



# Addressing political instability and securing humanitarian assistance in Venezuela

Security Council



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Literacy and Enlightenment



**Forum:** Security Council

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## Introduction

One of the most pressing political, economic, and humanitarian issues of our day is the unfolding catastrophe in Venezuela. Venezuela was once a wealthy country with the greatest oil reserves in the world, but it has since collapsed catastrophically, forcing over 7.7 million people to flee their homes since 2014 and leaving millions more in dire need of assistance. Over 80% of people live in poverty, with 53% of them living in extreme poverty, because of years of economic mismanagement, hyperinflation, and corruption, as well as the breakdown of democratic institutions under Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro. Many people still fight every day to have access to essentials like food, medication, and clean water.

Venezuela's authoritarian political environment under Maduro's control, which is characterised by repression of dissent, election manipulation, and limitations on civil society, exacerbates the problem. International sanctions have unintentionally hindered humanitarian efforts by restricting assistance distribution and NGOs' operations, despite their intended goal of isolating the regime. Effective assistance is further hampered by obstacles including corruption, poor institutional coordination, and regime control over aid distribution. Despite these obstacles, the United Nations and other international organisations have worked to lessen the situation by negotiating with the opposition and providing humanitarian funding. The international community must take swift action to meet Venezuela's urgent humanitarian needs while promoting a lasting democratic transition, especially since the July 2024 presidential elections.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Hyperinflation

An economic condition where prices increase uncontrollably, eroding the value of currency. Venezuela experienced hyperinflation reaching 10 million percent in 2019, rendering its currency nearly worthless.

### Authoritarianism

A particular form of government characterised by repression of opposition, restricted political freedom, and centralised power. This is demonstrated by Nicolás Maduro's government, which manipulated elections and imposed limitations on civil society.

### Electoral Fraud



Manipulation of electoral processes to alter outcomes, undermining free and fair elections. Venezuela's 2018 presidential election is a widely cited example.

## Multilateral Organisations

International institutions formed by multiple countries to address global issues collaboratively, such as the United Nations or World Bank. These organizations are central to coordinating aid and diplomatic efforts in Venezuela.

## Temporary Protective Status (TPS)

A legal status allowing migrants to reside and work temporarily in a host country due to unsafe conditions in their home country. Colombia's TPS program for Venezuelan migrants is a model for regional migration policies.

## Institutional Collapse

The breakdown of governmental systems responsible for providing services and enforcing laws. Venezuela's public institutions, including healthcare and infrastructure, have deteriorated under prolonged mismanagement.

## Sanction Overcompliance

When financial institutions or donors exceed the requirements of sanctions, hindering legitimate transactions like humanitarian funding. This has been a significant issue for aid agencies in Venezuela.

## Voter Suppression

Tactics used to prevent or discourage specific groups from participating in elections. In Venezuela, allegations of voter suppression are tied to the Maduro regime's efforts to maintain control.



## General Overview

### The Economic Collapse and Humanitarian Crisis

Venezuela, which was once among the richest countries in Latin America, has come to represent protracted sociopolitical unrest, economic ruin, and human misery. Millions of Venezuelans have been displaced by this catastrophe, which has its roots in political tyranny and economic incompetence. It has also caused the country to descend into extreme poverty and prompted an international humanitarian response that is unable to handle the scope of the situation.

Venezuela's dependence on oil is at the core of its economic collapse. Nearly 98% of the nation's exports and a sizeable amount of its government revenue came from oil by the early 2010s. This reliance made Venezuela susceptible to changes in the price of oil globally, as did corruption and poor management in the state-owned oil corporation PDVSA. An extraordinary economic downturn was brought on by the precipitous decline in oil prices in 2014. Venezuela's GDP shrank approximately 80% between 2014 and 2021, resulting in hyperinflation that hit 10 million percent in 2019. Because of this, Venezuelans could not purchase essentials, and the country's currency was essentially useless. Although hyperinflation has subsided as of 2024, yearly inflation is still among the greatest in the world, with the average monthly salary of \$24 that is insufficient to cover even a fraction of basic food costs.

A broad humanitarian crisis has been directly exacerbated by the economic catastrophe. Over 80% of people live in poverty, with 53% of them living in extreme poverty. With over three million people experiencing crisis-level food shortages as of 2024, food insecurity has emerged as one of the crises' defining characteristics. Malnutrition is widespread, especially in vulnerable groups and children. A basic food basket costs

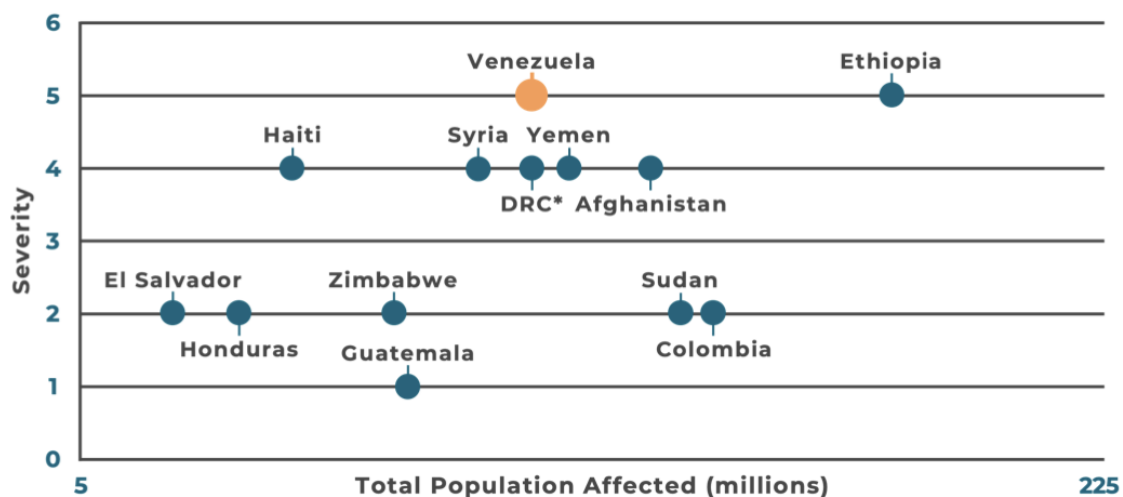


significantly more than the average family makes, which forces many to turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms like missing meals or turning to illegal sources of revenue. Additionally, access to healthcare, sanitary facilities, and clean water has declined. There are acute shortages of medical staff, medications, and supplies at hospitals all around the nation. Due to gaps in vaccine coverage and a lack of preventive healthcare services, diseases like malaria and measles that were previously under control have returned.

### Political Instability and Barriers to Aid and Assistance

The humanitarian problem is made worse by the political environment. Venezuela has slipped towards authoritarianism under Nicolás Maduro's leadership. Maduro's government has steadily destroyed democratic institutions, repressed political dissent, and compromised election integrity since taking over from Hugo Chávez in 2013. His heavily contested re-election in 2018 led to worldwide censure and more than 50 nations recognising opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's acting president. Despite this, Maduro has managed to hold onto power with the help of the military and partnerships with countries like China, Russia, and Cuba. The Maduro dictatorship has been the focus of international sanctions, especially from the US, to force political change. However, by discouraging foreign financial institutions and donors from operating in the country, these actions have had the unintended consequence of worsening the humanitarian and economic situation.

**Access of Humanitarian Actors to Affected Populations  
 Relative to Total Population in Need**



\*Democratic Republic of the Congo

**Source:** ACAPS Severity Index 2022

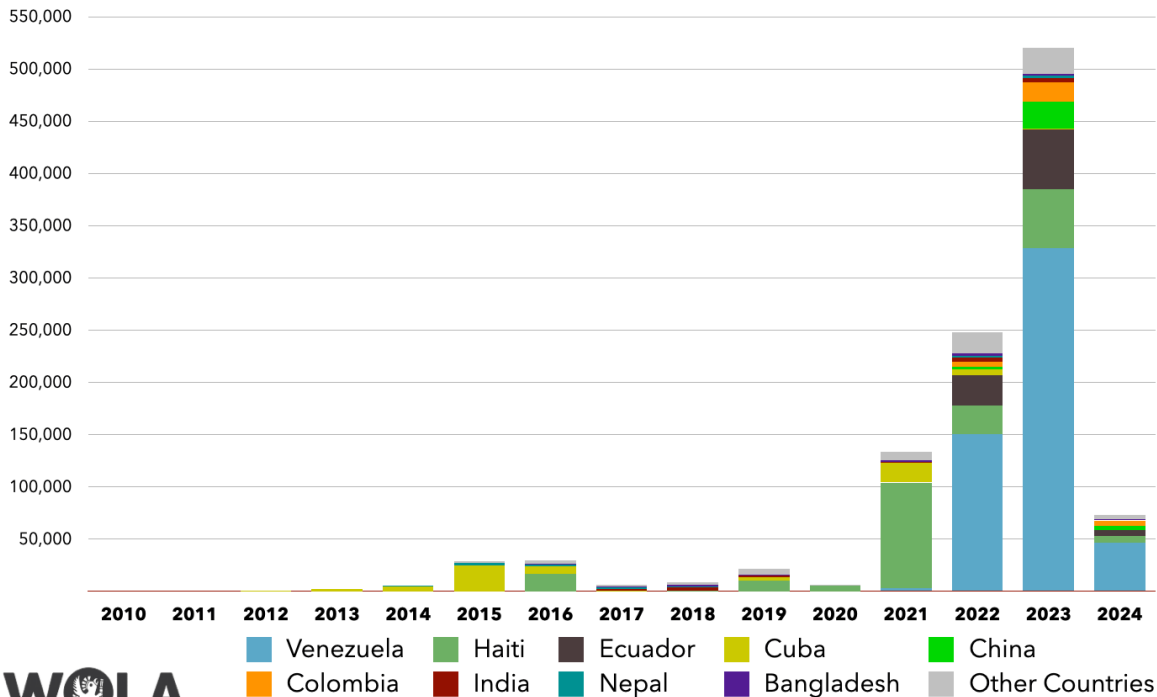
The catastrophe has cost many lives. One of the worst displacement crises in the world, more than 7.7 million Venezuelans have left the nation since 2014. Most have sought safety in nearby nations, with Colombia housing the greatest number of migrants—nearly 2.9 million. Others have ventured on risky adventures, such traversing the Darién Gap, a treacherous jungle passage that connects Panama and Colombia. During these journeys,



migrants are threatened by human traffickers, violence, and harsh weather. Deprivation and instability characterise daily life for those who stay in Venezuela. Many areas, especially rural and border districts, are effectively controlled by criminal organisations and armed groups.

## Annual Migration Through Panama's Darién Gap

**2024:** Venezuela 64%, Haiti (plus Brazil and Chile) 8.1%, Ecuador 7.7%, Colombia 6.3%, China 6.1%, Peru 1%, All Others <1%  
**Since 2010:** Venezuela 48%, Haiti (plus Brazil and Chile) 20%, Ecuador 9%, Cuba 6%, China 3.0% Colombia 2.7%, All Others <2%



Source: Panamá Migración - <https://bit.ly/3LyECwM>; source indicates "children of Haitian nationals' birth records correspond to" Brazil and Chile

Both inside Venezuela and in the host nations, the UN and other NGOs have set up humanitarian operations. 5.1 million of the 7.6 million Venezuelans in need are to get aid, according to the UN's humanitarian response plans for 2024–2025. Food security, healthcare, water, sanitation, and protection services are given top priority in these strategies. But as of early 2024, only a small portion of the necessary funds had been obtained, resulting in significant gaps in the provision of relief.



One significant barrier is the Maduro regime's control of humanitarian endeavours. Legal obstacles, arbitrary detentions, and charges of political meddling are just a few of the severe limitations that NGOs and foreign agencies must deal with. The efficacy and transparency of aid are compromised by the regime's fixation on regulating its delivery. Furthermore, the planning and targeting of relief efforts are made more difficult by the absence of trustworthy data on humanitarian needs. To properly evaluate requirements and distribute assistance, many foreign organisations and donors need precise statistics, which Venezuela's government has either neglected to gather or purposefully concealed.

### **Possibilities for International Action**

The distribution of humanitarian help is made more difficult by corruption. Venezuela is among the most corrupt nations in the world, with structural problems impacting all tiers of government. Shipments of aid are frequently the target of extortion, theft, and administrative hold-ups. To get around these obstacles, some NGOs have turned to smuggle supplies into the nation, which raises questions about operating safety and transparency.

The limitations of using international sanctions as a vehicle for political change have also been brought to light by the crisis. Sanctions have unintentionally limited humanitarian activities by posing logistical and financial challenges, despite their intended goal of weakening the Maduro dictatorship. The supply of money to NGOs working in Venezuela has been restricted by foreign banks' and financial institutions' over-compliance, which is motivated by a fear of breaking sanctions. This has made financing shortages worse by discouraging some donors from contributing to aiding the problem.

There have been some improvements despite these obstacles. In 2020, the World Food Program made a big leap by starting operations in Venezuela. Some agreements, such as the creation of a humanitarian fund to assist social programs, have been reached because of international diplomatic efforts, such as discussions between the opposition and the Maduro administration mediated by Norway. However, political difficulties continue to impede progress, and the implementation of these accords is still delayed.





*People line up in Puerto Limón, Panama, where World Vision is working with partner agencies to support families who have crossed the Darién Gap, a dangerous 66-mile jungle route. (©2023 World Vision/photo by Gabriela Becerra)*

To handle Venezuela's problems, the international community must play a crucial role. To support a democratic transition, concerted diplomatic measures are required in addition to humanitarian aid. In particular, the UN can use its impartiality to arbitrate disputes between the opposition and the state while rallying support from both domestic and foreign sources. Although collaboration with the Maduro regime would be necessary, the deployment of an impartial electoral verification mission might contribute to increased transparency in the next elections. Furthermore, preserving civil society organisations and their capacity to function in Venezuela must be a top priority for the UN and regional players.

Supporting Venezuelan migrants and refugees is crucial in host nations. The difficulties experienced by displaced people can be lessened with the support of programs that promote economic integration, social service access, and legal regularisation. Regularisation measures have been established by nations like Colombia, setting an example for others to follow. However, because host communities' demands frequently outweigh available resources, funding for these efforts continues to be a chronic concern.

Addressing the underlying reasons of the Venezuelan crisis, such as political instability and poor economic management, is crucial. Long-term solutions need reviving the economy, restoring democratic government, and rebuilding institutions, even while urgent humanitarian relief is important. Sustained international involvement and a dedication to helping the Venezuelan people in their quest for a better future are necessary to meet these objectives.

## Major Parties Involved

The United Nations (UN)





Through its several agencies, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the World Food Program (WFP), the UN is actively involved in resolving the Venezuelan issue. These groups focus on helping displaced people, monitoring human rights abuses, and providing humanitarian relief. To ease the crisis, the UN also oversees international humanitarian funds and supports diplomatic initiatives like discussions led by Norway.

### The United States of America (USA)

As one of the most outspoken opponents of the Maduro government, the US has imposed harsh sanctions to force the government to make political changes. Significant humanitarian assistance has also been given by it, both inside Venezuela and to neighbouring nations that are taking in Venezuelan migrants. The intricacy of striking a balance between political and humanitarian goals is highlighted by the criticism levelled at U.S. measures for worsening the economic situation.

### The European Union (EU)

The EU, which frequently adopts U.S.-style policies, has backed Venezuela's opposition and advocated for democratic reforms. In addition to giving humanitarian aid, the EU has targeted members of Maduro's government with sanctions. The EU has also promoted dialogue between political groups in an effort to promote a peaceful conclusion.

### Russia and China

Both nations assist the Maduro dictatorship diplomatically, militarily, and economically, making them important allies. China has made loans and investments in Venezuela's infrastructure, while Russia has helped the country get over sanctions by exporting oil. Since they oppose Western attempts to isolate Maduro, their engagement highlights the geopolitical nature of the situation.

### Colombia

Colombia has been disproportionately affected by the crisis as the main destination for Venezuelan migration. Temporary Protected Status is one of the initiatives the Colombian government has put in place to regularise migrants and give them access to necessary services. Colombia's involvement emphasises the crisis's regional effects and the necessity of ongoing international assistance.

### Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)



The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) are two NGOs that have been instrumental in delivering aid on the ground. These organisations, which frequently work under difficult circumstances because of governmental limitations and instability, concentrate on providing healthcare, food distribution, and protection services for disadvantaged communities.

## Timeline of Events

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1998</b>  | Hugo Chávez Elected: Chávez wins the presidency, marking the start of Venezuela's socialist era, heavily dependent on oil revenues.   |
| <b>March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013</b>     | Chávez Dies: Hugo Chávez dies of cancer, and Nicolás Maduro becomes interim president.  |
| <b>2014</b>                           | Oil Prices Plummet: Global oil prices collapse, triggering Venezuela's economic crisis and severe shortages of basic goods.   |
| <b>December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015</b>  | Opposition Wins National Assembly: Opposition parties gain control of the National Assembly for the first time in nearly two decades.   |
| <b>May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018</b>      | Disputed Election: Maduro is re-elected in a widely condemned election, boycotted by the opposition and denounced as fraudulent by many international actors.                               |
| <b>January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019</b>  | Guaidó Declares Interim Presidency: Opposition leader Juan Guaidó declares himself interim president, citing constitutional succession rules, and gains recognition from over 50 countries. |
| <b>February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019</b> | Humanitarian Aid Blocked: Maduro orders security forces to block humanitarian aid shipments at the Colombian border, resulting in violent clashes.  |
| <b>March, 2019</b>                    | Nationwide Blackouts: A series of blackouts leaves millions without power, further worsening living conditions.   |



<b>September 2021</b>	Currency Redenomination: Venezuela introduces a new currency, the digital bolívar, removing six zeros to counter hyperinflation.
<b>November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022</b>	Mexico City Agreement: Negotiations between the government and opposition lead to an agreement on an UN-administered humanitarian fund.
<b>October 2023</b>	Opposition Primaries: Maria Corina Machado wins the opposition primaries but is barred from running for office.
<b>January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024</b>	Sanctions Reimposed: The United States reimposes sanctions on Venezuela after Maduro fails to commit to holding free and fair elections.
<b>July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024</b>	Presidential Election: Venezuela holds its highly anticipated presidential election. Incumbent Nicolás Maduro claims victory amid widespread allegations of electoral fraud and voter suppression. Opposition candidate Edmundo González Urrutia contests the results.

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

### Recognition of Opposition Leadership (2019)

Juan Guaidó was acknowledged as Venezuela's temporary president by more than 50 nations, with the US and EU leading the charge. By uniting the world around a definite alternative, this action sought to delegitimise Nicolás Maduro and put pressure on him to step down. Nevertheless, there were no noticeable changes on the ground because of this acknowledgement. In addition to maintaining strong ties with powerful international players like China, Russia, and Cuba, Maduro also maintained tight control over Venezuela's military, which remained devoted to his government. Despite his early gains, Guaidó's international fame was insufficient to inspire a powerful enough local opposition or generate enough power to overthrow Maduro. The circumstance demonstrated how difficult it is for outside forces to overthrow well established authoritarian governments.

### International Sanctions



Wide-ranging economic sanctions were placed on Venezuela by the US and other countries, which targeted the country's main source of income, oil exports, and senior people in Maduro's government. These actions were intended to impoverish the dictatorship and limit its capacity to finance repressive state apparatuses. The sanctions unintentionally made the humanitarian situation worse even if they were successful in economically isolating Maduro's regime. The shortage of necessities like food, medication, and industrial supplies made life much worse for regular Venezuelans. Financial institutions' excessive adherence to sanctions also made it more difficult for assistance agencies to carry out their work within the nation. The necessity for more sophisticated strategies to accomplish political goals without unduly hurting disadvantaged communities is highlighted by the dual effect of sanctions.

### Norway-Mediated Talks (2019, 2022)

Norway mediated negotiations with the goal of bringing the opposition and the Venezuelan administration together for productive discussion. The goal of these discussions was to provide the groundwork for future democratic elections, humanitarian collaboration, and political reform. Agreements to establish a humanitarian fund run by the UN to meet pressing needs were among the noteworthy results. However, because there was still little trust between the opposing camps, these discussions were unable to result in long-lasting solutions. While Maduro's administration frequently employed discussions as a means of stalling, the opposition found it difficult to put up a united front. These negotiations' little success demonstrated the difficulties of using mediation alone to settle long-standing political disputes, especially when one party has overwhelming power.

## Possible solutions

### UN-Led Electoral Verification Mission

Using an impartial United Nations team to oversee and validate Venezuela's 2024 elections might greatly increase openness and discourage electoral fraud. A thorough evaluation of the election process, including voter registration, campaign circumstances, and vote counting, would be part of such a mission. This idea would need strong international support and pressure on Maduro's administration to grant monitors full access in order to be successful. Offering diplomatic incentives or conditional relaxation from some sanctions might create leverage, even if the government could oppose such examination. The ability of the international community to put up a united front and exert constant pressure on all parties involved is essential to the success of this approach.

### Sanction reforms to remove barriers to Aid and Assistance

Aid distribution to Venezuela may be enhanced by putting in place procedures to exempt humanitarian missions from the limitations of international sanctions. For instance, donors



might finance relief projects without worrying about sanctions violations if an UN-administered funding conduit was set up. Bypassing possible government intervention, this would guarantee that resources reach the intended beneficiaries directly and openly. To better distribute help, foreign players should also work with Venezuelan civil society organisations. This strategy might reduce suffering and keep pressure on the government by keeping humanitarian operations apart from more general political goals.

## Regional Resettlement Agreements

The displacement issue may be better addressed if host nations are encouraged to implement coordinated strategies for integrating Venezuelan migrants and refugees. Measures for legal regularisation, access to healthcare and education, and economic integration through employment possibilities would all be part of such accords. These efforts might be supported by international funding from institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations, which would guarantee that host countries have the means to put inclusive policies into place. Colombia's Temporary Protective Status program for Venezuelans, for instance, has served as a useful template for other nations in the area. In addition to lessening the strain on individual countries, enhancing regional cooperation on migration will increase Latin America's general stability.

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