

Venezuela's Complex Humanitarian Crisis: Humanitarian Response, Challenges for Civil Society

The Venezuelan population is suffering a deep, complex humanitarian emergency, and broader access to humanitarian assistance is urgently needed to protect the country's most vulnerable communities. In a new report, "[Venezuela's Complex Humanitarian Crisis: Humanitarian Response, Challenges for Civil Society](#)," WOLA and Acción Solidaria map out the existing humanitarian infrastructure in Venezuela today, and highlight the need to address the crisis on the ground.

The report's findings include:

- The humanitarian response is restricted by the de facto Maduro government, which is wary of humanitarian agencies and has presented significant obstacles to registration and operation.
- Because COVID-19 pandemic has presented grave challenges to a health system that is in shambles, medical assistance and equipment are among the biggest priorities for assistance. Access to safe water, adequate sanitation, and proper hygiene are also urgently needed, as is a response to food insecurity and malnutrition.
- The absence of the World Food Program (WFP), which has significant logistical capacity and experience responding to food crises around the world, is a major obstacle to an adequate humanitarian response.
- Despite the scale of Venezuela's deep humanitarian crisis, the amount of funds earmarked for humanitarian assistance by the international community have been insufficient. The outlook for the humanitarian response in Venezuela is discouraging. While the United Nations' 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan request \$762.5 million, only 19% of this (147.6 million) had been funded by October 30. While the United States and the European Union, the main donor countries, have contributed to assistance outside the Plan, this aid amounts to only \$74.2 million. More commitments are urgently needed.

The report also makes several recommendations to policymakers inside Venezuela and across the international community.

Recommendations to Actors in Venezuela

- **The Venezuelan state must provide greater access for national and international humanitarian actors, in order to promote a humanitarian response that is proportionate and in accordance with humanitarian principles.** Allowing greater control by impartial actors both in the identification of needs and in the distribution of aid should be at the top of the agenda.

- **The Venezuelan State must improve access to information, and put an end to its hostility towards humanitarian organizations that seek to carry out reliable analyses of the needs of the population.** Obtaining detailed and reliable information about needs on the ground is essential to improve the targeting of aid that does not always reach those most in need. Achieving this objective requires more precise information about the most remote populations and rural areas. Above all, it is necessary for the government to allow this information to be generated and disseminated without persecuting those who are dedicated to this task.
- **More awareness is needed about the humanitarian infrastructure in the country, and civil society can play a convening role between leadership and vulnerable communities.** Venezuelan civil society organizations, especially those traditionally involved in assisting vulnerable communities, have a role to play as part of the humanitarian response. It is important to design and promote education about the structure and procedures of the humanitarian system as well as the principles and norms that govern humanitarian assistance.
- **Sectoral or partial agreements can help mobilize the use of funds frozen abroad to address the crisis, with necessary transparency.** The June 2020 agreement to implement a response to the pandemic between the Ministry of Health and the Humanitarian Aid Commission of the National Assembly, coordinated by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), was a tremendous achievement and shows that such agreements are possible. As the COVID-19 pandemic worsens and the humanitarian emergency deepens, these sectoral agreements can be a way to mitigate human suffering while at the same time fostering negotiation towards a broader political solution.

Recommendations to the International Community

- **Donor countries should fully fund the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan, as well as increase bilateral humanitarian assistance within Venezuela.** Contributions to the Country-Based Pooled Fund of Venezuela are essential so that, based on the cooperation coordinated by OCHA, they are used to strengthen the actions and programs of national and international humanitarian organizations. In other humanitarian emergencies which include severe political conflicts (for example, Syria, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan), the mobilization of resources for humanitarian aid has been considerably greater compared to the Venezuelan response.
- **A more nuanced approach is needed to address priorities in the international response to the humanitarian emergency in Venezuela.** By pressuring the government for better access for humanitarian actors, the international community must create spaces for dialogue with actors on the ground, in order to directly understand the effects of the humanitarian emergency on the Venezuelan population in a differentiated manner.
- **The international community should emphasize and expand on the June 2020 PAHO agreement and encourage new partial agreements.** Countries should encourage the Venezuelan opposition, which has access to public funds seized

abroad, and the Maduro government, which controls the territory, to reach minimum points of consensus as they did in the case of the PAHO agreement. Such agreements could address the reality of the humanitarian emergency and at the same time serve as the basis for broader political agreements.

- **The international community must continue its efforts to promote a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis in Venezuela.** Multilateral negotiation is an essential element to advancing a solution to the humanitarian emergency, given that at its root are the long-standing political conflict, the dismantling of the rule of law and widespread corruption. Only a political agreement that contributes to the restoration of democratic institutions, in a peaceful manner, can lay the foundations to overcome the effects of the humanitarian emergency and begin to generate development, well-being and peace.
- **The United States must take steps to limit the impact of sectoral sanctions on humanitarian actors and the general public.** Although the U.S. Treasury Department has issued a general license that exempts transactions related to humanitarian assistance and the importation of essential goods, the reality is that banks and other financial institutions remain risk-averse when it comes to operating in Venezuela. As a result, several NGOs and humanitarian actors have been affected by the overcompliance with sanctions, suffering the freezing of their bank accounts or the denial of transactions. The U.S. government must work to address these challenges and should consider lifting secondary sanctions that further restrict access to diesel and fuel in the country, as this has a widespread impact on the population.