

EXPLORING THE LOCAL ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE TO VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS IN COLOMBIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the wake of the crisis in Venezuela, a “mixed-flow” migration—including Venezuelans who have left Venezuela for Colombia and Colombian returnees coming back from Venezuela—has created new and significant challenges for institutions in neighboring Colombia. Venezuelan migrants in Colombia need places to live, jobs, schools for their children, and clinics where they can receive medical treatment and other services. Humanitarian efforts to provide these supports have been remarkable in scope, and the coordinated effort has quickly scaled up interventions in collaboration with the Colombian government and municipal authorities. The success of this effort is critical for Colombia. Failure to integrate Venezuelans into Colombia’s social and economic fabric may lead to a large and settled population that is fundamentally disconnected from the formal labor market and a viable path to self-sufficiency. This may also heighten their vulnerability to human trafficking, recruitment into the production of coca, and recruitment by dissident FARC fighters, the rebel National Liberation Army (ELN), and right-wing paramilitaries. The Colombian government and international partners have taken numerous steps towards addressing the issue of integration, including providing work permits to hundreds of thousands of irregular Venezuelan migrants. Though evolving, these large-scale policy efforts are well documented by media and independent reports. However, we know less about how local organizations in Colombia are adjusting to the fluctuating needs and shifting dynamics associated with the flow of Venezuelan migrants. These local entities that are providing direct services to the most vulnerable Venezuelan migrants are an important part of the short- and long-term humanitarian solution.

This study aims to understand how networks of local organizations that provide services for Venezuelans are adapting to meet their needs, particularly in receptor cities where migrants are settling.

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Because migrants in these places often intend to stay indefinitely, receptor cities are where the immediate humanitarian needs of Venezuelan migrants—finding basic shelter and food—are compounded by longer-term challenges, including social and economic integration into mainstream institutions. The Colombian government is collaborating with numerous international organizations and NGOs to coordinate a response to this complex dynamic. Given the social, economic, security, and rule of law concerns noted above, the effectiveness of this coordinated response is critical and merits careful analysis. This study, however, focuses on the challenges associated with addressing the needs of migrants on the ground—that is, how policies and programs are ultimately delivered and administered by local service providers. What barriers do local service providers encounter while addressing the social and economic needs of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia? How is their ability to meet these needs enabled or constrained by the larger coordinated humanitarian response? Ultimately, what implications may this dynamic have for the integration of the most vulnerable Venezuelan migrants and the preservation of rule of law?

Primary data from this study come from in-depth interviews with the leaders of local organizations that serve Venezuelans and a small sample (n=25) of migrants who are beneficiaries of their services. Interviews were conducted in person and over the phone from January to June 2019. The study focuses on the case of Bogotá, the major receptor city for Venezuelan migrants, and Cúcuta, the primary border city where nearly half of all migrants are crossing into the country. Participant organizations include international organizations, USAID, providers that are implementing partners within the coordinated humanitarian relief effort, and other entities that offer services for migrants independent of the formal humanitarian apparatus in Colombia.

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Findings from this study highlight the ongoing challenges associated with integrating the most vulnerable Venezuelans into Colombian society and mainstream institutions. The respondent organizations in this study provide a view that complements and enhances the statistical portraits presented in reports produced by NGOs, the Colombian government, and the international community. Broadly, this study finds that local organizations are seeking innovative ways to build capacity to meet the emerging needs of Venezuelans. These innovations include relying more heavily on volunteers, partnering with informal organizations (e.g., individuals and small community groups), and redirecting resources from existing programs (designed for Colombian internally displaced persons [IDPs], for example). Beyond identifying these innovations, this analysis aims to describe how they develop and the organizational efforts to sustain them. Despite these innovations, many of the providers in this study continue to bump up against significant limitations in capacity and funding. Without more effective policies that allow them to work in the formal labor market, the most vulnerable Venezuelans—particularly women, children, and those without legal status—are at risk of social exclusion. Their vulnerability threatens to fuel rule of law concerns in Colombia, including the coca industry, human trafficking, and recruitment by guerrilla and paramilitary groups. While the Colombian government and its international collaborators are addressing these issues through policies and targeted programs—including existing and emerging legalization initiatives—findings from this study suggest that local organizations whose services provide a buffer for Venezuelan migrants may also be of added value—if indirectly—to those larger efforts.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The crisis in Venezuela has triggered one of the largest and most dramatic migrations in recent history. Faced with the combination of such factors as hyperinflation, a shortage of food and other staples, increased crime rates, and popular demonstrations against the policies of Venezuela's government that led to these outcomes, nearly one in ten Venezuelans has fled their country in search of food, medicine, work, and stability.¹ Of the four million displaced individuals, over 1.4 million have settled in Colombia—by far the largest receptor country—and, at the time of this writing, an estimated 5,000 continue to cross the border each day.² Colombia's response to the crisis must be understood in the context of its own struggles: ongoing efforts to recover from a protracted civil conflict, which contributed to the internal displacement of millions of its own citizens, and, ironically, the out-migration of millions more to oil-rich Venezuela in previous decades. Historically a migration sending country, therefore, Colombia is now in the position of navigating the uncertainty of settling a massive influx of migrants, refugees, and returnees—what has been referred to as a “mixed flow.” This mixed migration flow has created new and significant challenges for Colombian institutions. In response, the Colombian government has collaborated with various United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other international actors to rapidly develop, coordinate, and administer a country-wide program that addresses the needs of these individuals and families. Colombia has absorbed the largest number of Venezuelans of any country, and an estimated 469,000 more are expected to arrive by December 2019.³ While the neighboring countries of Ecuador, Peru, and Chile have introduced more stringent admissions requirements, Colombia has continued to encourage Venezuelans who enter the country informally to register with migration authorities so they can access basic services.⁴ A growing number of reports aim to assess the development and

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implementation of this coordinated humanitarian response. This study aims to contribute to this body of research by focusing on the implementing partners on the ground: those organizations whose programs directly impact the day-to-day lives of Venezuelan migrants.⁵

Venezuelan migrants⁶ in Colombia must find places to live, jobs, schools for their children, clinics where they can receive medical treatment, and other services they may need. These are pressing short-term and long-term concerns, and many Venezuelan migrants are navigating this period of adjustment with limited social support and few economic resources. In light of this vulnerability, the process of social and economic integration for Venezuelan migrants will take time, and it is likely to differ from one region of the country to the next. It will depend on a range of factors, including the ability of the local labor market to absorb a shock of new workers and the response of schools and health delivery systems to increased demand for services. The outcome of this process—whether and to what extent Venezuelan immigrants are integrated into Colombia’s social, cultural, political, and economic structures—is critical for Venezuelan migrant families and communities, but it also has implications for the stability of Colombia as a nation and the preservation of rule of law. Failure to integrate Venezuelans into the fabric of Colombia’s institutions may lead to a large and settled population that is fundamentally disconnected from the formal labor market and a viable path to self-sufficiency. This, in turn, may directly and indirectly fuel problems at the heart of securitization and rule of law, including policing, trafficking of persons, neighborhood safety, coca production, recruitment by guerrilla and paramilitary groups, and illicit employment in the informal labor market.

The humanitarian response apparatus in Colombia has rapidly articulated an assemblage of local partners whose services aim to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable Venezuelan migrants. This study focuses on a sample of local organizations that are part of this response effort to better

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understand the operational challenges of meeting the unrelenting and evolving needs of Venezuelan migrants. These entities are embedded in neighborhoods and often connected to networks of other service providers and organizations. Some may be local offices of large international NGOs, while others might be small churches that provide a weekly meal for migrants in a nearby park. Many are confronted with difficult questions such as how to expand existing services, develop new programs, and prioritize resource distribution. Others are directly serving Venezuelan migrants even if they are operating independently from the larger coordinated relief effort. This study assumes that both types of providers—those formally affiliated with the humanitarian relief response and those operating autonomously—provide an important organizational-level perspective of the situation in Colombia.

The study is driven by three primary questions concerning these organizations: What barriers do local service providers encounter while addressing the social and economic needs of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia? How is their ability to meet these needs enabled or constrained by the larger coordinated humanitarian response? Ultimately, what implications may this dynamic have for the integration of the most vulnerable Venezuelan migrants and the preservation of rule of law? This study of organizational capacity building in select regions of Colombia aims to complement existing—and much larger—data collection efforts that are currently quantifying the humanitarian response.⁷ It is an exploratory study based on a convenience sample of organizations rather than a large-scale impact evaluation. Yet, by focusing on this sample of providers—and the Venezuelan migrants who receive their services—this study provides an alternative lens through which to assess the regional/national coordination effort: as experienced on the ground by the organizations responsible for responding to the day-to-day needs of Venezuelan migrants. The study examines the services and programs that are formally and informally part of the relief effort, offering insights from direct service providers into

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the administration of relief in Colombia and the infrastructure needed to coordinate and sustain it. In addition to data from service providers, this study is informed by interviews with Venezuelan migrants who are beneficiaries, entities responsible for coordinating the humanitarian response (including U.S. Government agencies), and academic and technical experts in Colombia.

II. COUNTRY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Colombia's efforts to address the out-migration of Venezuelans should be understood within the larger regional effort involving major recipient countries throughout the Americas. In September 2018, the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay signed the Declaration of Quito, signifying their commitment to a coordinated exchange of information and best practices to address the migratory crisis of Venezuela.⁸ These signatories agreed that one of the most critical needs for Venezuelan migrants and refugees is for receptor countries to provide them with legal status so that they can legally engage the formal labor market, qualify for healthcare, and access social services. They recognize that restrictive legal structures that exclude Venezuelans from integrating into mainstream institutions would exacerbate complex problems associated with large numbers of unauthorized immigrants, including those associated with the illicit trafficking industries that both facilitate and exploit such flows.

For its part, the Colombian government has been commended by many in the international community for its response to Venezuelan arrivals,⁹ even as its array of program supports remains an impartial patchwork. To help regularize out-migration from Venezuela, Colombia created a Special Stay Permit (*Permiso Especial de Permanencia*, or PEP), for example, which provides Venezuelans permission to remain in the country, work legally, and access education and healthcare. The government issued 182,000 PEPs in 2017 to Venezuelans with a valid passport who had entered the

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country legally. To address the large numbers of irregular Venezuelans already in the country, Colombia conducted a large-scale registration effort in 2018 that allowed many Venezuelans to apply for and receive PEP even though they lacked a passport.¹⁰ As of December 2018, an estimated 453,000 Venezuelans have PEP.¹¹ Similarly, in August 2019, Colombia announced that it would extend citizenship to over 24,000 undocumented children of Venezuelan migrants.¹² Colombia does not automatically grant citizenship to those born inside its borders unless at least one parent is a legal resident. Without this new pathway to citizenship, UNHCR warned that many of these children would have remained stateless.¹³

Despite these accommodations by the Colombian government, a significant number of Venezuelans in Colombia are socially and economically vulnerable. The World Bank estimates that 105,766 are currently living in Colombia without status,¹⁴ and media outlets have reported that some have been recruited by dissident FARC fighters, the rebel National Liberation Army (ELN), and right-wing paramilitaries.¹⁵ The UN estimates that over 600,000 are food insecure and even more are in need of health care services, and some warn that as Venezuela trends toward becoming a failed state the number of people who are displaced could reach 10 million, with millions more inside the country who are struggling to stay alive.¹⁶

The large number of migrants arriving in Colombia in such a short period of time and the diversity of their needs would be challenging for any host country to accommodate. However, in the case of Colombia, the relatively sudden and unexpected impact of their arrival must be absorbed by a country that is in the early stages of recovering from a protracted armed conflict and the peace accords signed in 2016. It is understandable, therefore, that these circumstances will strain Colombian

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institutions. It is less clear how these institutions will build the capacity to address the emerging needs of these vulnerable populations—or why, under certain circumstances, they might not.

The scale of the problem and the ongoing political uncertainty in Venezuela make it difficult to calibrate the most effective response in receptor countries like Colombia. Yet, even though healthcare, education, and social assistance for Venezuelan migrants is estimated to cost the Colombian government between 0.2% and 0.4% of GDP each year, Colombia’s macroeconomic stability has been unwavering amidst years of healthy economic growth.¹⁷ For this reason among other factors, the international humanitarian response community views the case of Colombia as a fertile opportunity to maximize the “humanitarian-development nexus”—that is, the intersection of humanitarian assistance and development—particularly associated with the country’s peacebuilding initiative.¹⁸ Toward this end, in September 2018, the UN, members of the international community, and government partners launched the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform to organize the response to Venezuelan migrants and refugees in receptor countries throughout Latin America.¹⁹ The regional platform is comprised of 41 participant organizations, including 17 UN-affiliate agencies, 15 NGOs, two international funders, and the Red Cross.²⁰ Then, in December 2018, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) announced their framework for the interagency response—the first of its kind in the Americas—called the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP).²¹ The RMRP is an operational blueprint that aims to provide “a holistic, integrated, and comprehensive response to the needs of refugees and migrants” and to bridge the short-term humanitarian response with efforts at strengthening development initiatives in the region that have a longer time horizon.²²

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Parties to the Inter-Agency Platform anticipate “continued and exacerbated challenges” in receptor countries (including Colombia) that are absorbing Venezuelan migrants, particularly their “institutional capacity and coordination” and their ability to provide direct assistance in the service of social and economic integration.²³ Local organizations that provide services for Venezuelans may have an influential—if limited—role in this process. Therefore, it is important to understand how they are able to sustain, modify, and, if possible, scale up their services to address the growing—and evolving—needs of Venezuelan migrants. The importance of these services is acute, especially given the ongoing need for food and shelter. However, the broader impact of this service infrastructure may become more necessary in the months and years to come. The longer the political and economic crisis in Venezuela persists, the more likely that today’s migrants to Colombia will become settled residents whose lives are woven into the social and economic fabric of the communities where they live. To the extent that they remain marginalized due to factors such as legal status and underemployment, the stability of security and governance structures in Colombia will be limited at best.

III. STUDY DESIGN

Data for this study come from in-depth interviews with organizational directors and other project personnel who are engaged in providing direct services for Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. In-depth interviews with respondents are structured broadly by the following domains: how they are adapting to the evolving needs of Venezuelan migrants, the challenges of leveraging limited resources to address these needs, how these providers negotiate resource scarcity, and how providers access additional supports (or not) in order to more effectively meet the needs of the diverse population of Venezuelan migrants.

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The study focuses on two cities in Colombia: (a) Cúcuta, which the World Bank classifies as a densely-populated border city that has been affected by the sudden increase in Venezuelan migrants, and (b) Bogotá, described by the World Bank as a developed city where interventions to secure access to key resources for Venezuelans are less necessary.²⁴ Both cities provide a distinct window into how the existence of organizational networks, partners, and resources may interact to differentially shape the reality of delivering services for Venezuelan migrants. The sample includes organizations that deliver services directly to Venezuelan migrants in these three cities, as well as a small convenience sample (n=25) of Venezuelan migrants who have benefited from services at these organizations. There is no single directory of organizations that serve Venezuelan migrants. Therefore, initial organizations were identified based on recommendations from key informants within the larger humanitarian apparatus coordinated by the Inter-Agency Group for Mixed Migratory Flows (known as GIFMM for its name in Spanish) in Bogotá, USAID, and other entities.

Using a snowball sampling approach, the researcher relied on referrals from initial respondents to identify additional providers. To avoid sampling on the same network, the researcher also examined recent media coverage of these areas to identify additional organizational “starts.” While this sampling approach is limited—it is not representative of all organizations in any one of these locales—it is common in organization-level research when no single directory exists. A benefit of this approach is that the sample is not limited to (although it includes) the GIFMM member organizations, allowing the researcher to examine the other aspects of the humanitarian relief response that may not be captured in other reports. A total of 37 individuals were interviewed for the study, representing 20 different organizations, government partners, and international entities. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for the purposes of thematic analysis. A thorough review of current reports

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and related literature and interviews with migration experts at Colombian academic institutions provide an additional check on the analysis.

The findings are organized based on the common trajectory of Venezuelan migrants: from border crossing to receptor city. Attention is also given to the experience of migrants from the border city of Cúcuta to Bogotá—a transitional period when migrants are particularly vulnerable. After examining the organizational context of each of these stages (border city, transit, and receptor city), the paper addresses key gaps and challenges. Across all of these sections, the paper considers issues related to policing, security, and public safety that were articulated by respondents (both organizations and migrants) in the study.

IV. FROM THE BORDER TO RECEPTOR CITY

They told us that there were shelters ahead when we left Cúcuta, so we kept walking. Then we were able to get rides [by hitchhiking], traveling from one shelter to the next. This is how we got to Bucaramanga, getting past one of the most dangerous areas due to the cold weather. In Bucaramanga we received a lot of help...and they provided us with transport to Bogotá. (Irregular Venezuelan migrant interviewed at a shelter in Bogotá)

The majority of Venezuelan migrants enter Colombia at (or near) two official crossing points: Maicao or Cúcuta. These two cities represent two of the seven official border crossing points along the Venezuela/Colombia border, but there are an undetermined number of *trochas*, or informal paths, that are increasingly used by migrants. Migrants who use *trochas* do not have legal status in Colombia. Reflecting these broader trends, the majority of migrants in the study crossed at either Maicao or Cúcuta. Because these are relatively small cities, Venezuelan migrants now make up a significant percentage of their respective populations. Considerable attention has been given to these border areas for this reason; the migration crisis was felt here first. Border cities remain a flashpoint for the variety of problems associated with suddenly hosting a large migrant population.

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The World Bank has created a typology to describe the areas receiving Venezuelan migrants. Along with Barranquilla, Bogotá is a “metropolitan area of high incidence”—that is, a receptor city that has absorbed a large number of Venezuelans. Yet, the World Bank describes these cities as highly developed areas where “interventions to improve access are not a priority.”²⁵ This is largely because cities like Bogotá presumably have developed service infrastructure to accommodate the range of needs presented by the migrants. In addition, it is less challenging to absorb 250,000 new migrant arrivals for a city whose metro area has over 10 million inhabitants. The border region is more sensitive to population fluctuations and less equipped to accommodate the needs of migrants. Therefore, the other classifications used by the World Bank refer to two different types of border zones: those that are of mixed development and densely populated (Cúcuta) and those that are “lagging” due to high poverty rates and limited resources (Maicao). Given their proximity to the border, these cities have historically been integral to quotidian commercial activity. Most recently, Venezuelan *pendulares* (literally pendular migrants) cross the border for the day to buy or sell goods before returning home. Although numerous institutions in Maicao and Cúcuta have organized around the humanitarian needs in their cities, many migrants are opting to settle in other Colombian cities—such as Bogotá—or travel on to other South American countries.

Maicao, located in La Guajira, is one of the poorest regions in Colombia, far from any major city. It is home to 13 informal migrant settlements, and its shelters and organizations are straining to help. Basic needs, such as housing and food assistance, remain critical concerns, and USAID is particularly concerned about the well-being of migrants in the city. Other members of the international community in Colombia share this concern. In March 2019, UNHCR erected 60 tents in Maicao with the capacity to accommodate 350 people for an estimated cost of \$1.7 million.²⁶ Refugees can stay in

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the camp for up to one month. The emergence of the camp was significant, because it represented a step towards officially acknowledging Venezuelan migrants as refugees. For this reason, Colombian officials insist it is “a center for temporary attention” rather than a refugee camp.²⁷ Indeed, the Colombian government has been resistant to the idea of formal refugee camps since the crisis began, because under international law, refugee status merits a higher level of services and protections. Colombia has only granted refugee status to a small number of individuals: an estimated 5,303 received asylum between 2014 and 2018.²⁸

Relative to Maicao, Cúcuta has a larger and more developed humanitarian response infrastructure. It is also where nearly half (48%) of official Venezuelan border crossings occur. There have been a reported 48 executed projects in La Guajira (the department where Maicao is located), but national and international actors have launched 74 projects in Cúcuta’s department of Norte de Santander.²⁹ However, the city is still struggling to meet the needs of migrants in the city. The government of Colombia operates only one shelter in Cúcuta. Civil society organizations and the Catholic Church attempt to fill in the gap, but an estimated 1,000 Venezuelans sleep on the streets every night.³⁰ In addition to being a focal point for humanitarian assistance, USAID reports that Cúcuta has also become a staging ground for ferrying humanitarian supplies into Venezuela. In February 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense sent five planes loaded with humanitarian commodities provided by USAID, including food, hygiene kits, medical supplies, and other goods.³¹ As of May 2019, however, many of these supplies were still being kept in warehouses along the border, awaiting the optimal political moment before distributing them in Venezuela. Ironically, many Venezuelans in need of these supplies were sleeping nearby in the streets of Cúcuta. While the

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perishable supplies were later distributed inside Colombia,³² the symbolism of this delay did little to bolster the U.S. reputation within the humanitarian community.

Respondents in Cúcuta repeatedly mentioned these types of tensions that are frustrating the humanitarian response in this region. The GIFMM in Cúcuta is organized into subgroups called *mesas*, or tables, two of which are education and health. Other members of the international community acknowledge that the GIFMM in Cúcuta is a model for the country because of the number of organizations it includes and the impact it has had. However, members of the GIFMM in Cúcuta also note that their efforts are limited in what they can accomplish. Ultimately, they need the support and resources that only the national government can provide. Using education as an example, over 100 teachers are needed, as well as expanded facilities, to accommodate the growing number of children. The numerous systems involved with this expansion include recruiting and training teachers, as well as paying them a respectable salary, yet according to study respondents, none of these infrastructural needs are within the purview of the GIFMM. The field of healthcare is similarly challenged, but even more complicated. Another issue that is the exclusive domain of the national government is providing Venezuelan migrants with pathways to legal status. The number of irregular migrants in Cúcuta continues to grow. Respondent organizations state that it remains one of the greatest issues they face. In response to these challenges, GIFMM members in Cúcuta described the need for a “complete protection program” that would address the range of issues that the *mesas* are organized to address.

The interagency coordinator of the GIFMM in Cúcuta stated that all relevant organizations in the city are part of the coordinated effort to provide relief, but some smaller church groups have also assumed some direct responsibilities with meeting the needs of migrants. One Protestant church that participated in this study runs a shelter outside of Cúcuta that has the capacity to house 50 people and

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provides food and clothing to 320 people each day. The church is not representative of Protestant churches in Colombia, if only because it is a large, multi-site institution that has the resources to operate a “mercy and justice” ministry. Funded by donations from parishioners, the church pays the monthly rent for the shelter in Cúcuta (\$150) and keeps it stocked with food and clothing. The church has gained even more attention, however, for its efforts to coordinate a system of shelters along the route from Cúcuta to Bucaramanga for those migrants who choose to leave Cúcuta. Many travel on foot, walking hundreds of miles along a narrow road through the mountains. They are called *los caminantes*, because this is what they do: they walk.

Los caminantes: uniquely vulnerable

The church created a website that provides information about the shelters along the road from Cúcuta to Bucaramanga. There are 17 such shelters, 14 of which are run and funded by individual families/households—many of whom are themselves poor. Each shelter is independent, usually a family that agrees to let a certain number of migrants stay the night in their home. Each shelter registers on the website and lists the resources available (e.g., number of beds, available food, etc.), as well as any needs they have (e.g., more fuel for cooking). The site allows providers to log in and update their information or enter data about a new shelter that may have recently opened or closed.

The church created a map that shows the locations of the shelters, as well as the elevation of the walk itself—all with the intention of serving *camminantes*. The goal of the geocoded web-based information system is to improve information flow and, ultimately, supply chain logistics. The route is color-coded based on how long a migrant could travel in a given day. This rough estimation helps inform where they strategically “position” shelters. The church is frustrated with the community of international organizations that is trying to facilitate the relief effort: “They have come many times to

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ask and to see and to take notes. But it bothers me that they come to gather their data when they haven't put in one dollar.” The lack of investment from other (potential) partners is partly attributable to the church's unwillingness to compromise their efficient approach to accommodate the quality control requirements of organizations like IOM. The church has cobbled together a shelter system that it views as adequate. Although the church is not formally part of the local GIFMM in Cúcuta or elsewhere, it has partnered with several humanitarian assistance organizations. The Red Cross has donated new mattresses for the shelter in Cúcuta, for example, as well as eight or nine stoves and refrigerators for shelters along the route to Bucaramanga. Another international aid organization has provided the church-organized shelters with water filters and has donated money for cooking gas.

The case of the church-organized shelter system is noteworthy for several reasons. First, as reported by another respondent who is familiar with the humanitarian response at the national level, the church-organized shelter system is viewed as a significant contribution to the overall relief effort. *Los caminantes* are extremely vulnerable, and the improvised series of shelters—literally private homeowners who have opened their houses to migrants—fill a gap that no other entity has been able to address as well. Second, the church has developed its own system to manage supply chain logistics. The web-based portal they maintain enables the church to communicate information about products that a given shelter might need, as well as pressing concerns experienced by individual migrants. It also prints thousands of maps that give instructions on how to locate the various shelters and distributes them to Venezuelans who are walking the route to Bucaramanga. This approach does not always work—sometimes migrants will stop a mile before a shelter without realizing they could have a place to stay, and sometimes they will arrive and the shelter will be full—but the level of coordination accomplished by one religious entity is noteworthy.

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A third reason this improvised shelter system is significant is that the church has largely eschewed opportunities to more formally join the coordinated relief effort. The church director interviewed for this study reported that, in order for the church to receive funding to expand its shelters, international organizations will require that it change its approach. Meeting IOM requirements for any given shelter, the church fears, will mean it has to spend time and resources that will dilute its overall impact. The respondent stated that outside funders will come to evaluate the quality of the shelters and say, “This bed is on the floor, which will make people cold,” or “We tested this water, and the pH is not ideal.” From his perspective, the international agencies are encumbered by such requirements. He is not opposed to having higher standards, but no one is putting up the money to build a larger, nicer shelter, or provide quality transportation options for migrants. He argues that something is better than nothing: “We do what we can do with what we have.” From his perspective, more funding would require more oversight to ensure the shelters are managing the funds properly. This is part of the reason why the church has chosen not to pursue funding from the international aid network.

As with all organizations that are part of this study, the church’s shelter system represents a work in progress. It has never provided these kinds of services, so there have been lessons along the way about how to deliver assistance. The church has learned not to give shoes and clothes away for free, for example. Individuals would come back to the same place numerous times to get more clothes, then turn around and sell it to other migrants. Therefore, the church charges a nominal fee for clothing and shoes (500 pesos, or about 15-20 cents; most of the respondent organizations in this study that distributed clothing reported that they have adopted the same practice). The church’s efforts to expand its programs have not always been successful: another example of how the church-as-relief-provider

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has learned by trial and error is in the case of helping *caminantes* in a major park in Bucaramanga. In 2018, the church launched a one-month effort to organize leaders in the Venezuelan migrant community. The leaders initially helped to run a small *comedor* (restaurant) that the church ran out of a house it rented near the park. But the church organizers later realized that one of the leaders was prostituting one of the women, and other aspects of running the *comedor* were not going as well as they could. They set up a camera to try to capture some of this disorder, which eventually led to one of the leaders being deported by the Colombian authorities. The church decided it had overextended itself, and the city of Bucaramanga agreed. The project was shut down by the city, and the church lost the money it had paid to rent the house for the year.

Additional vulnerabilities

At various points between Cúcuta and the receptor city of Bogotá, Venezuelan migrants encounter risk and vulnerability. Women are particularly targeted. The sex worker industry has absorbed Venezuelan women (and men, but to a far lesser extent) who have not been able to regularize their status. Numerous respondents identified the border city of Cúcuta as one of the primary areas where young women are exploited, but many are also forcibly recruited along the 120-mile stretch to the next city, Bucaramanga. Some *caminantes* are offered a ride at various points along the way by volunteers. While the majority of these volunteers are well-meaning, the vulnerability of the *caminantes* also creates opportunities for them to be exploited.

A similar point of exposure is in the parks where many migrants stay in Bucaramanga and in the bus terminal when they arrive in Bogotá. Several of the Bogotá-based organizations in this study have established offices in the bus terminal where they can provide Venezuelans with information and basic services. In contrast to the 120-mile stretch that many Venezuelans have walked with limited

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support, the bus terminal is a more manageable space for organizations that aim to provide assistance. As discussed below, many migrants come through the bus terminal in Bogotá, and there are dozens of humanitarian workers in blue vests who help direct them to the places in the terminal where they can receive help. There are also Colombian police present at the terminal to manage security concerns.

Regardless, some Venezuelan migrants still experience the terminal as a space where they are vulnerable. One migrant in the study reported that he was mugged in the terminal while sleeping on a bench—he lost his phone and most of his money. One respondent explained that her organization noticed that a group of taxi drivers were colluding with a sex trafficking ring to identify young women in the bus station who looked alone and uncertain. She explained the process as follows: a taxi driver would approach a woman and say he knew of a place for her to stay and/or a job, and he would then drive her to a location off site where she would be forcibly recruited as a sex worker. The respondent stated that the organization had been working in the bus terminal long enough to notice this and had contributed to the police sting that interrupted this practice.

Despite efforts by organizations to provide support and protections at these various points of vulnerability, migrants still experience considerable risk in border regions and on the roads they travel to receptor cities. These concerns directly relate to rule of law issues that Colombia will need to address as it continues to integrate Venezuelan migrants. An additional vulnerability concerns the illegal farming of coca plants for the production of cocaine.³³ Several organizations in the study stated that some migrants in Cúcuta—particularly young males—are recruited to work in the coca industry (although coca production has ostensibly declined under the current Colombian president,³⁴ the problem of recruiting Venezuelan migrants has been reported in the media, as well).³⁵ None of the migrants interviewed for this study reported being approached or pressured, but these recruiting

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efforts reportedly entice young migrants with the possibility of earning a good wage harvesting coca plants in areas throughout the interior of the country (including the areas outside of Bogotá).

V. RECEPTOR CITY: FINDING A FOOTHOLD IN BOGOTÁ

Now comes the difficult question: How are we going to pay our rent, pay for services, pay for food, pay for transportation? In order to do these basic things, in order to look for work, you have to have economic resources. This is where the knot tightens. We'll have to see how we do it...But if you ask me today, "What is your financial plan to safeguard your family?" I would not know how to answer you...This is the difficult reality of being an immigrant: just when you have an opportunity, the door closes. (Irregular migrant interviewed at an organization in Bogotá)

Bogotá has the largest concentration of Venezuelan migrants of any city in Colombia. As of July 2019, there were 285,480 in the city, over 50% more than the population in Norte de Santander (181,332) and La Guajira (152,738), the departments at the border where Cúcuta and Maicao are located.³⁶ The problems associated with Venezuelan migrants settling in Colombia are evolving quickly. Respondents agree that the available data are limited, and what data are on hand seem quickly outdated. Venezuelans migrants continue to cross the border, and the demographics of these individuals continue to evolve. However, media attention on the border regions—particularly the city of Cúcuta—belies the questions facing receptor cities that are attempting to distinguish between migrants who intend to stay and those who are simply passing through. Even this seems to be changing, however, as migrants who had previously stopped through Colombia on their way to Peru are now coming back to Colombia. Others—especially Venezuelan women—are now arriving in Colombia with their children after their partner left months earlier. These patterns are not uncommon within the migration literature: often, one family member will leave first with the intention of sending money to loved ones who remain behind, and these initial migrations are often gendered (led by men). Respondents in this study, however, emphasized that women and whole families are now becoming

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the prime movers. In some cases, women with children who arrive in Bogotá report that they have lost touch with their partner only months after he left. These circumstances contribute to the grave degree of vulnerability experienced by many Venezuelans in receptor cities like Bogotá. Repeatedly, respondents noted that women with young children, single women, and—to a lesser extent—youth are among the most vulnerable.

Finding shelter

Upon arriving in Bogotá, Venezuelan migrants must first attend to basic needs such as food and shelter. The latter has proven to be particularly challenging, and many recent arrivals spend the night in or around the central bus terminal in Bogotá. In November 2018, the city of Bogotá attempted to address this problem by creating a tent city. The tent city temporarily hosted 500 Venezuelans before closing down in January 2019 due to mismanagement, poor sanitation, and crime.³⁷ The intention of the tent camp was to provide better shelter for Venezuelan migrants who were staying in a “shanty town” next to the main bus terminal in Bogotá. It also symbolized something greater, however: recognition that, like the UNHCR camp in Maicao, Venezuelan migrants—regardless of their status—deserve a broader spectrum of rights and protections.

Since the closure of the tent city, the international community has stepped in to find other ways to address the housing concern. In May 2018, for example, a surge of migrants again began sleeping at and near the bus terminal. This time, however, the IOM introduced a temporary program to relocate them by paying for their bus fares to Ecuador and Peru. Numerous families that participated in this study had applied for the program. While it allowed them to more quickly continue their journey, the program was a clear effort to manage the migration flow rather than address structural problems facing migrants. With shelters at capacity in Bogotá, paying for migrants to travel

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on to other destinations helps to alleviate their immediate housing needs—as well as the Colombian government’s burden to recognize them as deserving of housing. Yet, this assistance was also of real value to the migrant families who would have otherwise had to stay in Bogotá until they earned enough to continue with the journey.

Numerous organizations in Bogotá—including the city itself—have stepped up to provide temporary housing for Venezuelan migrants and their families. These shelters range in capacity, but they generally provide 40 to 50 individuals a place to sleep for three to four days. Beneficiaries often learn about the shelters when they arrive at the bus terminal, where the city government operates a migrant center that helps to orient them to resources in the city (a religious organization also runs an intake facility in the terminal). When they arrive at a shelter, they often receive some form of basic medical attention—often seeing a nurse or other medical professional—and an orientation to other services in the city. (See the appendix for profiles of two such shelters: one a private facility funded by a religious organization, and the other a public facility funded by the city of Bogotá.)

There are reportedly about 15 such shelters around the city, although at the time of data collection there was no master directory with information about their services—let alone real-time information about available beds in a given shelter (respondents at the city of Bogotá indicated that they were developing such a directory, but it was not yet available). Venezuelans who come through the bus terminal are more likely to learn about these resources, but only if they happen to get referred to the resources that are located there. Other migrants who enter the city elsewhere must rely on word of mouth to learn about such resources.

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Identifying and reaching the most vulnerable migrants

The single greatest concern cross-cutting all other needs among Venezuelan migrants is legal status. One respondent organization has worked for over two years with Venezuelan migrants, for example, and has developed a sophisticated, multi-tiered approach to serving them—unless they are irregular. The core value that this religious organization seeks to cultivate is self-sufficiency, and this requires connecting migrants to the labor market. The organization has a building where new immigrants are registered, and they are assessed for psycho-social needs (e.g., mental health counseling) and job readiness. Regarding the latter, some are identified as professionals who have skill sets that easily translate to relatively high-paying jobs in Colombia. Many others, however, need basic workforce development services. These programs are offered in another building that has its own staff and crew of volunteers. On site is a childcare program, as well. Newcomers first process through a series of classes facilitated by a psychologist in which they are “integrated” into the cultural context of Colombia. This involves a module wherein they each light a candle in honor of a loved one in Venezuela and place it on a map of their country in the middle of the room to represent this transnational familial connection. The psychologist then gently welcomes them to their new home—Colombia—and explains that it is possible to meaningfully join this new society without severing ties to Venezuela.

The model for this program has only recently developed in the wake of large-scale Venezuelan migration to Colombia. It is striking because of what it represents—an organization’s effort to buffer the cultural and social jolt of fleeing one’s country—as well as who it excludes: irregular migrants. Because it is the first module in a series of workforce development trainings aimed at helping Venezuelans find work, those who are in the country without authorization are ineligible for the

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program. Regardless, this organization—and others like it—are important contributors to the regional effort that is coordinating assistance for the most vulnerable Venezuelans. As with the other religious organizations in the study, however, this program does not draw on funding from the humanitarian effort. Instead, these organizations build capacity by consolidating existing programs and reallocating staff members to new projects. They solicit funds from parishioners or from the church hierarchy, and they find ways to manage operations with volunteer support.

The organizations that are best positioned to assist vulnerable Venezuelan migrants are limited by the legal structures that constrain irregular migrants from securing formal employment. In the case of a workforce development organization (see appendix), their inability to serve unauthorized migrants is not necessarily because they lack a more diverse funding base (although they were concerned about funding at the time of the interview). Rather, this organization had already developed its approach to workforce development prior to the influx of Venezuelan migrants. Although the module meant to welcome Venezuelans to Colombia was developed directly in response to the needs of this emerging population, the other components of their services—including the staff, facilities, and programming—were part of their long-standing effort to help work-ready Colombians (re)enter the labor market.

VI. KEY GAPS AND CHALLENGES

They have told us that it will take more than two years to process an asylum application. But while you're waiting you cannot request PEP, and without PEP you cannot work. Without work you don't eat, you don't clothe yourself, and you don't have anything else. And how do you access the health system if you don't have money? (Irregular migrant interviewed at an organization in Bogotá)

Rule of law concerns

Study respondents—both organizations and migrants—answered questions related to policing, interactions with migration authorities, and safety (both exposure to violence and perceived

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safety). Some migrants stated that they had been mugged, and many reported feeling discriminated against in the workplace or while looking for work. The majority of migrants who were in a temporary shelter at the time of the interview had also spent at least one night sleeping outside, whether at a park in Bogotá or at some point since crossing the border into Colombia. To a person, these respondents emphasized the danger of being exposed in this way. There were also stories of having cell phones unnecessarily confiscated by migration authorities, fearing reaching the point of desperation when they would need to resort to sex work in order to feed their children, and experiencing xenophobia while in Colombia. In general, migrant study participants did not say they were fearful of the police or afraid of law enforcement authorities. One woman explained that, in her experience, the corruption that plagues Venezuela makes the police in Colombia seem trustworthy and reliable. Another said that she is more afraid of other Venezuelan migrants than Colombians because she perceives that they are in a state of desperation and more likely to take advantage of her. It is important to emphasize that respondents may not have felt comfortable talking openly with the researcher about their experiences with Colombian authorities. Therefore, incidence of victimization may be underreported. It is also important to underscore that the study relies on an extremely small sample of migrants, and it is a convenience sample that is not representative of migrants who receive services at these organizations—let alone all Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. With these limitations in mind, there are two important observations to be made from the study data.

First, interviews with respondent organizations largely reflect the data collected from individual migrants and their families. In apparent contradiction to this trend, other official reports and media accounts have documented the vulnerability of migrants to victimization and police abuse. One possible explanation is that the most vulnerable Venezuelan migrants are not receiving services

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at these organizations. In other words, while the empirical evidence of victimization and police abuse in this study is inconsistent at best, this is not an indication that these problems do not exist or that they are less worrisome than some other reports would suggest. To the contrary, it may reflect a general failure of the existing services infrastructure to effectively serve the most vulnerable Venezuelan migrants. The true depth and scope of this problem may reach these organizations by chance, severely limiting their ability to understand and address it. Support for this hypothesis comes from an interview with an organization in Bogotá that exclusively works with women who have been forced into the sex trade. While sex work in cities like Bogotá and Cúcuta is known to concentrate in certain areas, this organization finds that the Venezuelan women who increasingly turn to this option include mothers and wives whose families do not even know they have reached this point of economic desperation. As potential beneficiaries of the services that the organization provides, such women are difficult to serve and protect because they are scattered across the city and do not want to be identified. Some of them are women with college degrees who worked for years in formal professional fields in Venezuela. The organization finds that the shame and fear that these women experience creates additional distance between them and the services that might help them avoid or desist from sex work.

Second, respondents are developing strategies to protect against potential safety threats. Numerous migrant parents, for example, explained that they were able to more easily get rides and assistance because they were traveling with young children. Several migrants said that Colombians graciously transported them and their children, while other single adults who they traveled with were overlooked. This helped them avoid some of the most dangerous stretches of the road taken by *los caminantes* on the way to Bogotá. While in Bogotá, a number of migrants explained that they tried to sleep in public spaces with groups of other migrants who they felt they could trust. They took turns

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keeping watch at night. While one couple said their group had been chased away by a private security officer because they were sleeping in an outdoor shopping complex near the bus terminal, most of the migrants said that congregating in this way was helpful.

Legal status

These findings suggest that, at least in the case of Bogotá, the organizations on the ground are addressing vulnerable populations—within certain structural constraints, as in the case of irregular migrants—in ways that build on their previous expertise and knowledge. Respondents repeatedly mentioned that some groups face systematic barriers to long-term integration. There are some organizations (and at least one shelter) that are specifically designed to serve sex workers, but other vulnerable populations do not appear to have services tailored for their needs. Several entities mentioned adolescents and young adults as one such population—particularly those who may not enroll in school upon arrival. Yet, respondents only mentioned youth twice.

Indeed, much depends on how Venezuelan migrants are classified: as irregular and temporary residents, or as refugees who merit a broader spectrum of rights. UNHCR has determined that many deserve international protection, but there are few robust mechanisms for asylum determination in receiving countries. Instead, Colombia and other South American countries have adopted quasi-regularization programs. In the case of Colombia, these temporary protections only apply to a percentage of Venezuelans in the country. In July 2017, Colombia introduced the *Permiso Especial de Permanencia* (PEP) which provides eligible Venezuelans with a two-year visa and the right to public health care and work authorization. To be eligible, an individual must (1) be in Colombia as of July 2017, (2) have entered the country with a passport at an official checkpoint, (3) have no criminal history, and (4) have no pending deportation order. The PEP was available through October 2017. It

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was offered a second time in February 2018 and again in August 2018. In December 2018, Colombian authorities estimated that 59% of Venezuelan migrants in the country had PEP, but over 479,000 were irregular.³⁸ Moreover, the cost of absorbing the rising number of Venezuelan migrants is prompting the governments of Peru and Ecuador to restrict access—a trend that may further strain Colombian institutions and portend heightened restrictions there, as well. As the authors of one recent report argue, “The risk going forward is that the existing patchwork of uncoordinated, discretionary migration policies gives way to a race to the bottom, whereby countries that can limit the entrance of Venezuelans do, while those that cannot—notably Colombia, which shares a 2,200-kilometer border with Venezuela—are left to shoulder ever increasing costs.”³⁹

Barriers to scaling up services

In addition to examining *who* receives services and which of the most vulnerable migrant subgroups may be excluded, this study examines the characteristics of the organizations themselves. Most striking, respondents emphasized the important role of religious institutions. As described above, the sampling approach was a multi-step process that started with entities involved in coordinating the regional response. These were international organizations, not religious institutions. Yet, they consistently pointed to the central role of churches and faith-based organizations to the task of delivering services to Venezuelans.

According to these respondents, the Catholic Church has been a significant actor. This may be unsurprising, given the Catholic history of the country. However, various Protestant churches have also been important to the effort. Numerous respondents pointed to the importance of religious institutions—entities that have been providing shelter for displaced persons for decades. Importantly, they are located in major receptor cities—such as Bogotá—as well border areas where the needs of

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migrants are more visible and acute. As noted above, these entities operate largely with their own funding sources and are therefore able to function independently from the larger bureaucratic humanitarian apparatus. Indeed, one respondent stated that his church views the international community and the larger humanitarian relief effort as expensive and inefficient—his church appreciates it, but does not seek to formally join it: “The concern is that much of the humanitarian aid is used up by the administrative bureaucracy instead of reaching the population that most needs it.”

Religious organizations in this study, though operational and effective, are not positioned to scale up their services. They have technical knowledge about the needs of Venezuelan migrants on the ground and experience with delivering services to address these needs, but they do not know how to access funding available through the international apparatus. Even if they did, they lack the capacity—all of their resources are directed to the task of providing resources. They do not have additional staff members who can dedicate time to complete the paperwork involved with soliciting funding from the international humanitarian community, let alone conceptualize how to best scale up their services to reach a larger number of Venezuelans. Moreover, they are mission-driven and guided by an ethic that prioritizes service delivery over administrative sophistication. This is not to suggest that such partnerships do not exist, or that there is no potential for future such collaborations. The larger and more developed religious organizations in this study were not opposed to accepting funding from the international humanitarian community. Indeed, one had just finished a small project funded by UNHCR and the other was launching a joint project at the border with funding from USAID’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID-OFDA). However, there appeared to be a gap between the ambitions of the humanitarian relief apparatus and the service providers in this study who were

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operating parallel to, but largely independent of, the regional coordination team. It is possible that this will be rectified once the coordination team is able to fully implement its interagency framework. Yet, an organizational perspective suggests this may be more than a time lag. There is something distinct about these faith-based organizations—whether it is their mission-driven organizational approach, limited capacity, or both—that renders them only partially compatible with the bureaucratic requirements of the regional humanitarian aid operation.

Incorporating new types of organizations

Another organization type is represented by Venezuelan mutual aid organizations. Venezuelan mutual aid organizations are entities created by Venezuelan migrants to serve co-ethnics. Many of them lack a formal structure and have only a Facebook page as a formal point of reference. They are important enough, however, that one member of the humanitarian coordination team had compiled a list of them, and numerous other respondents mentioned the value of the role they play. If some of these associations seem only loosely organized around a shared interest in food or culture, others have been in Colombia for over a decade and are viewed as experienced political actors. One respondent explained that Venezuela has a long practice of social movements. She contrasted this with the Colombian context and suggested that the history of violence in Colombia has eroded trust outside of family circles. If Colombians are private and less civic minded—more interested in family than in community solidarity—she said Venezuelans are accustomed to working together to pursue civic interests. This study does not draw on empirical data to test this claim. However, there is a significant literature on ethnic associations and the function they serve in immigrant receiving contexts. Historically, ethnic associations (or immigrant mutual aid societies) provide a buffer for immigrant newcomers, offering them a social space where they can connect with their peers, as well as a channel

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through which they can secure valuable resources and information. These associations and the ethnic networks they comprise help ethnic newcomers find jobs and housing, for example, whether in Colombia or elsewhere.

Some organizations have struggled to shift from serving IDPs to working with Venezuelans—developing a “response mentality.” Some smaller organizations have been able to receive funding from the larger humanitarian apparatus, but this has also meant a loss of some control and the challenge of excessive paperwork. This is part of the benefit of working through religious institutions where they have infrastructure, volunteers, and some consistent funding already in place.

Responding quickly, but planning for the long-term

The situation for Venezuelan migrants in Colombia is a humanitarian emergency that, as explained in this paper, presents challenges for basic economic and social needs, stabilization, security, and rule of law. As noted above, the evolving nature of the issues on the ground reflect changes in the demographics of the migration flow itself, and the changing policies in Colombia—and in other receptor countries—determine who can enter legally. At the same time, there is also uncertainty regarding the political situation in Venezuela, making it unclear when the out-migration of Venezuelans will abate. This mix of short- and long-term considerations makes it extremely difficult to optimize a coordinated assistance campaign. For example, given the uncertainties of the moment, 2017 was a year when the Colombian government needed to respond to the very real problem at the border, but it was unclear whether the migration flow from Venezuela would be a short- or long-term issue. In effect, the government introduced more short-term resolutions—like PEP—rather than legislation that would create a more long-term answer to the problem.

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Accordingly, the organizations in this study with programs that target Venezuelan migrants tend to have a six-to-twelve-month time horizon for the services they provide. In general, this time-bound approach is driven by funding restrictions, but these are reflective of donors who view the current situation as a humanitarian issue rather than from a longer-term development perspective. One exception is a large Protestant church that is part of the study. Some of their services—the coordination of shelters along the route from Cúcuta to Bucaramanga, for example—are not focused on development, per se, but they have other programming in Cúcuta that aims to spur micro-enterprise among Venezuelan entrepreneurs. Still, perhaps because they are fueled by donations and volunteer staffing, this church does not seem constrained by the same time horizon as some of the other programs.

U.S. Government involvement

The potential for disaster assistance and development efforts to go hand in hand is what one respondent described as a “unique opportunity” to actually work at the intersection of these two fields, with funding for both the short- and long-term aspects of this work. The humanitarian-development nexus is acknowledged by the UN and other international organizations. The goal of this nexus is to avoid redundancy and gaps, as well as to develop shared interpretation of the context and shared objectives for collective outcomes. Some respondents were less hopeful, however, expressing that the case of Colombia stands out as a highly politicized humanitarian effort. At the time of data collection, the United States was attempting to bring critical relief supplies across the border into Venezuela, but President Maduro refused to allow the shipment to enter. Meanwhile, people on both sides of the border remained hungry and in need of medicine. Some respondents identified that international partners may develop the perception that the United States is using humanitarian aid for the purposes

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of political negotiation. Respondents indicated that this perception—whether an accurate assessment or not—may have implications for how U.S. Government agencies in Colombia are incorporated into the larger coordinated response, and in turn limit the impact of U.S. Government investment in the region, ultimately truncating the short- and long-term intervention.

Based on interview data, USAID initially provided a relatively small amount of assistance, in part because the size and longevity of the problem had not fully declared itself. After consultations with a variety of stakeholders, in an effort to increase impact, they decided to focus on three priority areas: health, food, and multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA).⁴⁰ MPCA is unconditional cash that recipients can choose to spend based on their own priorities, whether rent, school, food, or even cash remittances to family in Venezuela. According to one respondent, “It is cost-efficient and gives them dignity.” A monitoring report from a UNHCR MPCA program in Jordan—the second largest in the world—suggests that this approach is effective with refugees. The report indicates that beneficiaries primarily use the cash assistance on rent, food, and utilities, and report a relatively low level of food insecurity.⁴¹

Given the success of similar initiatives elsewhere, USAID plans to increase investment in MPCA in 2019.⁴² The intention of the cash assistance program is to provide vulnerable individuals including not just Venezuelan migrants, but generally children, pregnant and lactating mothers, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly, with a supplement that will allow them to buy needed items. It is administratively efficient and cheap to implement. Venezuelan migrants will learn about the program when they are referred by other agencies, but one risk associated with this approach is that it might not reach the most vulnerable people. Some other major international organizations in Colombia are also switching over to cash-based programs and have a mandate from the Colombian

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government to operate in the border regions, while USAID providers will now shift to receptor cities. While some respondents indicated that large receptor cities can absorb migrants more easily, other respondents observed that the needs of migrants in big cities such as Bogotá are in fact less visible and more diffuse; as a result, it is more difficult to mount an effective intervention to support the most vulnerable Venezuelans in these places.

The Colombian government insisted that the amount of cash assistance not exceed what is available through the national welfare system. As a result, USAID providers are only able to give each beneficiary the equivalent of \$1/day—half of what is now considered by global standards as extreme poverty, and only 25% of what USAID providers were originally providing (in 2018). USAID was able to expand the amount of time one can participate in the program (now six months instead of three), but this is still inadequate to tip the scales—it is merely supplemental. While cash assistance is one of the most effective ways to help vulnerable populations, it is also the quintessential “handout” and likely feeds into the criticism that many organizational respondents have of Venezuelan migrants. That is, respondent organizations consistently articulated concerns that Venezuelans do not know how to work in part because they are accustomed to a government-subsidized way of life—arguably a thinly-veiled bias against immigrant newcomers, and possibly reflective of chilling tolerance for Venezuelans at the national level.⁴³

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The U.S. Government should increase funding for programs that serve highly marginalized Venezuelans.** Local organizations engaged in humanitarian work must have access to funding streams that incentivize outreach to the most vulnerable Venezuelan

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migrants. It is possible that those who are more at risk of victimization, human trafficking, workplace abuse, and mistreatment by Colombian authorities are less likely to access the services provided by local organizations. Access to these services is already limited, and many only hear about existing programs by word of mouth. There are some limited programs and services in place that target certain vulnerable groups—such as sex workers—but programs for other groups—such as youth—are virtually nonexistent in receptor cities like Bogotá. The creation and expansion of effective community-based programs to serve the most vulnerable migrants will greatly enhance inclusion, social stability, and rule of law. The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform—led by UNHCR and IOM—can build on its robust network of partners to strengthen outreach and programming for the most vulnerable Venezuelans in Colombia. However, to do so they will need additional funding that targets programs that are already effective at working with these populations. In cases where local organizations avoid donor funding out of concern for their ability to meet donors’ administrative requirements—as discussed in this report—the U.S. Government and other donors should explore possibilities for facilitating and funding partnerships of local organizations led by larger local organizations with greater capacity to meet donor requirements.

- **The Colombian government must expand legalization programs and recognize Venezuelans as refugees.** The Colombian government should prioritize the expansion of PEP to ensure that all irregular Venezuelans have the possibility to engage in the formal labor market. This will not resolve the problem of labor market displacement, but it will help (one study estimated that more than 50 percent of urban workers in Colombia were working in the informal sector in 2013, well before the Venezuelan out-migration began in force).⁴⁴ In June

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2019 Colombia announced its plan to issue temporary work permits.⁴⁵ This is a step in the right direction, but many predict that the impending collapse of Venezuela will lead to the displacement of millions more. Colombia and other neighboring countries must go further than temporary programs to recognize displaced Venezuelans as refugees. This is in keeping with the 1984 Cartagena Declaration,⁴⁶ and consistent with Colombia's (largely) welcoming response to Venezuelans thus far. This is only tenable, however, with increased international support for short-term humanitarian relief and long-term development efforts associated with absorbing large numbers of Venezuelans.

- **The coordinated humanitarian response effort should continue to expand its network of partner organizations.** The interagency team that is coordinating the response should create smaller funding opportunities for service providers that may not have the capacity to compete for larger grant opportunities. With the extensive volunteer base and established rapport that these organizations have with the populations they serve, a small grant may yield significant returns. These efforts should intentionally include key leaders within the religious community—a central institution in Colombia—to draw on and build upon their insights as service providers. Venezuelan associations in Colombia may also be potential partners, and donors should explore ways to catalyze the process for these associations—most of which lack nonprofit status—to develop their own programs to address the needs of Venezuelan migrants. These organizations and other smaller entities may be more effective if they were able to compete for matching grants whereby the resources they distribute to co-ethnics are augmented with grant-funded dollars.

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APPENDIX: TWO ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILES

The Appendix highlights two organizations from the study. The description below summarizes their operational potential and current constraints. They are not representative of organizations in the sample, but they offer a window into the importance of more fully integrating small service providers into the coordinated effort, as well as the potential challenges associated with doing so.

Faith-based Support Shelter (FSS)

The organization from the study that operates the Faith-based Support Shelter (FSS) (a pseudonym) has three migrant service centers in Bogotá designed to serve the most vulnerable migrants/displaced persons. The shelter receives funding primarily from the local archdiocese and an international organization, although they have also received funding from USAID in the past. The founding of the organization predates the contemporary Venezuelan crisis, but they have adapted many of their programs to serve this population. The organization is mission-driven, with the aim of “gathering and orienting migrants, especially those who are the least protected” (*acoger y orientar a los migrantes, en especial a los más desprotegidos*).

One of the organization’s migrant service centers (opened in 1992) is located in Bogotá’s major bus terminal. With funding from UNHCR, the organization recently expanded the center’s reception area to accommodate more clients. The center works together with the city of Bogotá’s migrant reception center in the terminal, which itself is part of the city’s temporary multi-site effort to help Venezuelan migrants. The faith-based parent organization also operates a workforce development center (founded in 2000) that aims to “promote holistic development” for the migrant population by offering courses in various professional areas including food preparation, cosmetology, and basic computing. However, the largest program the organization runs is the short-term shelter (founded in

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2002). FSS started with the primary goal of helping IDPs, but it has since expanded its programming to serve migrants of all kinds. With its staff of 15 employees, the shelter has the capacity to sleep 44 people. Individuals typically stay one to three days, but some may stay as long as a week if they need to. The shelter is a three-story structure in an industrial area about five kilometers from the bus station.

Since the Venezuelan crisis began, the shelter has been over capacity at several points, requiring staff to set out mattresses to accommodate the overflow. There is no doctor at the facility, but medical volunteers come to run the health clinic on site. The shelter director stated that she is far too busy with the activities at the shelter to weigh in with opinions about the larger relief effort. While she has a heightened awareness of the day-to-day needs of the most vulnerable migrants, the unrelenting demand introduces a gap between “migration management” at the regional level and the task of addressing the needs of migrants on the ground.

City shelter

One city-sponsored migrant shelter is located in a lower-income community to the south of the city center. The shelter is located on a quiet residential street far from the terminal near the city’s historic district and political epicenter. The building itself is unadorned. No sign indicates that it is a shelter of any sort. The front windows are tinted, making it impossible to see inside. Unlike the faith-based shelter described above, there is no area outside where people can congregate. The main floor of the shelter has a small reception area where newcomers register, often carrying small backpacks, a pillow, and a roll of bedding. The back room on the main floor opens up to an eating area and multi-purpose room. Laundry hangs from improvised wires throughout this space. The second floor of the building has five sex-segregated dormitories, each with bunkbeds and capacity for ten to twelve people. There is a separate room for families. Dressers with locked drawers are along the walls.

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The shelter opened in January 2019 and, at the time of data collection, was funded to operate through July 2019. It is operated by a private company that specializes in running similar shelters; the staff are a psychologist, a kitchen crew, and several other employees who oversee program operations. Prior to working with Venezuelan migrants, the company operated the same shelter for nearly 300 indigenous people who had been internally displaced. These individuals stayed in the shelter for an extended period of time before the government reportedly relocated them to more permanent housing. It was easy for the city to pay the private company to run the same model for Venezuelans without the need to build a program model from scratch—a prime example of what is meant by the World Bank’s description of Bogotá as a city with preexisting service infrastructure.

Now the shelter serves about 50 Venezuelans at a time. The terms of the contract only allow beds for this number of people, although the building itself has space to house three times more (there are two additional stories upstairs that were unused at the time of this study). The Venezuelans who are referred to the shelter tend to be the most vulnerable, often because (among other reasons) they are not lawfully present in the country. Individuals can stay for up to three days before being discharged, either with a referral to another shelter or with instructions to return to the bus terminal. Program staff have on occasion used Whatsapp to send information about possible jobs to several people who have come through the shelter, but these jobs are generally for individuals with a work permit. While this form of extended support seems promising, many migrants who come through the shelter do not have cell phones, making this a relatively ineffective medium for communicating such information to them.

The city of Bogotá funds the shelter, and many of the referrals for the shelter come through the reception center in the terminal or the city’s *Centro de Atención al Migrante* that is an additional

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referral center located near the city's financial center. As of the time of data collection for this study, facility staff reported that a relatively large percentage of beneficiaries continue traveling to other points in Colombia or outside the country. Less than half remain in the city (they do not have official data to corroborate this estimate).

As with interviews with other shelters in the city, the most difficult population to work with are those with irregular status. This is the case for most of the individuals who come through the shelter. Moreover, the short period of time in which migrants are present limits the shelter staff's ability to establish rapport and help them with deeper issues. This is different from their experience working with IDPs, primarily because they stayed in the shelter for several months.

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ENDNOTES

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² *R4V*, *supra* note 1. William Spindler, “Venezuelans Risk Life and Limb to Seek Help in Colombia,” *UNHCR*, April 5, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2019/4/5ca71c3a4/venezuelans-risk-life-limb-seek-help-colombia.html>.

³ Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers,” Challenges Faced in Receiving 1.4 Million Venezuelan Citizens at the Centre of Colombia’s Dialogue with the Committee on Migrant Workers,” *UNHCR*, September 4, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24963&LangID=E>.

⁴ Julia Symmes Cobb, “U.S. to Give Additional \$120 Million to Help Venezuelan Migrants,” *Reuters*, September 4, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-usa/u-s-to-give-additional-120-million-to-help-venezuelan-migrants-idUSKCN1VP30F>.

⁵ For the purposes of this report, individuals fleeing Venezuela are referred to as “migrants” rather than “refugees.” Under international law (the 1951 Refugee Convention), refugees are defined as those who are fleeing armed conflict or persecution and cross national borders in search of safety. It is too dangerous for them to return home, so they must seek sanctuary elsewhere. The 1951 Convention protects refugees from being sent home (what is termed *refoulement*) when doing so would endanger their lives, but asylum seekers must show that they cannot return due to a well-founded fear of persecution. States where they settle are obligated to provide protection, access to asylum, and the preservation of their basic human rights. Migrants, by contrast, are motivated by economic interests rather than the direct threat of persecution, and therefore are not impeded from returning home. An expanded definition of refugees emerged from the 1984 Cartagena Declaration to include “persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order” (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36ec.html>). Yet, while *R4V*—the coordination platform for refugees and migrants from Venezuela—reports that there were a total of 613,256 asylum claims by Venezuelans around the world (September 5, 2019, <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform>), the countries that are party to the Cartagena Declaration have been reluctant to grant refugee status to Venezuelans (<http://opiniojuris.org/2018/08/27/the-cartagena-declaration-and-the-venezuelan-refugee-crisis/>). For example, the Colombian government has introduced ad hoc programs that

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provide temporary residence permits rather than granting refugee status to Venezuelans, arguing that this offers them greater opportunity to integrate into Colombian society permanently (https://caracol.com.co/radio/2018/03/18/internacional/1521338114_441104.html). Indeed, according to UN data, as of September 2019 only 5,303 asylum claims have been filed in Colombia (<https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform>) with reports that migrants have been discouraged from applying or told that only strict cases of political persecution will be recognized (<https://www.apnews.com/6ad91a0a6188453491d75564739780d9>).

⁶ Although there are a range of needs represented within this mixed flow—including Colombian returnees, among others—arguably some of the most vulnerable are Venezuelan migrants. While the study includes organizations that provide services for the larger mixed-migration flow, special attention is given to services for Venezuelan migrants. For the purposes of this paper, the broad term “migrant” is used to describe those who have been displaced from Venezuela. UNHCR refers to them as “migrants and refugees” and, alternatively, as “asylum-seekers.” These labels are important, particularly for the purposes of this study. They suggest differing levels of “worthiness,” with refugees and asylum-seekers generally viewed as being more deserving of aid.

⁷ A large-scale operational response to this humanitarian crisis is currently led by IOM and UNHCR, in coordination with the Colombian government and numerous partners, including USAID and a range of NGOs. The IOM and UNHCR—in coordination with the Colombian government—formed the Inter-Agency Group for Mixed Migratory Flows (GIFMM) in 2018. The GIFMM’s 38 members work to coordinate the humanitarian response in Colombia along three primary axes: direct emergency response focused on needs such as health, food, and sanitation; general protections for children, irregular migrants, and other vulnerable subpopulations; and socioeconomic and cultural inclusion. The interagency coordination effort involves collecting data about the number of individuals served, identifying the types of services provided, and mapping these data relative to the need. This is critical information used to improve efficiency and avoid redundancy—important concerns in response analysis. Response analysis is often collected using the “4 Ws” framework: who does what, where, and when. This framework provides descriptive data on the organizations providing the services and their project sector (the “who”); organizational activities, programs, and implementing partners (the “what”); and details concerning where they operate and reporting period during which they provided services. An additional question—“for whom”—summarizes the number of individuals served based on basic demographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex/gender).

⁸ “Declaration of Quito on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region,” September 4, 2018, https://www.cancilleria.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/declaracion_de_quito_en.pdf.

⁹ See “UN Refugee Agency Ramps up Support for Venezuelans, Praises ‘Extraordinary Solidarity’ of Colombia,” *UN News*, October 9, 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/10/1022682>. See also Cynthia J. Arnson, “The Venezuelan Refugee Crisis Is Not Just a Regional Problem,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/venezuela/2019-07-26/venezuelan-refugee-crisis-not-just-regional-problem>.

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¹⁰ The Colombian government has also issued the Border Mobility Card (*Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronteriza*, or TMF) from July 2017 – February 2018. The TMF, valid for two years, allows Venezuelans who live near the border to briefly enter the country without a passport—a group referred to as “pendular” migrants because of their day-to-day movement across the border. Although TMFs are no longer being issued, 1.6 million Venezuelans received them. Then, in December 2018, the Colombian government introduced a 15-day transit visa that would allow Venezuelans without a passport to legally transit through the country en route to their final destination.

¹¹ Andrew Selee et al., “Creativity amid Crisis: Legal Pathways for Venezuelan Migrants in Latin America,” *Migration Policy Institute*, January 2019, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/legal-pathways-venezuelan-migrants-latin-america>.

¹² Anatoly Kurmanev and Jenny Carolina González, “Colombia Offers Citizenship to 24,000 Children of Venezuelan Refugees,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/world/americas/colombia-citizenship-venezuelans.html>.

¹³ Anastasia Maloney, “Thousands of Children Born in Colombia to Venezuelan Migrants Left Stateless,” *Reuters*, May 23, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-venezuela-youth/thousands-of-children-born-in-colombia-to-venezuelan-migrants-left-stateless-idUSKCN1ST2CE>.

¹⁴ “Migración desde Venezuela a Colombia,” *World Bank*, 2018, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/911381540835286885/pdf/131472-WP-SPANISH-PUBLIC-MigracindesdeVenezuelaaColombia.pdf>.

¹⁵ See Helen Murphy and Luis Jaime Acosta, “Colombian Armed Groups Recruiting Desperate Venezuelans, Army Says,” *Reuters*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-colombia-exclusive/exclusive-colombian-armed-groups-recruiting-desperate-venezuelans-army-says-idUSKCN1TL14E>. See also John Otis, “Fleeing Crisis, Some Venezuelans Are Recruited by Rebel Forces Fighting in Colombia,” National Public Radio, January 18, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/18/685850399/fleeing-crisis-some-venezuelans-are-recruited-by-rebel-forces-fighting-in-colomb>.

¹⁶ Michael O’Hanlon and Juan Carlos Pinzon, “Get Ready for the Venezuela Refugee Crisis,” *Brookings*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/09/10/get-ready-for-the-venezuela-refugee-crisis/>.

¹⁷ Luis Fernando Mejía, “How Colombia is Welcoming Migrants – and Staying Solvent,” *Americas Quarterly*, September 11, 2019, <https://www.americasquarterly.org/content/how-colombia-welcoming-migrants-and-staying-solvent>.

¹⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Humanitarian Needs Overview: Colombia,” 2019,

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/290119_hno_2019_en.pdf.

¹⁹ See “Response for Venezuelans,” R4V, accessed September 20, 2019, <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ R4V, *supra* note 1.

²² R4V, *supra* note 1.

²³ “Regional Action Report,” *International Organization for Migration*, 2018, https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/consolidated_action_plan_venezuela.pdf.

²⁴ World Bank, *supra* note 14, at 63.

²⁵ World Bank, *supra* note 14, at 63.

²⁶ See Dylan Baddour, “Colombia Is Losing the Race against the Venezuelan Migrant Crisis,” *The Atlantic*, April 30, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/04/un-tents-venezuelan-migrants-colombia/588007/>. See also John Otis, “Venezuelans Find Temporary Lifeline at Colombia’s First Border Tent Camp,” *National Public Radio*, May 1, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/01/718778333/venezuelans-find-temporary-lifeline-at-colombias-first-border-tent-camp>.

²⁷ Dylan Baddour, “Inside the UN’s First Tent Camp for Venezuelans Who Fled to Colombia,” *Vice News*, April 22, 2019, https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/pajdvn/inside-the-uns-first-tent-camp-for-venezuelans-who-fled-to-colombia.

²⁸ R4V Coordination Platform data, accessed July 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/platform/location/7511>.

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⁴⁵ Luis Jaime Acosta et al., “Colombia Plans Temporary Work Permit for Undocumented Venezuelans,” *Reuters*, July 8, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-migrants-colombia/colombia-plans-temporary-work-permit-for-undocumented-venezuelans-official-idUSKCN1U32NC>.

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