

Venezuelan exodus to Ecuador reaches record levels: UN refugee agency steps up aid

One of the largest population movements in Latin American history is under way from Venezuela, according to the UN Refugee Agency, [UNHCR](#), which on Friday confirmed that it is increasing assistance to neighbouring Ecuador, where more and more Venezuelans are arriving each week.

Amid ongoing social and political upheaval in the South American country, more than half a million people have arrived in Ecuador since the beginning of the year, UNHCR's William Spindler said.

"The exodus of Venezuelans from the country is one of Latin America's largest mass-population movements in history," he added. "Since the beginning of the year, some 547,000 Venezuelans have entered Ecuador through the Colombian border at a daily average of between 2,700 and 3,000 men women and children. However, the influx is now accelerating, and in the first week of August, some 30,000 Venezuelans entered the country. That's more than 4,000 a day."

In response to the situation, Ecuador has declared a state of emergency in the northern provinces of Carchi, Pichincha and el Oro.

The development means that Ecuador can assign additional resources to Venezuelans, many of whom have endured weeks of hardship on their journey to the border, UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler said.

"Many of the Venezuelans are moving on foot, in an odyssey of days and even weeks in precarious conditions," he said. "Many run out of resources to continue their journey, and left destitute are forced to live rough in public parks and resort to begging and other negative coping mechanism in order to meet their daily needs."

The UNHCR spokesperson noted that Ecuador also had a "long tradition of welcoming refugees" in a region where the movement of people across borders was commonplace.

Nonetheless, the rising number of arrivals have led to "pressure" on asylum registrations.

"Xenophobic reactions to the exodus have been noted in some quarters," Spindler said. "The majority of the Venezuelans entering Ecuador continue onwards to Peru and Chile. Up to 20 per cent, however, remain in the country, some 7,000 of whom have sought asylum since 2016. The government-run asylum system is feeling this pressure."

According to UN Migration Agency, [IOM](#), there has been a 900 per cent increase in Venezuelan nationals living abroad on the subcontinent from 2015 to 2017 –

up from 89,000 to 900,000.

Worldwide, the number has risen from 700,000 to more than 1.6 million in the same period.

A lack of visa requirements and other bilateral agreements make it relatively straightforward for Venezuelans to move through Latin America.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, IOM spokesperson Joel Millman said that Latin American press reports refer to people's pursuit of a "Chilean dream", a reference to the American dream that many migrants are said to pursue when migrating north.