

CHAIR REPORT

Committee: Human Rights Council

Topic: The Question of Safeguarding Human Rights in Conflict-Affected Border Communities along the Columbia-Venezuela Frontier

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Introduction

The Colombia-Venezuela frontier is one of Latin America's most complex humanitarian and human rights environments. It is approximately 2,200-kilometres long and it connects communities whose lives and economies have always relied on cross-border movement. Due to the political instability, migration pressures, poverty, illegal activities and the presence of armed groups the border has some serious protection problems.

The situation is very catastrophic in Colombia's Catatumbo area, where armed groups including the National Liberation Army (ELN) and other groups have fought for territorial control. In January 2025, violence in Catatumbo forced more than 56,000 people from their homes and resulted in killings, kidnappings, disappearances, and other abuses against civilians.

Millions of citizens from Venezuela have crossed into neighboring countries. With Colombia facing the largest Venezuelan refugee and migrant populations. The UNHCR reports that nearly 7.9 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants were living outside their own country globally by the end of 2025.

The Human Rights Council must therefore consider how Colombia, Venezuela, neighbouring states, UN agencies and civil society can protect civilians while addressing displacement, access to essential services trafficking, discrimination, and abuses committed by armed groups.

Key Terms

Refugee

A person who has crossed an international border because of circumstances such as persecution or serious threats to their safety and requires international protection.

Armed-Groups

Non-state groups that exercise organized armed control or participate in armed conflict. Along the Colombia-Venezuela frontier, groups such as the ELN and FARC dissident groups have operated in areas affected by illicit economies and weak state presence.

Human Trafficking

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of people through coercive or exploitative means for purposes such as forced labour or sexual exploitation.

Non-Refoulement

The principle that refugees or asylum-seekers should not be returned to a country or territory where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. The principle has been particularly relevant to Colombia-Venezuela migration and deportation concerns.

Background Information

The Colombia-Venezuela border is one of the important and difficult border regions in Latin America. For years the people living near the Colombia-Venezuela border have dealt with fighting, messy politics and money problems. Armed groups, like the National Liberation Army and groups that cause violence force people to leave their

homes and take money from locals. These armed groups also stop people from moving freely. These armed groups often compete for control of strategic territories and illegal trades routes, placing local populations at considerable risk.

The area has also been greatly affected by the Venezuelan migration crisis. Millions of Venezuelans have moved into countries and Colombia has the most refugees and migrants. Even though many are looking for safety and a stable life they often deal with problems like not being able to get healthcare, school, work or legal help. People living near the border have time handling more urgent needs while also dealing with safety issues. Because of this, making sure human rights are protected including getting services being safe and not facing unfair treatment is very important. As a result, the protection of human rights, including access to basic services, personal security, and freedom from discrimination, remains a critical issue requiring international cooperation and sustainable solutions.

Major Countries and/or Organizations Involved

Colombia

Colombia is one of the primary countries involved in this issue as it shares a long border with Venezuela and hosts millions of Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Border regions such as Norte de Santander and Arauca have experienced violence from groups forced displacement and humanitarian challenges. The Colombian works with international organizations to provide protection and assistance to affected communities.

Venezuela

Venezuela is the country of origin for many refugees and migrants crossing the border. Economic difficulties, political tensions, and social instability have contributed to mass-scale migration. Venezuelan border communities are also affected by insecurity, limited public services, and the presence of armed groups.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR plays a major role in protecting refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons. The organization provides humanitarian assistance, legal support, shelter, and access to essential services for vulnerable populations living in the border areas.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The IOM assists migrants and governments in managing migration challenges. It collects data on migration trends, supports humanitarian responses, and helps improve access to healthcare, documentation, and social services for migrants and host communities along the Colombia-Venezuela frontier.

Timeline of Events

<i>Date</i>	<i>Closure of the Colombia-Venezuela border</i>
<i>19 August 2015</i>	<i>Venezuela closed a major crossing with Colombia following security concerns. The closure disrupted trade, separated families, and increased humanitarian challenges for border communities.</i>
<i>21 August 2015</i>	<i>State of emergency and mass deportation</i>
	<i>Venezuela declared a state of emergency in several border municipalities. Thousands of Colombians living in Venezuela were deported or returned voluntarily, raising concerns about human rights and due process.</i>
<i>8 February 2021</i>	<i>Temporary protection statute for Venezuelans migrants</i>
	<i>Colombia announced the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants. The policy aimed to provide legal status, access to services, and employment opportunities for eligible Venezuelans.</i>
<i>16 January 2025</i>	<i>Escalation of the Catatumbo border conflict</i>
	<i>Armed conflict intensified in Colombia's Catatumbo region near the Venezuelan border/ Clashes between armed groups caused widespread displacement and endangered thousands of civilians.</i>

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- ***Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees:*** The 1951 Refugee Convention is the main international convention protecting refugees. It establishes the criteria for refugee status, and outlines their rights, such as access to refugee protection and education and employment. It also established the principle of non-refoulement, which bars States from returning refugees where they face the risk of their lives or their freedom.
- ***Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees:*** was an extension of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which eliminated the time limit and geographical restrictions on the Convention. This enables the Convention to be extended to the cases of refugee situations anywhere in the world, such as the displacement of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America. It also helps to reinforce the responsibility of the international community in protecting refugees.
- ***Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):*** This convention protects the rights of all children including refugee and migrant children, on 20 November 1989. Mere children's right to education, health, protection from violence and humanitarian assistance, without any discrimination. The CRC is particularly significant along the Columbia-Venezuela border where children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, and interrupted education.
- ***New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants:*** The UN General Assembly accepted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants on 19 September 2016, a step towards enhancing the international response to a massive movement of refugees and migrants. It emphasized on mutual cooperation, human rights protection and mutual responsibilities among countries. The declaration served as a foundation to the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact on Migration.
- ***Global Compact on Refugees:*** The Global Compact on Refugees offers a framework for countries and other actors to act more effectively on their

obligations to refugees and host communities; It promotes a greater burden sharing between countries; It facilitates access to education, health and jobs; It offers long-term solutions for refugee communities. Within this framework Colombia has cooperated closely with UNHCR in order to effectively respond to the Venezuelan refugee crisis.

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

Temporary Protection Statute (TPS) - Colombia (2021)

The Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan migrants was adopted in Colombia in 2021, providing qualified Venezuelan migrants with a 10-year legal status. The policy improved access to healthcare, education, employment, and legal documentation helping millions of migrants be able to integrate into Colombian society.

UNHCR Regional Response Team and IOM Regional Response Team.

UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) developed the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) for humanitarian response in Latin America. The plan offers emergency shelter, food, medical, legal, and protection services to refugees and migrants, including communities on the Colombia-Venezuela border.

R4V Coordination Platform

The R4V Platform (Response for Venezuelans) is composed of UN agencies, NGOs and Governments working together to support coordination of response to the Venezuelan displacement issue. It aids in humanitarian assistance distribution, migration information, and vulnerable groups in the region.

Humanitarian Border Assistance

International and local civil society organizations have set up humanitarian centers at major border crossings to assist with food, health, child protection, legal aid and temporary shelter for migrants and displaced families that enter Colombia.

Collaborations for Peace and Security in Colombia.Actions towards Peace and Security in Colombia.

The Colombian government has persisted with its work to defuse violence through peace talks and security measures to monitor armed groups. In some places, there has been a decrease in

violence under some agreements, but in border regions like Catatumbo and Arauca, civilians remain at risk of violence.

Possible Solutions

Improving security and protection in communities along the border. The Colombian government should implement measures to increase security in border areas impacted by armed conflict in collaboration with the United Nations and local governments. This covers the enhancement of trained police, establishing early warning systems of attacks, and protection of schools, hospitals and villages from armed groups. The UN Human Rights Office should also keep a watch and report on human rights violations, to hold armed groups accountable to prevent future violations of human rights against civilians.

More humanitarian assistance is needed in border communities through increasing the number of healthcare clinics, temporary shelters, food distribution centers, and education programs by the United Nations, UNHCR, IOM and NGOs in affected communities. Mobile medical teams and community centres can provide services to remote areas where services are also poor. International funds should be provided for refugees and host communities to help prevent host communities being overwhelmed by the ever increasing number of refugees.

Preventing human trafficking and protecting refugees' rights by increasing humanitarian awareness of the vulnerability of refugees at Colombian borders and its neighboring countries, while strengthening visa/registration procedures. Border officials should be trained in identifying trafficking victims and the government should provide safe houses, legal and psychological support to victims. Additional temporary protection permits and identity documents would also enable refugees to receive safe access to basic services such as health, education and employment, as well as minimising exploitation and discrimination.

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