

# COLOMBIA CENTER FOR INTEGRATED ASSISTANCE

**KEYWORDS:**

REFUGEES, MIGRANTS, CAPACITY BUILDING, MENTORING, PROTECTION, REFERRALS

CAUSE OF DISPLACEMENT	Mixed refugee and migrant response
DATE OF EVENT CAUSING DISPLACEMENT	2015 - Ongoing, Venezuela crisis
PEOPLE DISPLACED	Approx. 3 Million
PROJECT LOCATION	La Guajira, Maicao
NUMBER OF PEOPLE TARGETED BY THE PROJECT	36,000
CCCM COORDINATION MECHANISM	Cluster activated



**SUMMARY:**

The reception center entitled “Center for Integrated Assistance”, first of its kind, aims at temporarily addressing the urgent humanitarian and protection needs of the most vulnerable people fleeing from Venezuela, as well as supporting the response of the local authorities. The most noteworthy innovative elements of the facility stand in its eligibility determination algorithm, length of stay and rotation determination system and its exit strategy mechanism combining humanitarian and government efforts.



Areal view of the “Center for Integrated Assistance”.

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### BACKGROUND

It is estimated that a total of 123,756 people are currently displaced in the Department of La Guajira, which hosts the third largest number of people originating from Venezuela, after Bogota and Norte de Santander.

Maicao is one of the cities in La Guajira with the highest concentration per capita of refugees and migrants from Venezuela. Hundreds of people, including children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and critical medical conditions, are forced to live on the streets, due to lack of alternatives or options. According to a recent UNHCR assessment, over 50% of Venezuelans in Maicao are living on the streets or in informal settlements and 81% of those interviewed said that they required temporary shelter and services.

Specifically, according to a CCCM and Protection Multi-sector Needs Assessment carried out by the implementing agency in February 2019 in Maicao, while many became apparent, the most striking needs were identified as protection and accommodation (shelter including basic services):

- Almost 70% entered Colombia through an informal crossing point (if this were added to the official population figure of people originating from Venezuela in Maicao, the figure would increase to 68,000 people at any given time as compared to the official estimation of 40,000 people having crossed through the official point and thus having been recorded);
- 67% of those interviewed find themselves in a situation of irregular/undocumented stay
- Regarding their previous housing situation but also as an indicator of previous economic status in Venezuela, 80% reported living in a house (60% owning while over 20% were renting)
- Currently, over 50% find themselves living in the street or informal sites in Maicao and over 70% at risk of being evicted
- 81% indicated requiring humanitarian shelter and access to basic services.

In this context, the Government of Colombia called on for strategic and targeted support at the Colombian-Venezuelan border of La Guajira, by enhancing its operational capacity and by setting up the first Integrated Assistance Centre in the country, in the border town of Maicao. The location is envisioned to deliver assistance and coordinated protection with an approximate reception capacity of 1,500 persons at any given time, in four phases each hosting up to 350 people.

### CONTEXT

Prior to the establishment of the Center, a set of required criteria of functionality was developed:

- Provide a safe space for the largest number of those in need.
- Identify the most vulnerable.
- Provide access to basic emergency relief assistance to the largest amount of people possible in an organized manner however within the limited reception capacity of the site.
- While also having the ability to ensure case management.
- Government ownership.

Through technical support, a unique reception Center typology emerged directly connecting case identification to access to emergency assistance and basic relief integrated services (both at a community at an individual level) as well as connecting it to case management (expanding beyond protection services to all available services required).

## PROJECT

### IMPLEMENTATION

Through CCCM technical support, CCCM/field and protection drafted an initial version of a document outlining key site management procedural aspects with regards to the modalities the Center would function under. This served as the main inter-agency guidelines under which the Center currently functions.

According to these guidelines agreed by the humanitarian community and government of Colombia, the Center provided assistance to the following categories of people:

1. People with specific protection needs.
2. People with unmet basic needs, specifically those living in the street.
3. People in transit.

Of these categories, only the most vulnerable are eligible for entry. To this respect, a vulnerability index system was developed in accordance with the implementing agency's Global Protection Indicators. To further adjust levels of services to be provided within the Center while construction was ongoing and to establish a baseline of profiles of those most vulnerable, several activities were organized:

- an urban service mapping exercise was carried out with support from the inter-agency (GIFMM) team.
- a Multi-sector Needs Assessment carried out with support from the IM team.
- community consultations.



Displaced children living in unsafe informal settlements.

With regards to multi-sector commitments from different agencies, key stakeholder exchanges were held with Government entities and NGOs. These confirmed the inter-agency agreement on the modus operandi of the Center and differing agencies' interest to participate (both in the further development of sectoral operational documents and on their implementation in the Center) within their area of responsibility. These exchanges were fundamental to ensure the well-coordinated, multi-partner/multi-sectoral nature of the Center required to deliver a comprehensive, integrated response.

Given the presence of indigenous communities surrounding the site, the management of the office saw it as an integral part of site development to involve the community through:

- Consultations
- Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)
- Cash for Work Projects (CFW)

As a result, the community felt a sense of ownership, obvious in their subsequent interactions related to the development of the site and thus they supported willingly with no sense of tension. This support provided the ability to access the most vulnerable in a community otherwise resistant to outside interventions.

With regards to the methods of communication, careful choices were made in light of the large number of those in need and the small amount of space available in the initial phase of the Center (an initial 350 people reception capacity). As such, specific and targeted activities were selected to be implemented at specific times with the aim to ensure that the largest amount of population had access to information regarding the Center, all processes were transparent, and eligibility was well understood.

Several activities and events were organized and delivered several days prior to the opening of the Center:

- Key messages were produced and tested.
- All humanitarian service providers in Maicao and key government staff attended several trainings based on these messages.
- All humanitarian service providers in Maicao and key government staff made visits to the Center prior to its opening.
- Community representatives made several go-see visits to the Center prior to its opening.
- Messages were disseminated at points of humanitarian aid delivery.
- Messages were delivered, and a specific communication event took place at the primary locations identified through the multi-sector needs assessment.

External communication was also carefully planned with several low key bi-lateral pre-opening day meetings with community leaders, government and the press. Several communication events were also organized jointly with government representatives to take place at strategically timed manner. Coordination with the CCCM partner for the Center, also entailed establishing in advance of the opening day systems such as (but not limited to):

- Manual on co-habitation of those hosted in the Centre
- Site rules and regulations
- Access cards for those hosted in the site
- Inter-agency reporting and 3Ws (Who's doing, What, Where?)

With regards to an exit strategy, as with any camp, site or humanitarian center, the element of solutions for its inhabitants is of great importance and assures the overall success of the location from an advocacy perspective.

Regarding an exit strategy in the context of the constant rotation of beneficiaries, from the time of the initial discussions regarding the opening of this Center, the strategic objective was for it to be used as an advocacy tool for solutions for those inhabiting it. As the authorities requested that this Center functioned within a transitional/rotation basis of people, the element of solutions for those exiting in the site, would provide the premises for such an exit strategy. As such, through government and humanitarian coordination and collaboration, several possible steps were identified and implemented such as documentation and cash assistance.

## IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

- **Best value for money:**
  - Targeted approach identified and served only those most vulnerable, thus a well prioritized investment
  - The multi-sector multi-partner service delivery aspect ensured cost-sharing
  - The beneficiary rotation system ensured the most amount of people are serviced. With an initial capacity of 350 people, it is estimated that 1,000 will be served per month. Once the full planned capacity of 1,000 was reached, the number rose to 3,000 which in a year amounts to 36,000 people served.
- **Inter-agency benefits** through collaboration and partnerships.
- **Contingency planning** capacity in case of sudden influxes
- **Advocacy tool**, through its existence UNHCR has been able to advocate for further rights and access to documentation and continues to do so.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### ACHIEVEMENTS

The implementing agency developed partnerships with Governmental Institutions, such as Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF) and Civil Defence (Defensa Civil) as well as NGOs, UN agencies and the private sector to ensure multi-agency support. Through these partnerships the “Center for Integrated Assistance” provided access to basic emergency relief assistance (such as shelter, food, protection services, health, WASH, site management, cash assistance, etc.) in a comprehensive and organized manner. Due to the nature of the facility, a complete package of protection services was provided including but not limited to child protection, registration and individual case management, psychosocial support, legal orientation, status regularization, access to documentation as relevant.

Since its opening in March 2019, the Center achieved the systematic identification of the most vulnerable through a unique eligibility determination algorithm. The system applies a detailed vulnerability criteria-based calculation methodology. Those deemed eligible were referred to the Center through the implementing agency’s protection desks (PAOs) and a multi-partner system.

In addition, the Centre provided a safe space, holistic/integrated emergency relief services and tailored individual/ family support, as well as establishes connections with support mechanisms when leaving the Center.

### CHALLENGES

Resources and funding have consistently been a challenging aspect. At the time of writing, the Centre functions in only one of the four phases of development. The Centre could expand to three other similar areas within the same space, tripling capacity, if resources became available.



Training with beneficiaries within the Centre for integrated Assistance.

### LESSONS LEARNED

#### Exit strategy:

A sustainable exit strategy is central to the project; through effective coordination between humanitarian and government agencies, connecting those most in need to additional services upon departure from the Centres.

#### “Why is it not a camp?”

The Center only admits those evaluated as being the most in need which are hosted at the center for only a limited amount of time. The length of stay of each case is determined upon entry based on a calculation which evaluates profile and level of need. This allows for a rotation system to be ensured on a continuous basis.



Displaced household in front of emergency shelter within the Centre for Integrated Assistance.