee stories in recent years, Colombia has responded to this influx with a suite of policies aimed at integrating Venezuelans, rather than deterring them.^{7,8} This has been roundly welcomed by the global migrant and refugee protection communities, which now wait in hope for signs that the Colombia model will not only succeed but prove replicable elsewhere.⁹

That said, Colombia's migration and refugee policy, which the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has rightfully lauded as, "the most important humanitarian gesture" in decades,¹⁰ is facing challenges from all sides. Recent years of **escalating border violence, growing poverty and food insecurity, strained social systems, domestic discontent, and heightened xenophobia**—all aggravated by the global pandemic and an unprecedented economic shock—have given rise to a new constellation of hardship. While Colombia has remained committed to its integration policy, it has not received adequate international funding. As the Petro administration settles in, international support is urgently needed both to enable Colombia's sustained commitment to Venezuelan migrants and refugees, and to signal to the world that such a rights-based act of solidarity does not only rely on national efforts but will also garner international backing.

Colombia's Policy Response

Colombia's commitment to a progressive migration policy response has remained consistent, even as contexts have changed, and presidents have transitioned. The Venezuelan exodus into Colombia began to increase during the Colombian presidency of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018). After instituting the Peace Accords that ended decades of conflict with the paramilitary group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC), Santos' government turned its attention to expanding regularization pathways for Venezuelan migrants fleeing deteriorating conditions in the north of Venezuela. In 2017, Colombia instituted the Permiso Especial de Permanencia (Special

⁵ The IMF predicts that the Venezuelan population in Colombia could reach 3.5 million by 2024. International Monetary Fund, "Colombia: 2020 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Colombia," *International Monetary Fund*, April 16, 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/04/16/Colombia-2020-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-by-the-49331>.

⁶ Pietsch, Bryan and Hari Raj, "Venezuela refugee crisis similar to Ukraine in size, but not aid," *The Washington Post*, September 4, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/04/venezuela-refugee-crisis-ukraine-syria>.

⁷ Hernandez, Camila, "Colombia is pioneering a new model for integrating migrants and refugees, Will it work?" *Atlantic Council*, February 19, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/colombia-is-pioneering-a-new-model-for-integrating-migrants-and-refugees-will-it-work/>.

⁸ (Interview, 2020)

⁹ As the director-general of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) put it, Colombia's approach "serves as an example to the world." UNHCR USA, "UNHCR and IOM welcome Colombia decision to regularize Venezuelan refugees," *UNHCR-IOM Joint Press Release*, February 8, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2021/2/60214cf74/unhcr-iom-welcome-colombias-decision-regularize-venezuelan-refugees-migrants.html>.

¹⁰ UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency Twitter Post, February 8, 2021, <https://twitter.com/refugees/status/1358889128578973703?lang=en>.

These initiatives were already notable at a time of rising anti-refugee and anti-migrant sentiments worldwide, and then Colombia went even further

Permit of Permanence or PEP), which provides two years of regular migration status to Venezuelans while also opening access to the labor market and social services.¹¹ Not without its limitations, this policy offers a pathway to temporary regular status for migrants and refugees.

In 2018, the presidency transitioned to Iván Duque, who chose to maintain national efforts to prioritize integration, rather than deterrence. A 2019 decision to grant full citizenship to roughly 30,000 children of Venezuelan migrants and refugees born in-country is a key example of Colombia's sustained commitment to integration and social protection.¹² In the same year, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported the government in developing the Income Generation Strategy for Migrants from Venezuela and Host Communities (IGS).¹³ This strategy underpins the country's efforts to create integration pathways through the labor market which also opens access to social services, education, and healthcare.¹⁴ Such a strategy reflects a long-term view on migration policy—recognizing that migrants and citizens alike benefit from facilitated integration rather than ad hoc holdover policy responses.

Alongside PEP and the income generation strategy, Colombia offers an assortment of accompanying programs to fill in gaps in coverage. The Border Mobility Card, for example, enables circular migration patterns for residents who live along the Venezuelan-Colombian border and regularly cross over to purchase food, access medical care, or study.¹⁵ For unsuccessful refugee applicants, there exists a Special Complementary Permanence Permit (PECP), a legal avenue to work and conduct activities in Colombia for 90 days at a time.¹⁶ Meanwhile the Special Permanence Permit for the Promotion of Regularization facilitates employment as a means towards regular status.¹⁷ In addition to these policies, Colombia adopted a COVID-19 six-point plan for supporting Venezuelan migrants that includes COVID-19 health service access, humanitarian corridors, cooperation programs, targeted assistance in high-risk areas, a focus on protecting the most vulnerable groups, and coordination with multi-level government and non-governmental stakeholders.¹⁸

These initiatives were already notable at a time of rising anti-refugee and anti-migrant sentiments worldwide, and then Colombia went even further. In February 2021, the government expanded regularization pathways via a statute

¹¹ Villamil, Stephanie López and Helen Dempster, "Why Colombia Granted Full Rights to its 1.7 Million Venezuelans, and What Comes Next," January 26, 2021, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/why-colombia-granted-full-rights-its-17-million-venezuelans-and-what-comes-next>.

¹² Barchfield, Jenny, "Colombia gives Venezuela newborns a start in life," *UNHCR USA*, October 14, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/stories/2019/10/5da42be64/colombia-gives-venezuela-newborns-start-life.html>.

¹³ (Interview, 2020)

¹⁴ (Interview, 2020)

¹⁵ Government of Colombia, n.d. in https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/22271/file/Social_protection_and_Venezuelan_migration.pdf

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ UNHCR Global Compact on Refugees Digital Platform, "Colombia's 6-point plan for Venezuelan migrants during COVID-19," *UNHCR*, August 12, 2020, <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/colombias-6-point-plan-venezuelan-migrants-during-covid-19>.

There is a growing consensus among experts that migrants and refugees constitute an economic benefit, not a burden, when they are included in the social and economic life of their host country. If successful, the strategy could provide a model for progressive, “win-win” migration and refugee policies elsewhere in the world

that created ten-year regularization status for existing undocumented Venezuelan migrants, estimated at one million people,¹⁹ called the Estatuto Temporal de Protección para Migrantes Venezolanos (ETPV), and enabled access to formal work and healthcare services.^{20,21} This policy also opened a pathway for those with legal status to extend their stay, and still today, it continues to benefit those who enter the country legally until January 31, 2023.²² The statute has been considered, “perhaps the most generous amnesty program to undocumented immigrants in modern history.”²³

This multilayered migration approach, if successful, will not only benefit Venezuelans who seek haven and opportunity, but also Colombia and its citizens. There is a growing consensus among experts that migrants and refugees constitute an economic benefit, not a burden, when they are included in the social and economic life of their host country.²⁴ If successful, the strategy could provide a model for progressive, “win-win” migration and refugee policies elsewhere in the world.

Challenges to Successful Policy Outcomes

However, the strategy is not a panacea. Colombia faces many entrenched challenges that predate the Venezuelan migration crisis, and now intersect with it. The country is still recovering from decades of conflict with lasting societal divisions, battling high levels of inequality, and struggling in its progress towards holistic political incorporation, to name a few. Such issues are often intricately linked with migration policy, either directly or indirectly (by encompassing migrants in their broader impacts). The strategy is also unlikely to resolve all the challenges facing mobility. **While the current approach provides a strong foundation for successful integration, it needs to be accompanied by equally inclusive and holistic responses in other domains.**

There is reason to think this will happen. President Gustavo Petro, in his first interview to an international newspaper, commented on the importance of ensuring the rights of migrants as well as supporting economic integration and

¹⁹ IRC Press Release, “International funding necessary to support Colombia’s policy to welcome Venezuelan migrants, says IRC,” *International Rescue Committee/Reliefweb*, April 15, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/international-funding-necessary-support-colombia-s-policy-welcome-venezuelan>.

²⁰ Hernandez, “Colombia is pioneering.”

²¹ Treisman, Rachel, “Colombia Offers Temporary Legal Status To Nearly 1 Million Venezuelan Migrants,” *NPR*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/09/965853031/colombia-offers-temporary-legal-status-to-nearly-1-million-venezuelan-migrants>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Bahar, Dany and Meagan Dooley, “Venezuelan refugees and their receiving communities need funding, not sympathy,” *Brookings Institute*, February 26, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2021/02/26/venezuelan-refugees-and-their-receiving-communities-need-funding-not-sympathy/>.

²⁴ Otis, John, “Venezuelan Migrants Providing Crucial Labor in South America,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2021.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/venezuelan-migrants-providing-crucial-labor-in-south-america-11614091553>; Bahar, Dany, Meagan Dooley, and Cindy Huang, “Integrating Venezuelans into the Colombia labor market,” *Brookings Institution*, December 3, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/integrating-venezuelans-into-the-colombian-labor-market>.

Growing pressure on social services, a large internally displaced population requiring more government support, rising food insecurity, informal migration made more perilous by conflict along the Colombian-Venezuelan border, and escalated xenophobia are all challenges that Colombia must overcome to achieve sustainable integration

education programs.²⁵ Upon taking office he has also signaled policy priorities with implicit but important implications for Venezuelans—such as tackling hunger and poverty—as well as explicit policies such as reestablishing diplomatic relations with Venezuela and reopening the border.²⁶ While commentators have noted an early emphasis on return as part of Petro’s migration strategy, which has caused unease, Petro has affirmed a commitment to providing refuge and asylum to those who need it.^{27,28}

As the Petro administration looks to institute an ambitious agenda, it will face a range of challenges that hold important implications for the integration of migrants and refugees. Growing pressure on social services, a large internally displaced population requiring more government support, rising food insecurity, informal migration made more perilous by conflict along the Colombian-Venezuelan border, and escalated xenophobia are all challenges that Colombia must grapple with to achieve sustainable integration. International support will be important to help address these, not least to ensure that the new government has the policy and fiscal space to live up to Colombia’s continued commitment to migrant and refugee rights.

Among the key challenges facing the new administration are:

Social services are buckling under the pressure of immigration and economic hardship. Colombia’s economy contracted 6.8 percent in 2020, marking the worst recession in decades, before recovering swiftly in 2021, nearing pre-pandemic levels by June.²⁹ Still, Colombia is battling a fiscal deficit.³⁰ It is struggling to fund programs targeting livelihoods, food security, health, education, and protection—programs that are vital amidst competing humanitarian challenges.³¹ In 2019, of the 12 percent of Venezuelans in Colombia with any health insurance, 9 percent used subsidized public coverage.³² In 2020-21, 21 percent of Venezuelan migrants and refugees utilized subsidized coverage.³³ **Finding ways to resource social services at adequate levels and expand coverage will be imperative as**

²⁵ Ahrens and Quesada, “Gustavo Petro.”

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Gutiérrez Juliana Gil, “¿Qué pasará con los 2,4 millones de venezolanos en Colombia en el gobierno Petro?” *el Colombiano*, July 19, 2022, <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/migrantes-venezolanos-en-colombia-en-gobierno-de-gustavo-petro-PA18092629>; Casas, Sebastián, “Gobierno de Gustavo Petro buscará retorno voluntario de migrantes y refugiados venezolanos,” *RCN Radio*, July 14, 2022,

<https://www.renradio.com/politica/gobierno-de-gustavo-petro-buscara-retorno-voluntario-de-migrantes-y-refugiados-venezolanos>.

²⁸ Política, “Gobierno de Gustavo Petro buscará retorno voluntario de venezolanos,” *El Tiempo*, July 15, 2022,

<https://www.elheraldo.co/colombia/agenda-migratoria-ausente-de-las-prioridades-de-petro-934849>.

²⁹ The World Bank, “The World Bank in Colombia,” *The World Bank*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/colombia/overview>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Graham, Jimmy and Martha Guerrero Ble, “The Impact of COVID-19 on the Economic Inclusion of Venezuelans in Colombia,” *Center for Global Development and Refugees International*, October 2020,

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/506c8eae4b01d9450dd53f5/t/5f997364f4ef54001a174ff9/1603892069536/impact-of-covid-on-venezuelans-in-colombia.pdf>.

³² Chaves-González, Diego, Jordi Amaral, and María Jesús Mora, “Socioeconomic Integration of Venezuelan Migrants and Refugees,” *IOM, DTM, And Migration Policy Institute*, July 2021, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-iom_socioeconomic-integration-venezuelans_2021_final.pdf.

³³ Ibid.

additional migrants and refugees arrive and obtain regular status, and thus secure access to services. Meanwhile, Colombian citizens also rely on these systems in increasing numbers due to economic hardship and growing poverty.

Internal displacement has continued to grow, placing further pressure on social policy to deliver. In 2016, the government of Colombia signed a peace agreement with the FARC. Despite this, from 2017 to March 2022, the country has continued to witness increases in internally displaced populations (IDPs).³⁴ In May of 2022, there were 734,375 IDPs currently in Colombia.³⁵ This places further strain on existing social service systems already enduring limited resources to keep up with growing migrant populations.

Food insecurity is rising globally, affecting Venezuelan migrants and Colombians alike. Food insecurity has become ever more pervasive globally as food prices rise, economies struggle, and climate impacts grow.³⁶ Those most vulnerable are taking the brunt of these changes. 345 million people around the world are food insecure.³⁷ Over 40 percent of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean experienced moderate to severe food insecurity just last year.³⁸ Neither Venezuelan migrants nor resident Colombians have escaped this growing global challenge. 50 percent of the Colombian-based Venezuelan migrants reported moderate food insecurity in August of 2021, while 14 percent experienced severe food insecurity.³⁹ Addressing food insecurity for both citizens and migrants further balloons social service costs. The food crisis is acute and the sooner it can be addressed, the better positioned Colombia will be to prevent compounding crises down the road.

Informal migration increases risks and limits policy effectiveness. Border closures do not stop migration from occurring, but rather force migrants to take informal, and often precarious, routes—further exposing themselves to high-risk environments. (This is why international refugee law makes clear that refugees merit protection regardless of how they entered a country). Upon entry to Colombia, integration policy is only as effective as migrants’ and refugees’ ability to access it. As of January 31, 2021, ten-year regulatory status is only available to new migrants who cross the border legally.⁴⁰ Without a secure

³⁴ Operational Data Portal: Refugee Situations, “Desplazamientos Masivos - Enero a marzo 2022,” *UNHCR*, May 3, 2022, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/92416>.

³⁵ Operational Data Portal: Country View, “Colombia Data Portal,” *UNHCR*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/col>.

³⁶ World Food Programme, “A global food crisis – 2022: A Year of Unprecedented Hunger,” *World Food Programme*, <https://www.wfp.org/hunger-catastrophe#:~:text=2022%3A%20a%20year%20of%20unprecedented,to%20345%20million%20%2D%20since%202019>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Press release, “In one year, 4 million people were thrust into hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean,” *Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations*, June 7, 2022, <https://www.fao.org/americas/noticias/ver/en/c/1585479>.

³⁹ World Food Programme, “Food Security Update: Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru,” *World Food Programme*, August 2021, https://www.r4v.info/sites/default/files/2021-11/WFP_Remote_Assessment_Migrants_August%202021%2005102021.pdf.

⁴⁰ “Colombia/Venezuela: Border Area Abuses by Armed Groups,” *Human Rights Watch*, March 28, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/28/colombia/venezuela-border-area-abuses-armed-groups>.

The international community should support the government in living up to its commitments—but the reality is that Colombia has been starkly under-supported when it comes to humanitarian aid

pathway, migrants are at heightened risk before they even access Colombia’s policy benefits. Not to mention, escalations in conflict along the Colombia-Venezuelan border, such as those that took place in early 2022,⁴¹ that further threaten secure migration for those crossing the border informally. President Petro is working with Venezuela to reopen the border.⁴² As this occurs, it will be important to ensure that all migrants and refugees, even those who do not arrive via official border crossings, can reach Colombia safely and access the rights and benefits to which they are entitled.

Xenophobia has been persistent in civil society and represents a key challenge for social integration. According to a 2020 poll, only about 20 percent of Colombians approve of the government’s approach to migration, and nearly 70 percent view Venezuelan migrants unfavorably, believing (against the evidence)⁴³ that they raise crime rates and steal jobs.⁴⁴ Hate messages and misinformation infiltrated the public discourse following the ten-year regularization statute in 2021.⁴⁵ Increasing public spending on migrants is politically harder when xenophobic sentiments are present. As in all countries, xenophobia among segments of the population is a key barrier to social integration. Colombia will need public support to continue its progressive policies and garner international support. **Changing public sentiments and aligning normative support with policy shifts will be critical if Colombia’s inclusive migration and refugee policy is to succeed.**

Inadequate International Support

Colombia is demonstrating a unique commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Migration alike.⁴⁶ As discussed above, however, the country is faced with several cross-cutting humanitarian and development challenges. The international community should support the government in living up to its commitments—but the reality is that Colombia has been starkly under-supported when it comes to humanitarian aid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Polanco, Anggy and Nelson Bocanegra, “Colombia, Venezuela working to coordinate border reopening, minister says,” *Reuters*, August 18, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-venezuela-working-coordinate-border-reopening-minister-says-2022-08-18>.

⁴³ Knight, Brian and Ana María Tribín-Urbe, “Immigration and Violent Crime: Evidence from the Colombia-Venezuela Border,” *Banco de la Republica Colombia*, 2020, https://repositorio.banrep.gov.co/bitstream/handle/20.500.12134/9880/be_1121.pdf?sequence=1. As the IMF recently found, “the informal labor market has absorbed most migrants, with little evidence of local worker displacement in either the formal or informal sectors,” Press Release, “Colombia 2020 Article;” Bahar, Dany, Meagan Dooley, and Andrew Selee, “Venezuelan Migration, Crime, and Misperceptions,” *Migration Policy Institute and the Global Economy and Development at Brookings*, September 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/migration-crime-latam-eng-final.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Guzmán, Sergio and Juan Camilo Ponce, “Hate against Venezuelans in Colombia is a ticking time bomb,” *Global Americans*, November 10, 2020, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2020/11/hate-against-venezuelans-in-colombia-is-a-ticking-time-bomb/>.

⁴⁵ The Crisis Group, “Hard Times in a Safe Haven: Protecting Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia,” *Crisis Group*, August 9, 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/094-hard-times-safe-haven-protecting-venezuelan-migrants-colombia>.

⁴⁶ The Global Compact on Refugees (2018) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (2018) are international agreements through which signatories affirm their commitment to uphold collective principles for refuge and migration.

While governments routinely take on debt on behalf of their own citizens, doing so on behalf of migrants and refugees is more difficult to sell politically

Underfunded humanitarian appeals

In 2020, the Colombia Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) only received 15.5 percent of its required funding and the Venezuela HRP only 23.6 percent.⁴⁷ Additionally, the Venezuela Regional Response Plan (RRP) was only 47.2 percent funded.⁴⁸ During the first year of COVID-19, not only were these plans independently underfunded, but they also received far fewer allocations relative to similar efforts elsewhere in the world. For instance, “while per capita aid for each Syrian refugee has been calculated at USD 3,150, and for each South Sudanese refugee at USD 1,390, each Venezuelan refugee has thus far only been allocated USD 265.”⁴⁹ While humanitarian appeals were better funded in 2021, Colombia still faces a large funding gap as it responds to ongoing crises. United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson William Spindler recently highlighted that Colombia is “among UNHCR’s most underfunded country operations in the world.”⁵⁰ Now nine months into 2022, Colombia’s HRP is still only 23 percent funded, while the Venezuelan Regional Response Plan is only 14 percent funded.⁵¹

Limited options for securing additional development assistance

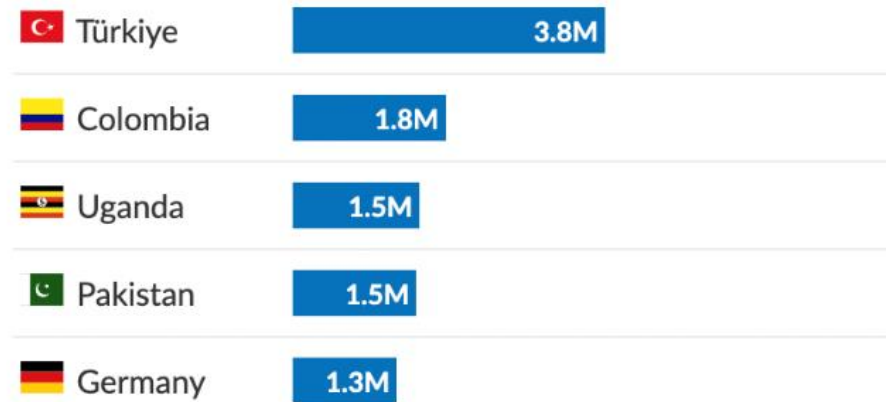
To exacerbate matters, Colombia has limited alternatives to seek support beyond the international donor community. As a middle-income country, Colombia is ineligible for most of the financing for development facilities intended to support crisis-affected communities, as these tend to restrict eligibility to low-income countries. One exception is the World Bank’s Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF), which provides grants and concessional loans to middle-income countries that host large numbers of refugees (the Bank has a similar program for low-income refugee hosting countries). Colombia became eligible for the GCFF in 2019 and received USD 31.5 million from the fund soon after.

Colombia can, alternatively, access “normal” development support through international financial institutions. The World Bank has been a key resource on this front, providing a total of USD 1.6 billion in financing to Colombia to respond to the Venezuelan migration situation.⁵² Much of these funds however, come in the form of loans which add to the country’s already high debt levels and servicing costs. Furthermore, while governments routinely take on debt on behalf of their own citizens, doing so on behalf of migrants and refugees is more difficult to sell politically.

Even with these additional funds, Colombia remains resource-constrained. As the second largest hosting country in the world (see *Figure 1*), and facing growing numbers of migrants, an ongoing global health crisis, and universal economic hardship—the need for social spending will continue to increase. As

new migrants enter the country, whether qualified or unqualified for regulatory status, Colombia’s need for greater financial support only grows. To meet the combined needs of Colombians and Venezuelan migrants, the international community must increase its financial support. Without greater international support, dueling crises will worsen causing hardship in the short-run, and ultimately incurring higher costs to remedy in the long-run.

Figure 1: Major Hosting Countries (July 16, 2022)



Türkiye hosted 3.8 million refugees, the largest population worldwide. Colombia was second with more than 1.8 million, including Venezuelans displaced abroad. *Source: UNHCR Global Trends 2021.*

Colombia is attempting one of the world’s most progressive responses to one of the world’s largest humanitarian crises

Conclusion

Colombia is attempting one of the world’s most progressive responses to one of the world’s largest humanitarian crises. Not to mention, they have stayed the course in the face of political turnover and a global pandemic. This ambitious agenda, however, coexists with several competing and interconnected challenges. Social policy must consider new populations that may not have formal access to already strained social service systems. Rising food insecurity will place additional financial burdens on these systems. Conflict mitigation strategies must account for the impact that border violence has on safe and secure migration pathways. Discourse and narratives about migrants can enable

⁴⁷ UN OCHA Services, “Appeals and response plans 2022,” *Financial Tracking Service, UN OCHA Services*, <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/overview/2020>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Bahar and Dooley, “Venezuelan refugees,” in Guzmán, Sergio and Ivonne Marmolejo, “Colombia urgently needs help with the economic integration of Venezuelan immigrants,” *Global Americans*, August 11, 2021, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2021/08/colombia-urgently-needs-help-with-the-economic-integration-of-venezuelan-immigrants>.

⁵⁰ Pietsch and Raj, “Venezuela refugee.”

⁵¹ UN OCHA Services, “Appeals.”

⁵² The World Bank, “Supporting Colombia Host Communities and Venezuelan Migrants During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *The World Bank*, October 31, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2021/10/31/supporting-colombian-host-communities-and-venezuelan-migrants-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>.

or disable public buy-in for new policies. Solution to any of these competing challenges must recognize their interdependent nature.

Equally important, without adequate financing there will be no effective or sustainable long-term solutions to the Venezuelan migration situation in Colombia. While the economic shocks of COVID-19 have been pervasive, those countries already economically underprivileged have fewer dollars to fall back on, just when they are needed most to support national resilience.

Colombia has made and sustained a historic commitment and is doing the world a public good in the process. If Colombia's migration and refugee strategy is to set a new precedent for integration policy that prioritizes justice for migrants and refugees, then the international community urgently needs to help finance it.

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