

CASE STUDY **VENEZUELA (REGIONAL) 2019–2023 / COMPLEX CRISIS**

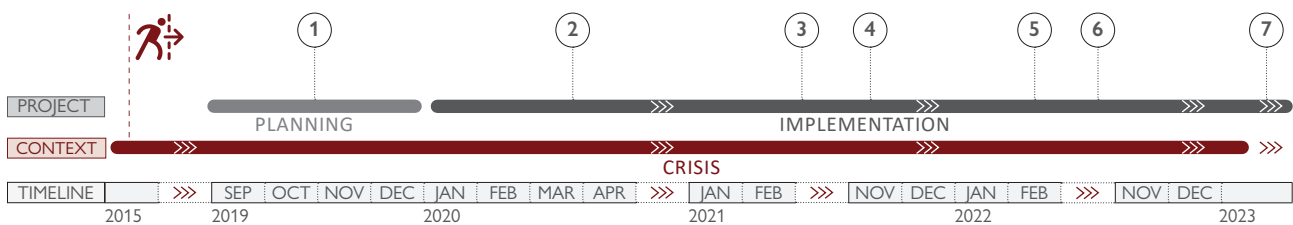
KEYWORDS: Community engagement, Infrastructure, Local authority engagement, Settlements approach

<b>CRISIS</b>	<b>Response to the situation of refugees and migrants from Venezuela</b>	
<b>LOCATIONS</b>	Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Panama, and Trinidad & Tobago	
<b>PEOPLE SUPPORTED IN THE PROJECT</b>	<b>800 direct</b> and <b>1,300 indirect beneficiaries*</b> (average of 30 direct and 50 indirect beneficiaries for each of the 26 tactical urbanism actions)	
<b>PROJECT OUTPUTS</b>	<b>26 tactical urbanism actions</b> (2 to 4 interventions per each of the 10 targeted cities)	
<b>DIRECT COST</b>	<b>USD 4,000</b> per intervention*	
<b>PROJECT COST</b>	<b>USD 6,000</b> per intervention*	

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

The project aimed to formulate strategies to support the integration of refugees and migrants with host communities in neighboring countries of Venezuela. A key component of the project has been 26 tactical urbanism actions: strategic interventions in public spaces aiming to transform the physical conditions to promote the use of the space and the social cohesion of the users, strengthening community bonds and sense of belonging. The case study focuses on a particular intervention in Bucaramanga, Colombia, consisting of a poor-quality and polluted alley around a waterway, which was then transformed with the active involvement of the community into an open space classroom for children in the community without access to formal education.

\*Note: The present case study focuses on the tactical urbanism actions implemented within a wider-scope project, and the above-mentioned figures of beneficiaries and costs refer only to those activities. The overall project's budget was 16 million Euros (USD 17.6 MN), and the outcomes were developed around five expected results: 1. Analysis, data, and evidence for decision-making; 2. Formulation of co-created solutions and plans; 3. Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention activities (including tactical urbanism actions); 4. Capacity building; and 5. Community of learning. The project developed information tools for decision-making, urban plans to strengthen territorial conditions, activities to promote economic integration, and training for territorial stakeholders.



- 2015:** First migratory movement recorded outside Venezuela.
- 1 **2019–2020:** Methodological definition of medium and long-term integration of refugees and migrants at the territorial level.
- 2 **2019–2020:** Baseline assessment to identify the opportunities and constraints of Venezuelan human mobility and host communities to access opportunities and rights in target cities.
- 3 **2021–2022:** Co-creation workshops at the neighborhood level that allowed for the identification of differentiated access to opportunities and services for Venezuelans in comparison to local populations.
- 4 **2021–2022:** Formulation of the intervention plan for target cities.
- 5 **2022:** Implementation of actions to boost integration at the neighborhood level.
- 6 **2022:** Co-creation and co-design of tactical urbanism actions.
- 7 **2023:** After the co-creation process, participatory processes were conducted to implement the interventions, with communities being encouraged to participate in the construction process.



Venezuelan refugees and migrants cross the Puente Internacional Simón Bolívar, the busiest border point connecting Venezuela and Colombia.

## CONTEXT

Since 2015, more than 7.2 million people have left Venezuela due to political and economic crises. Approximately 84 percent of those emigrated to neighboring countries in the Latin American and Caribbean regions. These figures do not include Venezuelan returnees, making the Venezuelan diaspora the most acute human mobility crisis in the region. The crisis has added pressure to the national and local governments, considering the already precarious social support systems and employment markets. Most Venezuelans have sought refuge in cities, which often could not accommodate this rapid influx in an adequate manner.

Due to the socioeconomic vulnerability of most of the migrants, flows have shifted from formal to informal. Crossing borders irregularly impacts access to employment and social support systems in the short- and middle-term, also increasing the overall poverty levels in host countries. Thus, governments face significant pressure and high costs for the provision of humanitarian assistance, public services, and employment opportunities while Venezuelans deal with constraints related to their widespread irregular status within host country economies already impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

## SITUATION BEFORE THE CRISIS

Although Venezuela could be considered rich from a natural resource perspective, the country has a high dependence on oil – representing 99 percent of the country's exports. The drop in oil prices in 2014 gave place to a deep socioeconomic crisis that impacted access to services, goods, and the job market, resulting in the migration of millions of Venezuelans across the region.

Moreover, the economic and political situation generated a security crisis, with recurrent episodes of social unrest.

At the regional level, Latin American cities were subject to inequality before the influx of the Venezuelan diaspora. According to the Development Bank of Latin America, 23 percent of the people in the region live in settlements with inadequate housing conditions. Additionally, before the COVID-19 crisis, poverty rates reached 24 percent of the population while in 2021 this number increased to 26.5 percent.

For more background information on the context of Venezuela, see the [Regional Overview in Pg. 66](#).

## SITUATION AFTER THE CRISIS

Available information shows that Venezuelan communities in host cities have most often settled at or near existing urban centralities (areas that concentrate on economic activities, services, and employment opportunities). In the Latin American context, urban spatial structure often limits access to fundamental rights (housing, basic services, education, health, employment, as well as culture and recreation) due to the presence of massive transportation systems, which impacts opportunities for Venezuelan and host communities living in areas disconnected from the main service networks.

Regarding access to livelihoods, refugees and migrants are predominantly employed in the informal sector – also concentrated in urban centralities. On a substantially higher degree than the host communities, Venezuelans are subject to unfair conditions (including lower revenue,



(Left) Target public space around the waterway in Bucaramanga pre-intervention; (Right) Resulting tactical intervention on target public space during the night.

longer hours of work, and no formal contracts) as well as a lack of access to social security. Regarding housing and affordability, Venezuelans live predominantly in rental units, often overcrowded, lacking access to a bathroom and/or a kitchen, and other basic services. Venezuelans also face constraints to rent properties at fair prices and are often rejected by landlords due to widespread xenophobia and discrimination.

### NATIONAL SHELTER STRATEGY

In the culture of Latin America, public spaces use to facilitate social and economic relations while providing opportunities for cultural, political, and religious events. Venezuelan refugees and migrants with access to public spaces can eventually build relations and bonds with locals to enhance their economic and social inclusion.

Different governments across the region have implemented efforts to promote access to adequate living conditions for the Venezuelan community. Colombia took a holistic approach intending to facilitate their access to housing but also to improve neighborhood conditions, investing efforts in the provision of social support infrastructure including schools, healthcare facilities, parks, and cultural spaces (among others).

### PROJECT DESIGN

The project proposed a territorial approach, integrating multiple sectors and intervening at different levels, to promote the effective medium- and long-term integration of Venezuelan and vulnerable host communities across the region, developing an action agenda to be consolidated in Territorial Intervention Plans. These plans consider integration challenges at the city, neighborhood, and community levels and propose actions aiming to increase the potential of inclusion in urban areas.

These activities consider the location and situation (spatial, physical contexts) of Venezuelans in host cities, and identify challenges regarding their access to opportunities and adequate living conditions for the overall population of those neighborhoods and differentials in their access by Venezuelan communities. The plans collect those designed through participatory processes to improve prosperity conditions and access to the right to the city at the city, neighborhood, and community levels. Among them, the so-called 'tactical urbanism' interventions are included to transform spatial conditions while promoting social integration.

### THE EXPERIENCE OF BUCARAMANGA (COLOMBIA)

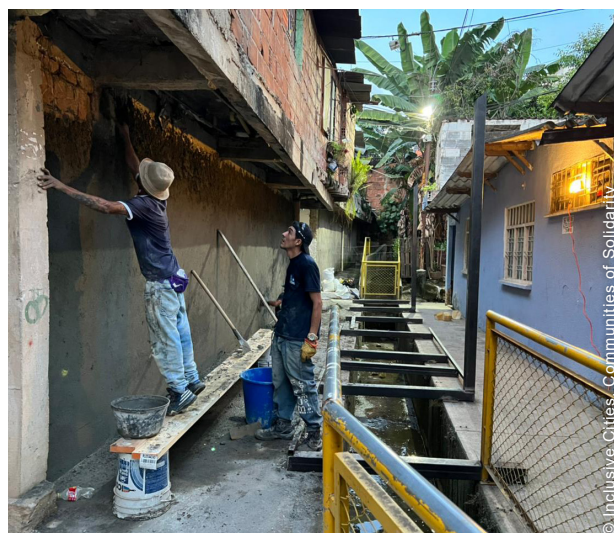
This intervention aimed to obtain a high impact with a low budget. It focused on a poor-quality and polluted alley around a waterway, which was then transformed into an open space classroom for children in the community without access to formal education. Lighting was also introduced together with sitting areas. The space started to be used daily by different community groups, at different

moments of the day, and for different activities. Children use the space for recreation with a community-based organization, while adults use it during non-school hours for social encounters and exchanges. Moreover, the intervention transformed the public space and its surroundings into a dynamic area (busy during the day and night) and consequently displaced criminal and anti-social practices related to drug dealing and consumption conditions and access to the right to the city at the city, neighborhood, and community levels. Among them, the so-called 'tactical urbanism' interventions are included to transform spatial conditions while promoting social integration.

### IMPLEMENTATION

The intervention in Bucaramanga was implemented through the following steps:

1. Identification of potential public spaces through participatory processes developed with project participants, local government, and other stakeholders at different levels.
2. Action prioritization for the selected public space: through a participatory exercise (workshop) with the community, the project aimed to identify the primary needs and demands for the public space and territorial assets that could be seen as advantages during the intervention.
3. Co-design of interventions with participants (Venezuelan and host community members) according to their primary needs and demands.
4. Socialization of intervention proposal for community approval.
5. The physical construction with community participation – this was planned for approximately seven days, according to the complexity of the intervention.
6. Activation of the public space to promote the appropriation of the community by cultural and recreational activities.



Intervention process at target public space.

## TARGETING

Considering that the overall project had a multi-scale approach, it included actions at the city, neighborhood, and community levels. Tactical urbanism actions were implemented at the community level in public spaces that complied with the following criteria:

1. **Ownership:** The area must be the property of the local government or the community to ensure that the action will be implemented strictly on public or community property.
2. **Risk condition:** The public space could be in an area with risk only when it does not imply vulnerability or healthy concern for users.
3. **Location:** The public space is located at a strategic and central point at the neighborhood level.
4. **Presence of Venezuelan community:** The public space must have the potential to be used by host and Venezuelan communities in equal conditions.

The selection of the public space in the Granjas de Provenza neighborhood was based on the above-mentioned criteria. The waterway crosses the entire neighborhood and is a center point for everyday activities. Moreover, the selection of the space was supported by the presence of Venezuelan and host communities considering that several Venezuelan households are living around the waterway. Finally, Venezuelan children are the most affected by the lack of access to education. Hence, Venezuelan children represent a significant percentage of the “Open Street School” participants, which after the intervention started to operate in the public space.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement was a vital aspect of the design and implementation phases of the project. Neighbors, children, and parents of the “Open Street School” participated. The engagement of the community helped to ensure the timely completion of the work.

A fundamental part of community engagement was the link and support of community leaders and the relation of the project focal point with community members in the neighborhood. Thanks to the proximity of participants, community engagement during the intervention helped to guarantee the sustainability of the action. As soon as the intervention was finalized, children utilized the public space and gave life to an open-street classroom. The last step of the intervention, the public space activation, was led and conducted by the project participant community.

## COORDINATION

Although tactical urbanism was approached as an on-site intervention, the project designed and coordinated the action through a regional team (architects, urban designers, and an acquisition team) that organized the activities with

a focal point on-site. While the regional team was responsible for the design, technical details, and the provision of materials, the field focal point was responsible for the participation of the community during different phases. The intervention was facilitated by the support of local leaders, who contacted community members and promoted their participation. In addition, they also provided safe locations for materials storage during the construction process.



The co-creation of spaces contributed to social cohesion among the host and Venezuelan communities.



Members of the Open Street School at the intervention site.

**MAIN CHALLENGES**

The most pressing issue during the intervention was time. Considering that tactical urbanism consists of soft interventions (not civil engineering infrastructure), actions were not planned to take more than seven days. Longer interventions were considered not cost-effective. In the case of Bucaramanga, the team was able to complete 80 percent of the work on time. Challenges in material delivery caused slight delays in activity implementation. The community took charge of the remaining actions and finalized the intervention. Another relevant challenge was to provide technical direction to the community after the departure of the regional team, flagging the importance of counting on a technical person on-site to lead the preparation and implementation of actions.

Additionally, to facilitate community participation during the construction phase, the project organized its construction according to the availability of a specialized labor force. Hence, activities that did not require training were implemented at the times of the day when the community could collaborate most effectively. Considering security conditions, the presence of criminal gangs added pressure during the construction phase. The participants mitigated security threats and facilitated the full development of the intervention.

**OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS**

Women and LGBTQI+ communities were considered a priority within the overall project. The intervention in Bucaramanga proved to be effective in the transformation of the physical space through the provision of furniture, lighting, and signs, promoting the space's use by all groups in the community. It did not consider the construction of civil infrastructure such as roads, retaining walls, or other similar items.

Within that scope, the action indirectly benefited the entire population of the Granjas de Provenza neighborhood through the transformation of the public space, the mitigation of environmental pollution, and the reduced risk of exposure to criminal gangs.

Moreover, the intervention directly benefited at least 20 children that were part of the community-based group and 20 households (around 80 people) living in the surrounding area of the intervened public space. Regarding Venezuelans, they are counted as both direct and indirect participants in the activity. As a result of the action, the surrounding waterway was transformed into a space for community encounters and recreation.



As soon as the intervention was finalized, children utilized the public space and gave life to an open-street classroom.

## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### STRENGTHS

- ✓ **The territorial integration approach was effective** to promote the inclusion of mobile communities while linking humanitarian assistance with effective integration and development.
- ✓ **Community participation** helped guarantee that proposed actions were responding to needs in accessing fundamental rights and opportunities (housing, employment, healthcare, education, recreation, cultural expression, and community participation).
- ✓ **Co-creation of spaces** strengthened the relationship between host and Venezuelan communities and boosted integration processes.
- ✓ **The support of community leaders and the municipal government** helped guarantee the sustainability of tactical urbanism interventions.
- ✓ **On-site teams oversaw the relationship with the community**, participatory processes, and general implementation. A regional team oversaw the coordination and provision of technical and specialized assistance.
- ✓ **Agreements with the local government** facilitated the obtaining of building permits.

### WEAKNESSES

- × **Limited budget and scope of interventions:** The challenges identified exceeded the reach of the project, security-, socioeconomic- and spatial-wise.
- × **A lack of monitoring tools** to effectively measure the integration of participants.
- × **The proposed methodology did not consider Venezuelans' limitations to participating in workshops** and community activities, especially related to time availability.
- × **Difficulties in the relation with some stakeholders** (not considering community and community leaders) that influence public space dynamics, including criminal gangs, municipal officials, and private actors.
- × **The municipal government provided permits but did not participate in the intervention**, due to their limited capabilities.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Tactical urbanism activities must be planned, designed and implemented with communities to enhance the sense of belonging and ownership.
- Community engagement activities are key to strengthening local bonds and facilitating participatory processes towards the interventions.
- Co-creation and participatory workshops should include activities for children so the entire family can attend, including parents (especially single mothers).
- Xenophobia can result from the sense of competition between host and vulnerable communities, collaborative projects can help mitigate this.
- Host and Venezuelan communities have the same expectations from their neighborhoods and public spaces, and both were willing to contribute to improvements.
- Future interventions should more heavily consider the availability of communities with a predominant share of work in the informal sector.
- Co-design and co-creation workshops generate expectations in the community. It is important to plan all phases within a short timeframe to adequately manage them.

### RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

The project promoted the effective integration of refugees and migrants with tools flexible enough to be adapted for a differentiated approach for any vulnerable community. In that context, as improvement opportunities, the following conditions were identified:

- Establish a strong monitoring baseline at the city-level with the location of refugees and migrants that guide all project activities on the ground.
- Ensure the active participation of local governments in the design and implementation of tactical urbanism actions.
- Implement community actions (related to culture and recreation) from the beginning of the project to promote community engagement during next phases.
- Strengthen local stakeholders' participation in the project to sensitize participants on the advantages that migration could bring to the community and neighborhood.

### FURTHER READING ON SHELTER PROJECTS

**On local authority engagement:** [A.19 / IRAQ 2019–2021](#); [A.8 / BAHAMAS 2018–2019](#); [A.16 / UKRAINE 2016–2021](#)

**On community engagement:** [A.14 / PHILIPPINES 2016–2020](#); [A.18 / NEPAL 2016–2017](#); [A.23 / SRI LANKA 2010–2016](#)

