



THE R.E.V. INITIATIVE

RELIEF AND ENGAGEMENT IN VENEZUELA

A TRACK II PROJECT PROPOSAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the economic, political, and humanitarian crisis continues in Venezuela, international assistance is required to address the grievances of the populace and alleviate the human suffering to prevent an escalation of violence and maintain domestic and regional stability. The R.E.V. Initiative is a proposal for a Track II strategy presented to Global Affairs Canada with the aim to prevent conflict and work towards securing the best-case scenario for Venezuela.¹

The R.E.V. Initiative will engage in Venezuela in two distinct phases. The first phase of the initiative is the creation of a fact-finding mission, resulting in a report that will be used to highlight the humanitarian situation in Venezuela and the main areas of concern facing refugees and migrants in Colombia. The second phase of this initiative is two-fold. First, it will leverage the capacities of the non-profit, non-government, Catholic organization, *Cáritas Venezuela* to deliver humanitarian aid within the country and perform advocacy at the local government level. Second, it will bolster the capacities of select Colombian municipalities to manage the incoming Venezuelan refugees. This initiative will be delivered over the course of five years beginning in May 2018, and with a total proposed budget of \$20 million.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to address to the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela as a cause of regional instability and as a potential source of armed conflict. Therefore, the R.E.V. Initiative has three fundamental aims:

- Gather objective data and information concerning the real humanitarian conditions in Venezuela and within Venezuelan refugee communities in Colombia.
- Supply targeted aid to refugee groups in key Colombian regions and bolster the capacity of Colombian municipalities to receive refugees over the long term.
- Aid *Cáritas Venezuela* in their humanitarian and advocacy work at the local government level, with the aim to effect policy change to alleviate the humanitarian crisis.

OBJECTIVES

These aims will be achieved by setting and meeting the following project objectives:

1. Compile a comprehensive, impartial, and objective report on the humanitarian situation in Venezuela and within Venezuelan refugee communities by collecting data from primary sources.
 - a. Deploy a Canadian lead task force to collect information from the Venezuelan refugees in Cúcuta and Bogota, Colombia, on the humanitarian situation they faced in Venezuela, as well as their needs as refugees.
 - b. Initiate and provide an ongoing research grant to the Center for Sustainable Development in Latin America (CSDLA) office at Los Andes University Colombia, to take local ownership of the fact-finding mission after the initial report is completed. The purpose of the grant would be to continue funding research on the humanitarian crisis and its impacts over the long term.
2. Enhance the existing knowledge and capabilities of *Cáritas Venezuela* to optimize their resources to provide effective humanitarian aid within Venezuela.
 - a. Encouraging them to share the results of the report and their expert knowledge with local government where they are active in Venezuela, to positively affect local governments' responses to the humanitarian crisis.
3. Supply aid and assistance that meets the priority needs of Venezuelan refugees as outlined in the report.
4. Build the capacity of officials and municipalities in Colombia to address the refugee crisis over the long term.

ANALYSIS OF STAKEHOLDERS AND BENEFICIARIES

<p><i>Colombia</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Currently hosting approximately half a million Venezuelan refugees.ⁱⁱ ➤ The Government of Colombia does not have the capacity to provide employment, education, food, or shelter for the influx of Venezuelans. ➤ Thousands of Colombian workers displaced and unemployed due to the refugees' willingness to work for extremely low wages.ⁱⁱⁱ ➤ Reports of violence initiated by Venezuelan refugees.^{iv} <p>Colombia's interest in a stable Venezuela is beneficial to them socially and economically. By building the capacity of key Colombian cities to address the influx of Venezuelan refugees, the country can mitigate the economic impact and instability generated by poor integration practices and low resource availability.</p>
<p><i>Cáritas Venezuela</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Currently operating within Venezuela, providing humanitarian support programs. ➤ Mandated to respond to emergency situations in the Global South and fostering peace to prevent conflict. <p><i>Cáritas Venezuela</i> would benefit from the additional funding and logistical support this project may provide, bolstering their current humanitarian projects as well as working together to achieve the shared purpose of preventing the outbreak of violence through humanitarian aid and assistance.</p>
<p><i>Canada</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Current economic interest in the MERCOSUR region, Pacific Alliance, and other free trade negotiations. ➤ Involved in Track I initiatives with the Lima Group, OAS, and the Inter-American Democratic Charter. <p>Canada has an invested interest in maintaining regional stability in Latin America, as this region is currently economically important to its trade interests. By funding the R.E.V Initiative, Canada has an opportunity to take steps towards preventing regional instability, as well as complement current or future Track I initiatives.</p>
<p><i>Venezuela</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Currently facing a humanitarian crisis, including mass food and medicinal shortages.^v <p>The benefits of the R.E.V Initiative include bolstering <i>Cáritas Venezuela's</i> existing aid programs, as well as providing them with a detailed report on the crisis, which lessens the pressure on local governments to mitigate the crisis.</p>

PRE-PROJECT RISK ASSESSMENT AND CONSIDERATIONS

VENEZUELAN CLIMATE

The current situation in Venezuela implies a high risk to any initiative attempting to enter the country and deliver a humanitarian program aimed at reducing tensions. The country's economic performance, governance, political instability, and human development are areas that have been identified as posing the highest risk to increasing violence.^{vi} Additionally, President Nicolás Maduro's refusal to define the situation as a humanitarian crisis, and his lack of willingness to accept international assistance, poses challenges to accessibility. However, as the situation has not yet escalated to the level of armed opposition there is currently a critical window of opportunity that this project seeks to capture to prevent greater levels of conflict.

The upcoming Presidential elections in May 2018 may present a challenge to the initiative. If President Nicolás Maduro is replaced in office, the tense political climate may begin to slowly reduce. Alternatively, if President Maduro remains in power, Venezuela may experience an uptake in violence as protests occur and opposition groups become emboldened. Whatever the outcome of elections might be, Venezuela's dire humanitarian situation cannot be ignored.

Since the Venezuelan Government is reluctant to provide access to external actors, providing humanitarian aid to Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia may be a key point of access that does not violate the sovereignty of Venezuela or alienate President Maduro. To conduct the fact-finding mission without the cooperation of the government,

teams will engage in this mission only with Venezuelan refugees living in neighbouring Colombia, who have insider knowledge and close ties to people who remain in Venezuela. This would allow teams to collect data from Venezuelans, without impeding the interests of the Venezuelan government.

PROJECT DESIGN TO ACHIEVE THE BEST-CASE SCENARIO

To achieve the defined best-case scenario for Venezuela, the proposed initiative is specifically targeting the immediate needs of the population.^{vii} By addressing the humanitarian needs, the project is alleviating pressures on the Colombian and Venezuelan local governments to deliver aid, while simultaneously removing a grievance that has the potential to stimulate an armed movement, thereby avoiding the worst-case scenario. Furthermore, through collaboration with *Cáritas Venezuela* the project is eliminating any potential perceived biases against the Venezuelan Government. As a faith-based organization, *Cáritas Venezuela* specifically aims to aid everyone regardless of race, religion, or politics.

PHASE I: FACT FINDING MISSION

ADDRESSING THE INFORMATION DEFICIT

Phase I of the project consists of a fact-finding mission. The fact-finding mission will aim to obtain information from refugees in the cities of Cúcuta and Bogotá. The two cities were chosen because they have the largest number of Venezuelan refugees in Colombia.^{viii} ^{ix} Moreover, research in the two cities will provide a good opportunity for comparative analysis. Cúcuta is a city bordering Venezuela, and therefore, it is a point of first encounter. Bogotá is the capital city of Colombia, situated in the center of the country. Thus, those refugees would have had more time to settle in and may have encountered different challenges. The mission will collect information concerning the most vital grievances and needs of refugees, levels of health, conditions of livelihoods etc. The mission will generate trends to better understand the progression of the refugee crisis.

The mission will create a report outlining the major findings and trends. The report will be shared with local authorities in an effort to build their knowledge and capacity, which may equip them to better address the refugee crisis in their areas. The report, for instance, will assist local authorities by orienting them to allocate resources optimally based on the findings of the report. The budget for this report will be \$1 million CAD over a 6-month period. The specified timeframe and budget includes the research, compilation of information, analysis, and creation of the final report.

ENLISTING LOCAL EXPERTISE

To complement the fact-finding mission, under the R.E.V Initiative, there will be a long-term research project to analyze the implications and risks generated by the Venezuela crisis in the region. This will consist of giving research grants to Los Andes University for the purposes of regional risk, stakeholder, and trends analysis specifically concerning the Venezuelan crisis. Los Andes University was chosen because it has recently partnered with Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Los Andes University has created a specialized office, titled, SDG Center for Latin America and the Caribbean.^x The office is an important regional hub for SDG- related research which brings experts from around the world. The budget will be \$2 million CAD over 5 years to the SDG Center for Latin America and the Caribbean.

ENCOUNTERING BARRIERS

The fact-finding mission faces operational limitations as it is conducted at a time of much uncertainty. Government elections, response to the outcomes of the elections, further international pressures on the Venezuelan government through sanctions, oil production and price levels etc. can intensify the refugee crisis and create new needs or grievances. Uncertainty imposes limitations on analysis since the findings may not reflect developments or represent the implications of sudden events. Moreover, it is understood that the refugees chosen (in Cúcuta and Bogotá) are a subset of the population and not representative of the entire population, and therefore may not experience all the grievances of the other refugees. Nonetheless, the mission and the report will provide insight into best practices to deal with the crisis.

Trends will be a focus of the mission and report. There will be measurement of key indicators throughout the 6-month period. The task force sent will be directly conducting the mission and responsible to sending progress reports.

PHASE II: HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT

BUILDING CAPACITY IN COLOMBIA

The second phase of the R.E.V. Initiative will be focused on operationalizing data and information collected during the first stages of the project. At the onset of a crisis, such as that currently developing in Venezuela, responders must deal with a critical deficit in information regarding who the vulnerable populations are, where they are located, and how to address their particular needs. Conditions in Colombia are further strained by the rapidly shifting dynamics with thousands of Venezuelans crossing the largely unprotected border every week, many of whom are undocumented and unreported.^{xi} Armed with the insights generated from the fact-finding mission in the short term and trend analyses from the research grants in the medium and long-term, R.E.V. personnel will be better able to assist aid workers and Colombian officials in delivering targeted aid to refugees and assisting migrants. Building local capacities for settling refugees and providing assistance is crucial in order to counter the destabilizing effects of the Venezuelan crisis in the region. It is important to consider that this initiative may encourage greater numbers of Venezuelans to flee to Colombia. Despite this potential hazard, as conditions in Venezuela continue to deteriorate, a full-scale refugee crisis is a likely development.^{xii} Taking action at this early stage is necessary to prepare for a future influx of people into Colombia. For these reasons, R.E.V. will contribute \$7 million dollars CAD over five years for direct humanitarian aid, training, and capacity building of officials in Colombia's host regions.

EMPOWERING LOCAL ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT IN VENEZUELA

Phase two of the R.E.V. Initiative also involves sharing the insights of the fact-finding mission with our partners in *Cáritas Venezuela* to empower their work in the regions hit hardest by the ongoing crisis. *Cáritas Venezuela* is a catholic non-governmental organization that responds to humanitarian disasters, promotes integral human development, and advocates on the cause of poverty and violence.^{xiii}

Cáritas Venezuela is a valuable partner in this project as it has been present in Venezuela since 1970, and has a access to approximately seventy percent of the country through attachments to church parishes.^{xiv} Additionally, *Cáritas Venezuela* maintains active partnerships with numerous national and international organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, European Commission Humanitarian Aid, health centres, universities, and the Sanitas Foundation of Venezuela.^{xv} Therefore, through a partnership with *Cáritas Venezuela*, this initiative will be able to leverage supplementary resources without the risk of attempting to secure additional entry. Collaborating with *Cáritas Venezuela* brings a significant level of legitimacy to the proposed initiative and overcomes the barriers to entry into Venezuela.

Leveraging the local knowledge and expertise of the organization will allow for timely and efficient responses to the crisis. Providing additional resources will also allow *Cáritas Venezuela* members to perform advocacy work at the local government level and liaise with officials directly responsible for the administration of public services. With *Cáritas Venezuela* representing the needs of Venezuelan people to local governments, it will compliment the official engagement efforts already undertaken by the Canadian government through the Lima Group and other regional forums. A substantial contribution of \$8 million dollars CAD over five years will help *Cáritas Venezuela* provide for vulnerable Venezuelans at the present time and protect their needs in the future.

WORKING IN A DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT

Throughout both aspects of the project regular communication with our partners, both in Colombia and Venezuela, will help monitor the impact of the R.E.V. Initiative and troubleshoot challenges to implementation as they arise. Certain limitations to the scope of the project are envisioned. For example, while the fact-finding mission will hopefully be able to identify areas with most pressing needs, given finite resources and shifting dynamics, it will require

involvement and coordination among multiple actors to deliver the levels of assistance necessary to achieve our best-case scenario. In addition to creating a dramatic increase in refugees, if armed conflict does occur, the porous Venezuelan-Colombian border regions could become focal points of violence as armed groups utilize the breakdown to their advantage. In order to avoid being seen as aiding rebel groups, it would likely be imperative to restrict or cease the R.E.V. Initiative's operations in Colombia. To combat these and other unforeseen scenarios, \$2 million dollars CAD will be set aside as a contingency.

POST-PROJECT ASSESSMENT

Predicting and evaluating the intended impacts of the project is vital to ensure that the project works to achieve the best-case scenario, avoid the worst, and does not negatively affect the situation in any intended or unintended way.

➤ Targeted Impact Areas

Human development is considered one of the high-risk areas contributing to the deteriorating situation in Venezuela.^{xvi} This project seeks to positively impact the indicators highlighted in this issue area to mitigate its influence on the crisis. Specifically, the R.E.V Initiative seeks to address access to medicine and rate of HIV/AIDS, and access to food and rates of malnutrition, specifically among children.

➤ Immediate Impact

Within the refugee communities in Colombia, as well as citizens of Venezuela through the work of *Cáritas Venezuela*, the immediate impact will be the temporary alleviation of priority needs, such as food and medicine.

➤ Long-Term Impact

The long term intended impact of the R.E.V Initiative targets the same issue areas; however, the intent would be to build the capacity of both key Colombia cities, Cúcuta and Bogota, and of the municipal governments of Venezuela to be better equipped to address the crisis should it continue. This capacity building includes sharing best practices and expert knowledge on both the priorities and impacts of the humanitarian crisis, as well as on refugee integration programs.

The secondary intended long-term impact of the project is to transfer local or regional ownership over the study and impact of the humanitarian crisis through the research grants provide to Los Andes University. The impact of this transfer would be that the crisis continues to be monitored, and the academic work and reports produced by the University can be used in further Track I or II initiatives.

➤ Distinguishing Impact

Unlike most projects or initiatives targeting Venezuela, the R.E.V Initiative specifically focuses on humanitarian aid indicators. Many Track I and II initiatives have heavily targeted the political situation, including sanctions and the withdrawal of diplomats. Additionally, with the focus through *Cáritas Venezuela*, the impact of our project will be at local, rather than pan-national or macro-level. Lastly, the continual engagement with Los Andes University through the research grant will allow the creation of reports or academic works to be traced back to the R.E.V. Initiative.

CONCLUSION: CANADIAN INITIATIVE, LOCAL OWNERSHIP

The R.E.V. Initiative outlines a positive first step in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and its impacts on domestic and regional stability. This project engages with vulnerable populations, equips local authorities, leverages current capacities, and transfers ownership to local and regional actors. Based on the benefits to Canada, Venezuela, and Colombia as outlined by our proposal, we highly recommend that the R.E.V Initiative receives priority funding from Global Affairs Canada.

Endnotes

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- ⁱ Avista Homayun, Felicia Leone, Stefania Novoa, and Herb Richardson, “Venezuela Risk Assessment Report,” February 2018.
- ⁱⁱ “Colombia says 550,000 Venezuelans have fled to the country,” *BBC News*, January 19, 2018. Accessed April 3, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-42755269>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Maria Arias, “La Crisis Venezolana Afecta a los Colombianos o es Solo Percepción,” *Publimetro*, August 4, 2017, <https://www.publimetro.co/co/colombia/2017/08/04/la-crisis-venezolana-afecta-los-colombianos-solo-percepcion.html>.
- ^{iv} Ibid.
- ^v Homayun et al, “Venezuela Risk Assessment Report,”
- ^{vi} Ibid.
- ^{vii} Ibid.
- ^{viii} “Migracion Colombia Entrega Ultimo Balance de Venezolanos en Colombia,” *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores Colombia*, (5 April 2018) <http://www.migracioncolombia.gov.co/index.php/es/prensa/comunicados/comunicados-2017/octubre-2017/5751-migracion-colombia-entrega-ultimo-balance-de-venezolanos-en-colombia?highlight=WyJ2ZW5lem9sYW5vcyIsImVuliwiYm9nb3RcdTAwZTEiLCJ2ZW5lem9sYW5vcyBlbiIsImVuIGJvZ290XHUwMGUxIl0>
- ^{ix} “Colombia Tightens Border Amidst Wave of Venezuela Refugees,” *Deutsche Welle*, (9 February 2018) <http://www.dw.com/en/colombia-tightens-border-amidst-wave-of-venezuela-refugees/a-42513569>.
- ^x “SDG Center for Latin America and the Caribbean to be Launched at Universidad de Los Andes in Partnership with SDSN,” *Sustainable Development Solutions Network*, (2 March 2018) <http://unsdsn.org/news/2018/03/02/sdg-center-for-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-to-be-launched-at-universidad-de-los-andes-in-partnership-with-sdsn/>.
- ^{xi} Danny Behar and Sebastian Strauss, “Neighbor nations can’t bear costs of Venezuelan refugee crisis alone,” *Brookings*, (7 March 2018) <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/neighbor-nations-cant-bear-costs-of-venezuelan-refugee-crisis-alone/>
- ^{xii} Shannon K. O’Neil, “A Venezuelan Refugee Crisis,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, (15 Feb. 2018) <https://www.cfr.org/report/venezuelan-refugee-crisis>
- ^{xiii} “Cáritas de Venezuela,” Cáritas, last modified 2018, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://www.caritas.org/where-caritas-work/latin-america/venezuela/>
- ^{xiv} Ibid.
- ^{xv} Ibid.
- ^{xvi} Avista Homayun, Felicia Leone, Stefania Novoa, and Herb Richardson, “Venezuela Risk Assessment Report,” *February 2018*.

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