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THE VENEZUELAN REFUGEE CRISIS:  
CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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**Introduction:**

TED PICCONE

Charles W. Robinson Chair and Senior Fellow, Latin America Initiative  
The Brookings Institution

**Panel:**

DANY BAHAR, Moderator

David M. Rubenstein Fellow, Global Economy and Development  
The Brookings Institution

KAREN L. FREEMAN

Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau  
for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance  
USAID

MATTHEW REYNOLDS

Regional Representative for the United States and the Caribbean  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

MARTA COSTANZO YOUTH

Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary, Central Asia & the Americas, Bureau of  
Population, Refugees, and Migration  
U.S. Department of State

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING

706 Duke Street, Suite 100

Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. PICCONE: Good morning, everyone. I'm Ted Piccone. I'm a Senior Fellow in the Latin America Initiative in the Foreign Policy Program here at Brookings.

And I welcome you to today's discussion about: *Venezuela, the Refugee Crisis: Challenges and Solutions*. As, you know, the Summit of the Americas is meeting as we speak, trying to address this problem through some kind of regional response, so it will be interesting to see if there will be any consensus toward a more coherent and generous regional response.

As you know, Venezuela has really become the poster child for how the combination of corruption, economic mismanagement, and undemocratic governance can lead to widespread suffering, in a spreading humanitarian crisis.

We have on the economic front a real collapse of the economy, soaring inflation, massive currency devaluation, dramatic declines in oil production, which is of course the foundation of Venezuela's economy. Caracas is now one of the most dangerous cities in the world.

On the political side, President Maduro is ruling like an autocrat. There is no real viable check on his power. We have elections scheduled there next month which are already declared illegitimate by several governments in the region, including the United States.

On the humanitarian front, we have shortages of basic medicines as the primary care infrastructure collapses, massive increases in disease, increases in child and maternal mortality, hunger and malnutrition. Aid delivery, well, international aid deliveries not getting in, domestic aid delivery is politicized, and there's a serious brain drain that's affecting the health care services as well.

We are not going to be able to address all of these problems of the conflict; today's focus is on the situation of migrants and refugees. And to help us, we have a fantastic panel of people, policymakers who are actually engaged with this problem in the U.S. government, and at the United Nations.

We'll hear from, in our panel, Karen Freeman is the Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance at USAID; a long title. You all have their bios, so I won't go into detail. She has served in many different places around the world including in Kenya, in Pakistan, early days in her career in Central America and El Salvador, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, et cetera.

We are also joined by Matthew Reynolds. He's the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Representative for the United States and the Caribbean. He has spent 30 years in government service handling humanitarian response, oversight and management, and a very interesting career working on legislative affairs here in Washington at the State Department, and on Capitol Hill. So, it will be very helpful to get his political antenna on how we can move forward on this issue.

We also have today, Marta Costanzo Youth, who is the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary in the State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration. She handles Central Asia and the Americas, that's an interesting combination, a long-standing Career Diplomat, has served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Managua, also in our Embassies in Ottawa, and Quito, South Africa.

So, it's really a fantastic group. We are going to be moderating led by -- the moderation today will be led by Dany Bahar. Dany is a David Rubenstein Fellow in the Global Economy and Development Program.

And he works closely with Ernesto Talvi, who is here with us today

visiting from Uruguay. He directs CERES, a think tank in Montevideo, and helps run our Economic and Social Policy Initiative in the Global Economy and Development Program.

Dany is an Economist, Israeli and Venezuelan, does a lot of very technical and interesting work on productivity and structural transformation, but including in that, the role of migration and economic transformation. So, he has just come back from Cúcuta, Colombia, where he spent time on the border talking to refugees and service providers. So, we'll get a first-hand view. And he's going to introduce the first segment, which will be a video from an official in Colombia. Thank you.

MR. BAHAR: Good morning. And welcome to Brookings. My name is Dany Bahar. Thank you, Ted, for the introduction. Let me, before I invite the panelists to join, let me tell you a little bit of what I lived through over the past week.

I just came from spending two-and-a half-days in Cúcuta, which is the bordering city with Venezuela. And I met thousands of Venezuelan migrants or refugees really with terrifying stories. Every person I met they had a very horrible background story behind it.

I don't think I just randomly met the 20 or 30 people with the worst stories, I think that really, every person that went by had a terrible story. I found, very roughly, two profiles of people crossing the border.

The first group is those that are closing for the day or for the week, some of them to work and bring some money back to Venezuela. They're not able to get a decent job with a decent pay in Venezuela. I've met people who were crossing just to buy groceries, and medicines, and just coming back. I've met people that are coming for humanitarian purposes, to go to a hospital, to vaccinate their babies, because there are no vaccines in Venezuela.

I saw a lot of children going to school at 6:00 a.m. in the morning,

probably they will be coming back in the afternoon. I saw a lot of people crossing just to eat in some of the public dining halls for charity, the Catholic Church and other organizations are putting there for the people, and then coming back.

But I also saw a lot of people leaving Venezuela for good. Some of them with a bag, some of them with nothing on them, using their lifetime savings to jump to the uncertainty, some of them are planning to stay in Columbia, some of them are taking buses to go beyond Columbia. There were like 12 bus companies just, as you cross the border, taking people to places like Ecuador, Argentina, Chile.

Just imagine this is the bus with 40 people that it takes them six, or seven, or nine days to get to their destination. And you know, when you are there, you realize that this is not a normal border. I don't think -- I mean as far as I'm concerned, I don't think it's normal to cross a border and see Red Cross tents treating people as they cross.

You're welcome to see my tweet in my Twitter feed @Dany\_Bahar, a lot of these stories that I'm telling you, I try to get in details on those, but let me tell you a little bit about the macro situation.

The Colombian Government has done a lot, they really have -- they have put a lot of efforts to provide some legal status to these people crossing, to treat them in their public hospitals, allowing children to go to school. This has come at a cost to them, and they're looking for help.

There are many, many other non-governmental institutions on the ground, the Catholic Church standing out as one of them, we met some of the -- I went to some of the dining halls that they're putting together. The number they told us that they've served 400,000 hot meals in the past eight months.

This is not counting meals are not hot, so they are also given out

sometimes some dry food for people to eat, or the Red Cross is providing first aid assistance as people cross the border, as I said.

But there's so much that the government, the Colombian Government alone can do, or the other governments can do on their own, and that's why part of this forum is to think constructively how can the international community help.

My feeling on the ground was that this is a crisis governments in the region are not calling this a crisis yet, and there might be political reasons for it, there may be -- there's a big discrepancy on the numbers, and we are going to get to that.

And we tried very hard to get some representative from a South American country here today with us. It was very hard to do so. But I was fortunate enough to meet Felipe Muñoz, who is President Santos' envoi to the border, to deal with the border. His title is the Border Manager, and he actually sent us a video in which he's going to explain a little bit in detail what have been done. So, let's watch this video and then we'll start a conversation. (Video playing)

MR. MUÑOZ: Good morning everybody. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here with you today. My name is Felipe Muñoz. I was designated a couple of months ago by President Juan Manuel Santos as Manager of the Colombia and Venezuela border. My job is coordinating all the actions that the Colombian Government has put forth to attend the Venezuela migration. I'm coordinating the action within the government with local authorities around the country, and with international cooperation.

I would like to begin by making a quick balance on how this process has been. This process began in 2015 when the Venezuelan Government expelled more than 22,000 Colombians during a one-week period.

These require a massive response for the Colombian Government to establish controlled units at the three main border points with Venezuela, that are located

in the Departments of Guajira, Norte de Santander and Antioquia.

With the participation of many state entities, and a quick response plan, we were able to address this problem effectively. In a six-months period the Colombian Government was able to manage and control the situation, but it was time enough to realize that there was a significant increase in the migration that needed monitoring.

The second stage of this process came in 2017, when a highest percentage of Venezuelan migrants arrived to Colombia territory as well as to other South American countries. It is important to say that the Venezuela migration is not just a phenomenon happening in Colombia, but it is creating humanitarian problems in other countries of South America as well.

To give some figures to you about the situation, the International Organization for Migration estimates that in Mediterranean 170,000 migrants moved to Europe in comparison, those same figures showed that the number of people that have left Venezuela in the last two years may be approaching 1.8 million migrants, this is therefore ten times the situation in the Mediterranean.

In this sense, Colombia is the largest migrant recipient of a phenomenon that is acquiring regional characteristics. During this stage which began in June 2017, the Colombian Government took a series of measures to address the migrant population. With the help measures more than 25,000 Venezuelan have been attending, free of charge, in the emergency room of the Public Emergency Service Network.

We had put forward education on measure as well to ensure the Venezuela children can continue with their education. Today, there are about 30,000 children in Colombia public school, but there are also childcare measures, with this strategy more than 25 Venezuelan children and adolescents had been assisted in the Colombian childcare system.

And also migration measures were implemented, for example the government create a special transit card to be controlling the border and a special permit to stay, that guarantees a legal status for Venezuelan migrants in the country, and gives them the possibility of being in Colombia for a two-year period.

As time passed and the increase in the migration continued, additional measures were taken this year in February by President Santos. Not only did the flow of Venezuelan migrants to Colombia continue to grow, but the percentage of Venezuela, who transits through Colombia territory to go through Ecuador, and to other countries in the region, has also increased substantial.

Within these new measures, there are control and security measures, because though the Colombia Government has been generous and supportive with the Venezuelan migrants' situation, this phenomenon requires to be managed with security and control. These measures include the registration of the regular migrants that we began last week.

The registration for Venezuelan migrants in Colombia is one of the largest registers in the world. In two months we hope to register all Venezuelans who have entered the country without documents, in order to know their situation and to be able, as a government, to establish some modification or extension of humanitarian public policy that the Colombian Government is already implementing.

In addition, other measures were created to support Colombian returnees. As you may know, a significant percentage of those returning from Venezuela have the right to be Colombian, because there are children of either a Colombia father or a mother, and there, too, the government has a specific program for this population, all this within the framework of a need for resources.

As you may see the Colombian government invests many resources in



this process, and will continue to do so, but we need the help of international cooperation, and we are working not only with the United State Government, with the United Nations and all its agencies, with the European Union, and all the NGOs to make this process coordinated and effective. But we need resources especially for very specific health issues there are at risk in epidemiological diseases, and the cost in vaccination and prevention issues are increasing. Many Venezuelan migrants arrive in very critical health condition, and we need to reinforce this process.

This is a quick overview to begin this discussion, and to tell you, and to reiterate to you that the Colombian Government has been taking care of the situation and continues to do so. It is an issue of highest priority for the President, the Foreign Minister and the Government.

My last message is that here in Colombia the Government and State entities will continue to act with solidarity and generosity, but also with security and control criteria. Thank you very much good.

MR. BAHAR: Let me welcome the panel, so please join us here. In the meantime I want to say, I encourage you to tweet about this event and use the hashtag, Venezuela Refugee Crisis, if you're in the Twitter world. Thank you so much for joining us, you know, taking some time from your busy schedules to join us here this morning.

I want to start by asking a question to Mr. Reynolds from UNHCR. There was a recent -- the UNHCR recently published a guidance note, which I have here, on the Venezuelan migration crisis where they are encouraging the receiving states to consider the application of the Cartagena Declaration in the cases of Venezuelan asylum seekers including as a basis, for accelerated or simplified case processing.

So, for those of you who don't know the Cartagena Declaration was adopted in 1984 by 10 Latin American countries including Venezuela and Colombia, and

it expands the original definition of a refugee that was established in 1951, and then it was expanded in '67, Cartagena Declaration definition for refugee says that "Refugees are people who flee their country because their lives, security or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order."

It further says, the note says, "UNHCR considers that the broad circumstances leading the outflow of Venezuelan Nationals would fall within the spirit of the Cartagena Declaration."

So, the first question for you is, there is not a wide recognition in the region that most of these migrants are refugees, and the question is, in your opinion, can we call them refugees? How easily would it be to classify them as refugees? What are the steps, what are their requirements, legally and practically for the international community, with UNHCR leading the efforts to really boost support for the efforts on the ground, based on whether they are or not called refugees?

MR. REYNOLDS: Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Dany. And I'd like to thank Brookings for holding this important event at this time, particularly as the situation surrounding Venezuela continues to grow, and become increasingly problematic. As you noted, I mean, the ongoing political and socio-economic developments have led to, as you've mentioned, the outflow of 1.5 million Venezuelans into the neighboring countries.

And this is a conservative estimate based on government, area government reporting. So, if you think about this, in modern history Latin America has never experienced an exodus of this dimension, and it could be another million this year. Here, we are seeing flows of about 5,000 people a day, and that's not just through, as you saw in the video, not just through to Colombia, but obviously to other countries in the

area, fleeing from Colombia into Ecuador, to Peru we see -- on the other side Guyana, and the small Caribbean Islands.

So, to date you have about 146,000 to 147,000 Venezuelans have actually filed asylum claims with an estimated, about 444,000, have accessed alternative legal forms of stay in Latin America.

As you noted properly, and recently, the UNHCR considers the broad circumstances leading to the outflow of Venezuelan nationals to fall within the Cartagena Declaration, with the resulting presumption of the international protection needs.

So, to that end, as you pointed out, and I encourage others to look, we've published that in March, just this last month, 2018, the Guidance Note which, as was mentioned encourage the states to consider the application of this regional definition in the case of Venezuela and asylum seekers, including as a basis for accelerated or simplified case processing.

This recognition is becoming increasingly important because as the outflow continues you may have just been putting the numbers I gave you together to recognize that almost two-thirds of the Venezuelans remain in an irregular situation without documentation, including those who are not able to apply for asylum, or another legal status, because of bureaucratic obstacles, long waiting periods, high application fees, you know, you name it.

So, these Venezuelans without access to legal status are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and receiving communities are, themselves, coming under increasing strain which can undermine peaceful coexistence, and feed the manifestations of discrimination and xenophobia.

So, therefore, you know, the need for a predictable legal status, documentation, shelter, access to health care, and other basic services is acute. And so

I think that's why we don't -- you may not want to be too tied up immediately, in all of the -  
- sort of legal definitions. The fact of the matter is there is a huge community both of  
outflow, but also host communities that clearly need assistance and need protection.

I'll just kind of point out, too, because as we are all focused on this to  
remember that Venezuela itself has generously hosted a large number of -- a large  
refugee population from the region and other parts of the world for decades, and this  
generosity should be recognized and reciprocated now by ensuring the timely and  
effective protection and assistance to Venezuelans who are compelled to leave their  
country.

MR. BAHAR: Thank you. I want to follow up before passing to the other  
panelists. I want to ask, like, would this be a requirement for the governments to declare  
this is a refugee crisis, or to adopt the Cartagena Declaration? Would this be a  
requirement for UNHCR to play a bigger role in providing aid and boosting the efforts on  
the ground?

MR. REYNOLDS: I mean, we are already very much on the ground, it's  
important to note that there are, as I said, looking just internally within Venezuela, we've  
got over 100,000 Colombians still in Venezuela in sort of a refugee-like status in  
existence there. And we are ramping up operations throughout the area, regardless of --  
I mean it's important to, and that's why we put out the Guidance Note.

With the Guidance Note, we very much are pursuing and pushing for the  
important protections that would be required, but UNHCR provides assistance on a  
needs basis, and the need is clearly there. So, you see, and we've just recently released  
a request for a supplemental budget for \$46 million, which we know -- we are expecting,  
a United States contribution, because the U.S. is the number one contributor to UNHCR,  
and it's always very generous.

So, I've got my hopes there, to address those situations, and provide the kind of assistance, the kind of support, the kind of advice that we are providing in all of the areas. You know, in some countries like Colombia, when you think of the amount of people, and these are large countries that are already absorbing lots of Venezuelans.

But part of my jurisdiction here, I've worked to represent the Caribbean area, and in some of the very small Caribbean countries, even a small amount of Venezuelans make a difference. I mean Aruba has 120,000 people if you add 30,000 Venezuelans to that, that's Lebanon's size proportion of refugees.

MR. BAHAR: Okay. Thank you. Ms. Freeman so as we heard from Mr. Muñoz the Colombian authorities have done a lot, but it seems like they're still in the need of important financial resources to be able to provide the help, particularly, on the health system they've been claiming that that's a big limitation for them right now. And USAID recently provided a grant of \$2.5 million to help the Venezuelan migrants who are crossing the border.

So, I was hoping you can tell us a little bit about the purpose of the grant. And looking forward, do you envision continued support from USAID to Colombia, Brazil, to deal with this particular problem? From my feeling of talking to officials this is a very generous contribution, but it's still very small in terms of what it -- that probably will be needed if we start running numbers. So, I wonder if you could give us some background on that and what do you see happening forward in terms of aid?

MS. FREEMAN: Sure. Thank you. And thanks to Brookings, and to my fellow panelists for so dedicatedly following this issue that could easily fall off of the scope these days. We are very concerned at USAID about the humanitarian situation inside Venezuela as well as in the neighboring countries, and I need to be very generous in my praise of the Colombian Government and the role that they're playing, as well as

the countries in the region, who are really absorbing the impact of the other migration.

The administrator announced a \$2.5-million package a couple of weeks ago, and the emergency food and health assistance for Venezuelans in Colombia, and the communities that are hosting them as well. And so not to the entirety of the request, but we do expect that the package -- that the package will grow, and we and we are looking at the region with great concern in this movement of people. And not unmindful of the fact that their programs will need to respond to the people in need in the region.

With respect to the program in Colombia itself, within the \$2.5-million package, part of that is going to -- and we are working with PAHO, the Pan American Health Organization, to support immediate efforts. We are also looking at providing the bulk of that 2.5 million through WFP for food assistance. But also looking at working with OSHA, and HDR, and others to really, kind of, get ahead of the analytical side of this, and get a better idea of what the needs are now, and what they're going to be.

Because as this emergency stretches on, and until there is a political solution, then the humanitarian solution will not -- it will never be, it will never be enough.

MR. BAHAR: Thank you. So, Ms. Youth, I know that you spent some time recently both in Colombia and Brazil, so I hope you can tell us a little bit about that, and particularly in the context of -- the State Department has a lot of experience in dealing with the conflicts that result in this large -- in a large population of refugees and displaced people, so one things I'm curious, it's like, how do you compare what you were doing -- what you saw in the border to other ongoing conflicts that you've seen? I mean can you categorize these as economic migrants? Do you see more, really, as refugees?

Because what I what I was surprised by being there is that, yeah, right there's not like a war happening in Venezuela, but all the humanitarian indices are like countries with war or even worse. So, in that sense I had, like, two parts to this question;

first, if you can tell us about that experience. And second, what have been the efforts, so far, of the U.S. Government, the State Department in dealing in the context of this Venezuelan situation?

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: Thanks, Dany. So, first of all let me say in all humility, there are folks in the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration who are, if their Foreign Service officers are recidivists, and they go back time and time again for tours there. And our civil servants in the Bureau are kind of devoted to the issues of migration, and humanitarian assistance to refugees, and the stateless, and so forth.

I'm only a recent arrival this past year, but they've done a good job kind of inculcating me into the Bureau. So, for those of you who are not familiar with the Bureau of Refugee and Migration in the State Department, the PRM it's known as in the field, it leads the U.S. Government efforts, when there is a refugee and migration crisis, and we look for sustainable solution for Refugees, for people in need of international protection, and for stateless, of which there are many in the world.

We have civil servants and Foreign Service officers here in the State Department and around the world; we have refugee coordinators, and local staff who are also amazingly dedicated to these issues.

And they liaise with governments, they keep tabs on situations of concerns, and they monitor the assistance that we fund. So, we fund UNHCR, and then we monitor them, and make sure that they're using our money, the U.S. taxpayer money efficiently, and to really meet the needs of the people in need of protection, and in the needs of the host governments.

And then where we don't have refugee coordinators and PRM staff specifically, in all of our embassies I have been amazed at how our staff, and especially

in Latin America our ambassadors have been very engaged in this issue, working with the local governments.

We work very closely with USAID in many of these situations, especially with Food for Peace throughout the world during refugee and migration crises.

In terms of what I saw, you know, just before we came in, we were chatting a little bit of what I saw recently in Cúcuta, and as well as I went to Boa Vista which is a Roraima State, right upon the Venezuelan border as well. And essentially, you know, I think it echoes a lot of what Dany was saying, you know. I also don't think I managed to just talk to the people who were most desperate; I think their stories were indicative of many of the people coming out.

And there were stories of, you know, a lot of parents I ended up talking to, and these were a lot of parents who didn't want to leave their country, because I think the Venezuelans are pretty patriotic, actually, as a country, right. And they didn't want to leave, but finally got to the point where their children were crying at night, they were hungry every day. Their child's school was no longer functioning, and they were worried about their child's future.

There was no food to be had, or there was medical treatment that was necessary, and they couldn't get it, and so they had to come out. You know, and so these are desperate choices of desperate people.

And I was telling Dany just before that, you know, I met a young mother with this very small child that was supposed to be two months old, the mother was very slim, the baby was very -- smaller than you would expect for a two-month-old, I'm not a medical expert so I can't say but, you know, essentially she said I don't get enough food, there's no way I could feed this child, there's no formula to be had, so I could just stay at home and just slowly watch this child starve to death, or I had to come out, and get



formula and get medical care.

And so these are the desperate and very humbling choices that you hear from people, there were also many people who are out and sending, you know, goods or sending money back to family in Venezuela to help them get through this.

So, it was a very instructive visit but I also, you know, to echo Karen and others comments, elsewhere in the world I think if this had happened, long before we got to the point of 1.7 million displaced Venezuelans, or displaced people out of their own country and into other countries, this would have been like, on the front page every day a long time ago. And so you have to give credit to all of the countries in the region who have been amazingly compassionate and generous in taking in, you know, what they referred to as our Venezuelan cousins, right.

And in Colombia especially there was this sense that, hey, when we had troubles internally Venezuela took our people in and they hosted them, and there continue to actually be Colombian refugees in Venezuela even to date. And now it's our turn to return the favor.

So, there was this amazing generosity and compassion, and when you heard Felipe Muñoz, I noted that one of the things he kept on talking about was integration, right. So, it wasn't like, we are hosting them and, you know, we are waiting for them to go back. No. They're trying to integrate them, they're getting them into schools, they're getting medical care. So, there's a, you know, you have to give these governments a lot of credit.

That said the flows continue, and so I think many governments have reached the point where they are saying, all along now we've been looking to the global experts, like UNHCR and IOM to help us through this, but we need more assistance, we need guidance on how to tackle this.

And so what in what the State Department does and through PRM so essentially we give a contribution by authority, we either fund international organizations, but we also fund NGOs. And so, in fiscal year '17 we funded \$36.5 million in the region. It didn't all go to this Venezuelan crisis, but it's kind of earmarked very loosely for the region, so that it can be used for whatever is the emerging crisis.

But in addition to that, UNHCR also, we have an emergency fund as part of our contribution, and last year they pulled \$3.3 million, I think, from that. So, at the early part of the crisis so that we could help out both host governments, and meet some of the humanitarian needs of these people, just as they needed urgent assistance.

So, this is, you know, kind of the part and parcel, and then going forward we are looking -- UNHCR has their supplementary appeal that's out there, IOM has also - - the International Organization of Migration has recently put out a regional plan, and asked for funding for that. And then the State Department has also put out a NOFO, which is I guess a request for proposals, I forget what it all stands for now, but a request for proposals for nongovernmental organizations throughout the region, you know, to see what gaps there are, because obviously the international organizations cannot be everywhere, and sometimes there are specific things in specific areas that NGOs somehow are better adapted to handle.

And so we are looking also to fund NGOs, and I think that request for proposals closes early next week. And so we hope to -- we are still looking at the appeals but, you know, we hope to do our best to help with this situation.

MR. BAHAR: Thank you. Well, one of the things that I was struck by said there's really a lot of disagreement in terms of official figures, or the numbers. There was a recent paper by the International Migration Organization, the original action plan, they're talking about -- they said there are a little bit less than a million Venezuelans who

have left the country between 2015 and 2017, a UNHCR report says that there are over 1.5 million Venezuelans in the region. I know that these numbers are not so comparable, but still just to give you a sense of all the different numbers that are out there.

The Colombian Government officially says that there are about 600,000 Venezuelans in the country including regular and irregular migrants, and there you see a lot of official services on the field that are saying that the number is even up to 1.5 million Venezuelans in Colombia.

Then when you look at the border itself, officially, the numbers are that there are 30,000 people crossing the border every day, and about 3,000 of them are staying in Colombia or traveling further away, and official numbers talk about 70,000 people on average crossing every day and 5,000 staying. And we heard from Mr. Muñoz, there's an effort from the Colombian Government to put out a census, basically to understand this number.

But I wonder, I mean the definition for crisis I think is when we don't really know what's happening, so it's obvious that we don't really have a good number, but on the other hand, it seems like until we don't have a number -- everybody is waiting for the number to see how we move forward.

So, we have a little bit of a chicken-and-egg problem here, because one hand we don't declare it a crisis because we don't know how big the number is, and on the other hand, until we know of the number we cannot really act as if it was a crisis.

So, the first question I think for all of you but, maybe, I'll start with Mr. Reynolds. Do you have estimations that you consider reliable? Or what are your expectations, the UNHCR expectations for the years -- of people that will leave the country in 2018 and '19? How do you deal with this problem that we don't really have a number?

MR. REYNOLDS: All right. Well, we do have some numbers, and I think some of them have been referenced, and the numbers I use, the 1.5 million who have left Venezuela already these are, as I said, conservative governmental estimates. We need to be careful not to get too tied up in a numbers game, just like too tied up in a legal game, because we are talking about people in need, most importantly.

And there are sometimes political, socio-economic, and other reasons why governments may be a little shy at expressing all numbers, or in some cases, in some parts of the world we've seen numbers expanded by governments, and we haven't found the people.

So, you know there's -- lots of various reasons for some shyness. I mean I'd point back to the Middle East situation where, you know, you look at the Lebanese Government numbers originally and what they are today, and for a year or two they weren't really meeting, simply because there was a political and internal political crisis that's happening.

And you have to remember and put that in context, I mean even in a country like Colombia, which is going out and doing a new registration which UNHCR and IOM are supporting, this Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants, in order to help get better numbers and a better handle on what's going on.

You know, there are elections coming up, this is clearly, you know, the issue of population flows is an electoral issue, and when we look on the United States national, I look at my own country where, you know, we are 320 million people, and in a refugee admissions program of under 100,000, is a huge political event in certain elections.

So, you know, we have to give some leeway on that. I think as I had mentioned before, UNHCR's approach is really a needs-based as opposed to a status-

based approach, and we see the people there. We have a lot of teams that work cooperatively with the U.S. Government on the -- and you were there at the border you probably saw some of our dedicated staff there working with the host governments.

So, yes, the numbers are important when it comes to appeals, and so on, and we'd like to get the most accurate numbers, but I think it's also important to recognize the need that's there and appreciate that the numbers probably are much -- are higher. But we are all going to play the International political diplomatic game that we need to play, and approach it from a humanitarian perspective.

MR. BAHAR: I'm asking this, Ms. Freeman, because I think that -- I mean, what's also striking to me is that on one hand the Colombian Government for -- I mean I suspect there could be political reasons, or not. They are doing a lot of efforts putting a lot of efforts in the ground, but they are not willing to recognize this as a crisis.

And then I thought to myself, well you're not -- but at the same time they are requesting for more resources, so for the health system, for the school system. So, I told them, well, if you don't have a crisis and you want more resources, go to the World Bank or to the IDB and get some loans. So, I agree that, you know, the numbers, we are talking about people and the numbers are, on one hand, it's just a measure, but I think it does play a role when it comes to aid that could come to help these people on the ground.

So, how do you deal with that? I mean your sense, this \$2.5 million is a grant that is very standard to countries that, on a rolling basis, would need? Or is this something that could be much higher that's really a declaration of a crisis in the region?

MS. FREEMAN: I think as everybody has pointed out that the brotherhood, the fraternity within the region, nobody wants to embarrass the other. And so it puts everyone in a very difficult situation when it comes to declaring the numbers, or

calling it a disaster, or not calling it a disaster, and so what we have done is to look at it from a needs-based approach. And we will continue to do that as we look at the region itself.

We are very concerned about the numbers, and obviously we are looking to AFCR and IOM to continue to come up with the best figures that we possibly can. One of the things that we had been discussing earlier was the fact that, you know, the first wave of people were fairly well-off that left, and the second is a little less well-off, and the third a little less well-off, so as that grows, and continues, and as people are away from their livelihoods their status will continue to deteriorate, unless they can find gainful employment, or have other means of support. And so there are many factors that are going to complicate the numbers that we see coming out.

That said, we will, the program that we've set up right now, was really based on a situation along the border with the migrants being threatened, and also looking at the transnational threats. One of the things that we were very, very concerned about was the measles epidemic that was crossing over the border because children were not being -- were not receiving vaccinations.

And so we were starting to see in an area that, heretofore, had been at a fairly steady state, we are seeing rises in cases of measles. So, when the situation starts to then infiltrate and affect the other countries in the region it begins to elevate that in, I think, in everyone's eyes, particularly when you see pandemic sort of situations. So, we will be watching for those kinds of triggers as we look at the migrant population throughout the region.

MR. BAHAR: Ms. Youth, I want to give you a chance to add something on the numbers if you have, but I also have an additional question, which is, also in the U.S. we see a lot of Venezuelans that have arrived in the past 20 years. I think most of

them who arrived in the early years are people that are well off and they definitely are, for the most part, are able to sell here on their own.

But I wonder now if the U.S. is contemplating a scenario where it would provide also temporary protection status or some other sort of status for Venezuelans who are fleeing right now from the country.

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: Thanks, Dany. So, on the numbers, you know, as Matt and Karen said, it's not, you know, there's not like a some kind of scale, and you hit a certain number, and then you say, well, now they need help, you know. So, PRM, that's why we are monitoring what is happening in the field, what kinds of conditions people are in, what kinds of -- what kind of things are happening.

You know, is there sexual exploitation? Is there labor exploitation? Or what are the medical conditions, and so forth? And so, you know, more than anything else we keep an eye on indicators and try to find solutions for that.

And also one of the things that Matt was talking about early on when he was talking about how many people have applied for asylum, and how many people have some kind of alternative visa or residency status, that's one of the things that we do a lot in terms of advocacy with governments on, because someone without status somebody who has, you know, no document, no kind of laminated card that they can show, I am, you know, registered, or I have a visa, or I have something, that puts them in a very, very vulnerable situation.

And so in terms of, you know, Karen was mentioning transnational concerns, well, there's also the concerns of transnational crime, because if you have someone who needs a job, has hungry children to feed, and has no status, where will they turn and who, you know, who will look to them as a potential employee, so to speak. And so those are the kinds of things that we were encouraging governments in the region

to really continue in their generosity in terms of giving people status.

In terms of temporary protective status here in the United States that has been used on and off for many things. Just recently I was remembering that it was even used during the Ebola crisis for folks who were here in the States and then lifted maybe six months after.

I've not heard any indication, and the Department of Homeland Security makes that determination on when to use TPS, so I don't really know what the criteria are, but I know that there are many Venezuelans have come to the United States, and a good number are asylum seekers as well.

MR. BAHAR: Yes. And I think that what you're saying is key, in the sense that a lot of these people don't even have documentation, and because the system is, there's simply no money to put in passports. And I, well, a Venezuelan, and I don't have a passport for a year. So, if somebody at the Embassy is listening to me, please.  
(Laughter)

I've applied for a new one, well, it took six months for them to give me an appointment to go to their Consular here, and then it's been seven months and I still haven't seen the passport. So, can you imagine people that are really -- who never had a passport before, or don't have the financial resources to go through these -- to get this documentation, that's why you see a lot of irregulars crossing the border, and that's a big issue.

Let me, before I turn to the public for some questions, I want to tell you. I mean, the reason I asked about the numbers, I agreed that, you know, we should care less about the numbers, and care more about the needs, but the numbers are important to budget the needs.

And so I have a few questions for all of you and, you know, I mean the



numbers that we are seeing that are coming out, and that will keep coming out of the country are significant, there could be in the next -- I mean if this flow continues, and there's no reason to think that it wouldn't, because the government there hasn't shown any signs of dealing with the internal situation, you could see one million more Venezuelans leaving in the next year or two, out of which a big portion of them could be actually classified -- it would be in the need of humanitarian assistance.

So I, together with Strauss-Kahn, who works here at Brookings, we crossed some numbers, and we compared the cost of a Syrian refugee into the countries like Germany, and Turkey, and Jordan, for the very basic protection, which is, to my understanding, people who are living in refugee camps, giving them food and health and basic services for a year, and the costs there varies from 3,000 to \$10,000. If we adjust this to the cost of living in Colombia and in the region we have a number that is around \$2,500, or as to \$4,000.

So, if you think that a million people will leave, or even half-a-million people will leave and in the need of humanitarian assistance in the next year or two, we are talking about the most basic protection, the most basic cost which doesn't -- which, by the way, refugee camps are not great for integration, so that would be like the least -- the worst possible scenario.

We are talking about 1,500 -- \$1.5 billion that the region will need to cover the basic needs of these people who are fleeing and in need of humanitarian aids. So, that's why I'm talking about the numbers, because we do need to have a figure in order to understand whether the resources that have been put forward so far, are great start, but are only starts.

So, how do you envision -- I mean if we would need to create a fund that is that big, of \$1.5 billion, who would kick in with that fund, who leads that efforts, like

how, in comparison to other crises, like, how big these funds have been and who are the main contributors to these funds? So, I don't know if you want to --

MR. REYNOLDS: I'm going to start again.

MR. BAHAR: Maybe on the U.N., side maybe you can tell us a bit about that.

MR. REYNOLDS: Sure. I mean a couple of things, first every sort of crisis or situation of this nature is very different. So, it's somewhat difficult sometimes to compare different regions given the socio, a sort of economic, and status of Latin America and South America, it is greater than, for example, the crisis that we are dealing with places like Bangladesh, which are much poorer, and where the absorption capacity is much smaller.

So, I think that's important. I think the second thing to remember, too, is that -- and this is very true for South America and the region -- is that, and is increasingly true throughout the world that the majority of refugees and others are not ever in a camp that, in fact, it's quite urbanized. And they're now taken in by host communities.

So, when we are looking at the costs and looking at how to help people the best, it's actually a community-based approach as opposed to that individual refugee or asylee, or whatever status you want to give them, but it's in fact helping that community where they are. That community is oftentimes stressed and poor itself, and you actually can help integration and help acceptance much better, instead of building a separate school for the refugee, you are actually building a better school for the entire town.

So, those are important factors to keep in mind. I think there's another factor here that's often overlooked, and I appreciate my colleagues here for raising it. Before, it actually the real generosity, acceptance and sort of forward progress that South

America has in accepting others from its communities, you know, there is quite a bit of integration.

Some of it is relatively simple in the sense that everyone speaks Spanish, you know, and there's a lot of cross-border movement anyway, but it's I think -- and I think the other factor that plays in here which may be different than some other areas, is that the real answer here, and what really needs to happen and is being pushed, is really a regional approach, because this is a regional issue.

And you're seeing, you know, if you take, let's compare it to another huge crisis we have which is Syria, and while you had a lot of Syrians leave the vast majority of Syrian refugees are actually still within Syria, their IDP, but you also have five million but they're saying, it's Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, and those are the immediate-bordered countries.

With Venezuelans then, and because of things like Mercosur, and so many other regional approaches that have occurred, Venezuelans are not just staying in Colombia, we are seeing, every day, thousands leave Colombia and go to Ecuador, Ecuador to Chile, Chile to Argentina, Brazil. Now, we are now seeing a northern movement that's occurring, up to Central America, towards the United States, and particularly -- and of course the poor Caribbean countries which really get overwhelmed very, very, very quickly remember.

It's literally seven, you can see Trinidad, and you can see Aruba from Venezuela. So, the regional approach is extremely important, and I think one of the things that UNHCR, I think, and other U.N. families are close-partnered IOM, are very involved in is really trying to promote, and work a regional approach, and that's where you're going to, I think, get a better understanding of what the numbers, just not numbers, but the needs and the importance are.

Because if we just measure it, of someone crossing that Colombian border and say, aha, that means that these Venezuelans in Colombia, that number or that need for aid may not actually be accurate, because that family very well may be moving to Ecuador, or even coming to Northern Brazil, which is very tight. They may actually be ending up in Sao Paulo a month or two from then. So, it's a complicated process, but there are people a lot smarter than me, and UNHCR who do this, and who are helping our partners figure that out.

MR. BAHAR: Before I go you, I want to push, in terms of the finance in particular, because the \$46 million, do you foresee this as a first step, and do you foresee that UNHCR or the U.N. system in general are thinking in the dimensions that we've talked about before? Of like, even if it's a regional issue of 500,000 people who are, who would be in the need of humanitarian assistance, are there talks about it? Do you these 46 million as just as a start to something that could be bigger if things get worse, or?

MR. REYNOLDS: Yes. Sadly, I'm afraid it's -- I'm afraid it is more of a first step, and not necessarily based on specifics of this crisis, but just of the generalities that have occurred in the world over the last 25 years, we are finding every new crisis becomes much greater, and much longer, and much more protracted, and we have to be thinking that way, and be prepared for it. We can, you know, prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

MR. BAHAR: Do you want to jump in on the finance side and the size of the aid?

MS. FREEMAN: Well, you know, we are seeing this across the spectrum of the protraction of situations and, yes, we do need the numbers in order to budget out for the responses, but what we also need a lot more of, on the one hand, responding to the need is the involvement of the local communities, the absorption notion in the area,

the involvement of the local governments, all the governments around the -- within the region, not only on the care of these people who are flooding into their countries but also their involvement in pressuring the Government of Venezuela to resolve this problem.

The problem -- the solution will not come unless that is done. And, you know, it's all well and good to have, you know, the United States and other to apply that pressure, but it's much more important for those who have a very vested interest that don't want to see their children being infected by diseases that they don't need to be infected by, because they are coming over the border, because the country has let its health system die, to put their own pressure on that government.

The humanitarian crises that we see today more and more are man-made crises, and they need they must have a political solution. Otherwise, the humanitarian budgets that you refer to, will have to continue to grow, and grow, and grow, and they can't *ad infinitum*.

So, it really becomes incumbent upon the governments in the region to join in that effort. They may not have all of the financial resources to provide the humanitarian assistance, but they most certainly have the political influence, and they need to use that.

MR. BAHAR: And I'm going to be straight with this next question, the follow-up question. So, this initial package the USAID is giving, are there talks that you can share with other governments in which they'd like to -- in terms of expanding this aid? Or how do you foresee, if you can't tell us about the talks, how do you foresee this package increasing in the next year, as a follow-up question?

MS. FREEMAN: I mentioned earlier that we are looking at and working with IOM and others, and looking at what the flow is, where are people going, who is going where, and what their needs are, wherever they are going, because they are

putting pressure on other systems.

So, what those needs are? We've got to kind of figure that out before we can, sort of, decide what the needs are that need to be responded to. We will respond to those needs that cannot otherwise be met. And no, I can't get ahead of my boss in terms of the numbers (laughter), but I will say that we are -- you know, that we are looking at our resources and looking at what we can do.

MR. BAHAR: Thank you. And, let me see, Marta, if you want to jump a little bit into your views on the finance side?

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: I'll just give -- I won't give them to Dany, even though I know he wants to crunch the numbers, so even though I just said, well, we don't really focus on the numbers, obviously if we are doing our due diligence, and we are funding things, we can't just say, well, the numbers will be damned, and we'll just, you know, fund whatever. So, you know, we have this very intricate chart that we keep and guard in our office where we kind of have what the official host government estimates are of the numbers, what UNHCR estimates, what IOM estimates, because IOM has their data tracking mechanism, and so everybody counts a little differently, you know.

And also since all of our posts in the field we've encouraged them to report, so they're also reporting. But anyway, we keep track of this chart just so we -- you know, we can kind of do a better job knowing what we are funding. But I will also say that, you know, one of the things that -- in fact I just wrote Matt a note just to make sure that I was correct in this -- but, you know, one of the things that I think is a powerful comment as well is that -- so it's only recently that UNHCR put out this \$46-million appeal, and yet they already have \$1 million in contributions from private U.S. entities and citizens, right.

And that speaks also, that's another part piece of the puzzle, it's not just

the U.S. Government, and it's not just other governments in the region and other governments beyond the region, it's also individuals who see this, it touches them, and they also choose to contribute.

You should know that when we decide, and when we are looking at an appeal and we are deciding to use U.S. taxpayer money to fund it, you know, we take it very seriously, our stewardship of U.S. taxpayer money. And so one of the things that we always include when we are considering funding an appeal, is we have a section of our process where we talk about what we are going to do to encourage other donors to share the burden.

And so with all of these things, and that is always part of our strategy: how we are going to approach other countries that are traditional donors, other non-traditional donors, if we think this is important enough to spend U.S. taxpayer money on then we also think it's important enough to talk to our friends and allies, and encourage them as well to share some of that burden.

MR. BAHAR: Thank you. I have many more questions to ask, but I do want to give some questions to the public. So, why don't we start here with this gentleman in the third row? Please present yourself, shortly, and make sure your comment ends with a question mark. (Laughter)

QUESTIONER: Hi. My name is David Scharifker. I'm from Caracas, Venezuela. I just moved here to the U.S. two weeks ago, I'm a City Council Member, an elected official in Caracas, and I'll be studying a Master's Degree here in Washington. My question mainly begins with -- well, Ms. Freeman stated that there are different waves of Venezuela that have left.

And I can stare two of them. A friend of mine who graduated as an architect in a very prestigious university in Caracas left to Argentina by bus, maybe a

year ago, and he's working as a waiter now in a restaurant in Argentina. And then there's another friend who just left Venezuela with only \$20 in his pocket, towards Colombian, and seeing what's going to happen after that.

So, my main question is, for example, Chile now just a trade -- or a democratic responsibility, *revisa* for Venezuelans to go to Chile. Surely it's going to be, they are going to have to pay for them in Venezuela in dollars, and while minimum wage is only \$2 a month it's going to be very hard for a Venezuelan to pay, to be able to begin the process to obtain a visa to be able to move over to Chile.

So, my question mainly for Mr. Reynolds would be, what recommendations do you have for Latin American countries when trying to legalize the status of Venezuelans in their countries? Because if you have to charge people to be able to start a process, and the minimum billing wage isn't enough to be able to pay a process, how could they legally leave Venezuela and become migrants or refugees in other countries? That's all. Thank you.

MR. BAHAR: Okay.

MR. REYNOLDS: Yes. Quite simply, well, that's just one of the things we ask host countries to do is to appreciate the circumstances of those who are coming, and address it in that way, maybe waive a fee, or lower a fee, or find ways to break through obstacles, to accelerate registration processes, to appreciate that the people are there, and are in need of protection and assistance, and it's in the best interest of that government to have individuals registered, to have them legalized, so that they're not in an irregular, or even drawn into, or forced into an illegal situation.

You know, narco gangs and so on, are very, very prevalent, so it's very important for a country's own national security interests to cooperate. And we are finding that they are very receptive, the host countries are very receptive to this. Some as was



mentioned, the Southern Caribbean, some of them have never faced this sort of situation before, so the U.N. family, not only UNHCR, but IOM and others, are helping provide sort of examples, and instructions, and guidance on how to accelerate that sort of -- giving some sort of a legal and protective status that's important.

MR. BAHAR: More questions -- here with the lady in the third row.

QUESTIONER: Hi. And thank you again for sharing your experiences. My name is Anna Eulette, I work as an urban specialist in the World Bank. I would be interested to learn a little bit more, and some of you mentioned this in the panel, about what are your estimates given what we have seen in other countries, in other regions of the size of the needs, and the top priorities for host communities. In particular, say, in the short term, talking about local price inflation, food security, and things like that. Thanks.

MR. BAHAR: Who wants to --

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: Do you want to start.

MR. BAHAR: Yes. Ms. Freeman --

MS. FREEMAN: Yeah. I'm processing. In terms of the local communities, what we do try to do, and we are working with the WFP in the program in Colombia, is to use the local markets. So, we use tools like vouchers rather than just commodities. So, there is sensitivity to the local economy in the areas that the program is operating.

The other thing I think that we -- when we prioritize, is to look at, carefully at the local systems, be it the education, or health, or food delivery and food security, to see which ones are being impacted the most, and therefore gauge our response to that.

But it is a do-no-harm attitude that we take to try to make sure that the well-being of the local community, is taken into due consideration. And that will have to be the case as we look at other groups, and other populations what the situation is in the

local, in the local -- in the local community.

MR. BAHAR: Do you want to add something, yeah? Go ahead.

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: And, you know, it is on a case-by-case basis, right, so some countries have, you know, have like one piece of the puzzle, like shelter, all figured out, and so they don't have to, you know, that that's not the thing that needs to be focused on. And then another country, you know, sometimes it's the health issue which, I think is probably throughout the region a great focus.

But, you know, I have jotted down some of the things that I have seen that -- in talking to local governments, that they were talking about. So, some places they wanted technical training for people, job placement, and how to train people on self-employment so that they can get livelihoods right away.

Some places, through UNHCR, and IOM and others, we are working with border authorities right - to help build the capacity, because not that they didn't have capable border authorities, but they weren't quite expecting the numbers and kind of dealing with that. Sometimes its local authorities don't have the ability to monitor people with special needs, or to be -- or to -- you know, so it's doing the registration, it's helping train people to assess.

You know, in Boa Vista, when I was there, one of the things that I was truly impressed with, and this is, you know, not to put a compliment UNHCR too much but, you know, he'll be nice to me in the next question, so that's probably good. (Laughter) So, in Boa Vista I mean they are very isolated, Roraima State is very far from anything else, right, and so that all of these people are coming in, and unlike in Columbia and other places where, well, they are just hopping on a bus and moving through, many of them have been concentrating in Boa Vista.

And so it's very difficult for them to register everyone, and do anything

and the UNHCR folks they are very creatively talked -- you know, trying to figure out, so this not, over-populated part of Brazil. What is it? How can we use local resources to kind of grapple with this?

And they worked with the local University of Roraima, and they said, okay, you've got all of these young, bright college students, who are looking for experience in the world, what if they started working with the local police to do the initial registration of people, not like the adjudication of, you know, do you get a (inaudible)?

But at least, you know, the filing, the initial interview, the setting up, the appointments and all of that. They get a little stipend, they get a job, maybe they get credits at university, and this takes the burden off of people, who otherwise, would be doing this when they should be doing adjudication.

And so, it's kind of going in and looking at what the situation is, what the needs are, and seeing what locally, what kind of solutions there are. And even in that same instance with Roraima, I admired that, so the University of Roraima had a building that they had half built. And they hadn't finished building it, and they ran out of money, I guess, for construction, they were waiting to finish it, and one of the suggestions that UNHCR did, was they helped finish the construction of that.

And they said, okay, we'll use this as a reception center for Venezuelan migrants coming in, and it will be a one-stop-shop, because in many places when a migrant comes in, or a refugee comes in, and they want to apply for refugee status, and they want to get a -- or they want to get a document so that they can work on the market, or they want to see somebody about a medical issue, they end up kind of getting shopped all over town, right.

And these are people with limited means and perhaps -- and in the case of Brazil, they don't even speak the language, many of them, because they've come as

Spanish speakers, and so to have like a one-stop-shop where somebody -- a vulnerable migrant who comes in can hop in here and see all of the people they need to see in one place. I mean it's just a gift for them, and it also is helpful in getting them on the path to integration right away. So, you know, that's not going to be the case probably anywhere else, right, but every situation calls for, you know, a solution specific to the situation.

MR. BAHAR: And I just want to add to that, with my economist hat, that actually when you look at the evidence on economics with migration, most of the evidence shows that migrants are actually positive to the local economies, because migrants don't only take somebody's job, that also depends on how the skills of the migrants that are typically complementary to the natives, and the migrants are entrepreneurs, they create jobs, they eat, they wear clothes, so they also contribute to the local economy.

So, I think a lot of those issues that are really important in this case when we are talking about capacitation and integration, that migrants, per se, are very entrepreneurial, and I saw a lot of that actually. So, people that were, you know, selling phone accessories, but I also, I bought this amazing wallet that was made with Venezuelan bills, someone created, and you can see it, it was beautiful. (Laughter)

The bills are worth like less than one cent of a dollar, each bill, and can you imagine what these people could do, if they had a little bit of seed capital, and a little bit of business training, they could make wonders, they could really create a lot of jobs so I think that that -- here at Brookings, with me, I'm trying to, with research, to battle that misconception that migrants are negative.

And we are going to keep working on the Venezuelan case, in particular, on thinking how to integrate those to their local economies, and to the labor force, and we have some plans with some partners, and we are always looking for partners to help.

So, let's get some more questions. This gentleman here in the middle, the mic is coming to you there.

MR. FAJARDO: Hi. Good morning to everyone. I'm Erick Fajardo, from Catholic Charities on Migration and Refugee Office, I think it's one of the biggest resettlement agencies in this area. And just for practical curiosity, we would like to know that if given the comprehension the government has about the Venezuelan phenomena, and obviously the political sympathy, it's clearly on the table, it's just to know, if we need to be prepared for someone else.

It's in the plans of the government to approve clearly not a TPS Program, but something like a refugee program, a special refugee problem. My question goes, because since the last year we've been receiving pretty much, a good number of Venezuelan asylees. And we would like to know if, given, the situation in Venezuela, and the full comprehension the government seems likely to have about this phenomena, is in plans or in progress any kind of refugee program, we just want to be prepared that everyone is welcome, and our agency probably resettled many of the asylees from Central America lately. But we would like to know if we need to prepare more coats, that's all.

MR. BAHAR: Thank you. That's for you, I think.

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: Now, as I said with TPS, it's not been in my -- I've not heard anything about any consideration, that that would be out of the Department of Homeland Security, and in terms of any kind of special refugee program, that also has, as far as I know, has not been discussed.

There have been, over the past two years, a spike in asylum applications from Venezuelans in the United States, and those are being processed just -- but along with all the other asylum applications, but there I'm not aware of any kind of special

program.

MR. BAHAR: I follow up that with Mr. Reynolds --

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: But let me just say?

MR. BAHAR: All right.

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: I'll just call out Catholic Relief Services for their -- in many places that I have been during this trip, there has been a lot of excellent work done by Catholic Relief Services, and a number of religious NGOs, and very impressive, and those are the kind of things that when we are looking at NGO programs, the gaps, the things that NGOs are able to kind of focus on that is so helpful in these situations.

MR. BAHAR: Thank you. Thank you for that. I want to follow up quickly with Mr. Reynolds, because you are in the U.S.A office. So, the U.S. didn't sign the Cartagena Declaration, but are there legal grounds in the U.S. so that eventually these people could be recognized as refugees if there's a need in an easier way?

MR. REYNOLDS: Well, I mean the U.S. has all kinds of its own internal laws which are very -- which are compliant obviously with all of the protocols and conventions. The U.S. is, right now, along with Spain, are the two primary providers of asylum, of legal asylum for Venezuelans showing up at their borders. So, I mean that's really a, that the U.S. has been, I think, very generous.

It is, even for all refugees, it is still the number one resettlement country of admissions, and we hope that, not only the U.S., but others will give that opportunity to the most vulnerable, to be resettled.

MR. BAHAR: I'm asking this in the context that the U.S. has recently significantly lowered the number of (inaudible) access for refugees. So, when we are talking about TPS, and further measures, I know you told me the Homeland Security

Department, but do you foresee that in the case of Venezuela, it could be different than we've seen in the past year or two, their behavior towards Syrian refugees? Or would be part of the same legal framework?

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: It's all part of the same legal framework.

MR. BAHAR: Okay I want a female, to have some gender balance, so it's over there, please?

MS. MAIRA: Thank you. My name is Margarita Maeda. I come from Smart Citizen Foundation, from the *Fundación Ciudadano Inteligente* in Chile. We are an NGO, and we work all around the region to promote and strengthen Latin-American democracies. So, I was wondering -- Well, I'm a Fellow here at Brookings for the moment, but I'll be going back.

And I wondered, you just mentioned it again, that NGOs are filling in the gaps, you were saying, I was wondering what kind of work is it that you value that they are doing to actually help tackle this problem, because we haven't figured out a way to help Venezuela, from my organization yet, but we might be looking at that. So, how can we be useful, or how are they being useful, the NGOs in general? Thank you.

MR. BAHAR: NGOs, and if that's your territory, Ms. Youth?

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: Yes. I think that is my territory. I'm trying to find my -- I did a little -- I anticipated that someone would ask, which is good, and I kind of cut and pasted a little detail from our NOFO, which now of course I can't find. So, just off the top of my head, one of the things that -- but we have -- we've been funding many NGOs in the region already for Colombian refugees, right, because there are Colombian refugees in Venezuela, they're in Ecuador, they're in Costa Rica.

So, the programs that are done there, there's a lot of NGOs that do legal assistance, so this whole documentation thing, very problematic. So, while I was in

Colombia, I also went to see some of our programs for internally displaced Colombians. And so when -- the people who come out without documentation, and it's not just documentation of citizenship, sometimes it's documentation of education, and so forth, to work your way through the bureaucracy, any government bureaucracy, if you've got a limited education or limited resources it's very difficult.

So NGOs, some that we fund, will have staff members, you know, kind of young, determined, insistent people, who will help people work their way towards the bureaucracy to get the services that they should be getting, not anything special but just - or to get the documentation they need so that they can get their kid into school.

Or, in the case when I was in Colombia, what I saw was there are Colombians who are coming out of Venezuela, they went there, they married, and so they've come out now, and they're a mixed family. They've got a Venezuelan spouse, and children who might not have documentation.

So, what they need is somebody to help them kind of go through the whole bureaucracy of getting the right kind of documentation. Other things, livelihoods programs so that when I was talking about technical training and those kinds of things, or teaching people self-employment skills.

Or sometimes NGOs will do programs on sexual and gender-based violence, you know, and specifically, you know, working with kind of education and conscious raising, so that people kind of understand the warning signs, and how to protect their children, and so forth. So there's all -- there's a variety of things that folks do.

I wish I -- well, while others are talking, I'm going to flip through my documents one more time to see if I can find our NOFO information.

MS. FREEMAN: Yes. Just typically, looking at, not only ourselves, but



the partners whom we are working with; so, for instance the World Food Program that we are working with in Colombia right now, looking at programs on nutrition and education, looking at programs on community mobilization, on public health, all of those things to empower the local community to be able to care for itself.

One of the things that is very prominent in the way USAID is thinking these days, is that that journey towards self-reliance. And so these kinds of programs we really use as opportunities to reach out and help the communities to learn how to cope with these kinds of crises as they arise. This isn't the last one -- this isn't the first one, and it's not the last one.

And so building that kind of capacity in the local community to be able to assess the needs and the stressors on their systems, is very, very important, and organizations such as your own are particularly well adapted to be able to strengthen the local community systems.

MR. BAHAR: Let me, I to take a few questions together because we need to wrap up, so if you can, just make them short? There's the gentleman there, then we can also have our closing statements.

MR. HETFIELD: I'm a Mark Hetfield. I'm the President of HIAS, which is the American Jewish Community's Refugee Agency, and we work in partnership with UNHCR, NPRM in four countries in South America that are impacted by the Venezuelan crisis.

Two short follow-up questions. One, the UNHCR Guidance Note in March -- and this is for Matt -- was very clear about the need that countries not return Venezuelans back to Venezuela at this time. So, have you so have you taken it the next step in the United States for UNHCR to specifically call upon the United States to give TPS to Venezuelans?

And a question for Marta; there was a report in McClatchy News Service last night that the United States is in fact talking to other countries in the region about the United States accepting, through our resettlement program, Venezuelans for the first time. Can you confirm or elaborate on that report?

MR. BAHAR: We'll take one more. Here, we have at the front, the third row.

MS. VELANOVICH: Hi. My name is Audra Velanovich, I'm with Human Migration, Remittance Program at the Inter-American Dialogue. And so my question about remittance is, kind of, talking about the community and economy back in Venezuela. Are the migrants who are leaving Venezuela, from your experiences at the border, are they planning on sending remittances back, and how much, and in what manner? Thank you.

MR. BAHAR: So, let me answer that first from my -- with my economist's hat, and then we can go through the questions and then closing remarks. I think there's a lot of remittance is happening today in kind, I think there's a lot of people sending food, and medicines, and so on. Not so much sending money because there's really no mechanism; there's no cash in Venezuela, there are not enough bills because of the hyperinflation.

So, we see a lot of that, and that has been increasing, and it's hard to know whether -- I mean I presume there's going to be much more remittances and cash flowing in somehow, but the system is really is moving always, all the time, so we don't really know how is that going to work. But some sorts of remittances are going to go and help the population there, that are left behind for sure.

So, I don't know if you want to take -- there were a few questions, and also some concluding remarks. Should we do it in this order?

MS. COSTANZO-YOUTH: Sure. So, HIAS is another great partner of ours, providing legal assistance, among other things, but also livelihoods and psychosocial support for Colombian refugees. So your question on the McClatchy story, which I also saw and kind of said, I don't -- this is news to me too. So, yeah -- so, no, I cannot confirm that story, I'm not aware of that at all.

And in terms of remittances, so interestingly, when I was in Boa Vista I noticed when I was in, there was a park where there were a lot of Venezuelans, and I noticed people had receipts from Western Union. And so I asked about it, and people said they were sending money back, so then I went back to the hotel and Googled, and I saw that they were Western Union offices in Venezuela.

So, obviously some remittances are going back that way, but then just anecdotally, talking to people, there were many people who said that they were there for, you know, a week, or they were there for a couple months, and they were collecting -- they were, like, saving up their money, and they were going to buy things, and go back, and so I think that in some ways -- now and I also just heard through word-of-mouth that people also had, you know, somebody from their village who would go back every month, and everybody would give them, you know, money or things to take back.

But there's a lot of movement back and forth, and just as we were chatting earlier on, there's also, it appears to be there are more people moving within Venezuela towards the border areas because of the availability of goods, and medicines, and so forth on the other side, which will enable them to continue living in Venezuela, while benefitting from the ability to purchase things that maybe are not so available there.

MR. BAHAR: Yes, Mr. Reynolds?

MR. REYNOLDS: Yes. Well, as you know, TPS is a domestic -- is a sovereign decision for the United States, so UNHCR, you know, we are not involved in

granting or -- or doing that, we have seen a number of Venezuelans coming and seeking asylum, and their cases are being processed. They are coming into the United States. And we have encouraged all countries, including the United States, to look at whatever form that they're comfortable with doing, alternative sort of means of protecting Venezuelans in need.

If the U.S. were to choose, and it's, you know, that TPS is an option they'd like to use, that's one of the available options, obviously there's an asylum route that individuals are taking. So, different countries approach it in different ways, but we certainly encourage all to be -- to provide the kind of international protection that these individuals desperately need.

MR. BAHAR: Thank you. Do you want to have some closing remarks, or?

MS. FREEMAN: Well, certainly, I want to thank you all here it at Brookings again for raising this, and it is a topic that we will be watching into the future, not only presently in Colombia but in Brazil, Ecuador, Trinidad and Tobago, as they continue to understand the numbers and the needs that are out there.

I would also, again, enter the plea to the region and those working within the region, the humanitarian needs today are just astounding, and the humanitarian community will always try to keep up, and as our administrators often want to say, we will stand beside our brothers when they need assistance.

But we need to count on self-responsibility as well, and the humanitarian crisis that's causing this great outflux will not end until the root causes are resolved.

MR. REYNOLDS: Yes. I'd just like to say thank you again for sponsoring, for Brookings for sponsoring this, for all of you for caring, and I know many in the -- I'm here with the U.S. government to again thank the U.S. It is UNHCR's largest

contributor, it's always very generous, and since we are really, really close to tax filing time, remember that folks, we really appreciate that very much (laughter) because it's your -- the American support goes a long, long way all over the world.

I really hope that this and other kind of panels help generate a lot of positive support and recognition of the crisis. And I look forward to coming back to Brookings when we are going to talk about all the others, Bangladesh --

MR. BAHAR: We will call you. (Laughter)

MR. REYNOLDS: -- Africa, Congo, South Sudan. Sadly, there are so many crises in the world that need attention today. But thank you, again, for inviting UNHCR.

MR. BAHAR: Thank you, Dany, Ted, Karen --

MR. BAHAR: Yes. Well, thank you so much, to all of you, really, for coming and all the work that you or your organizations are doing for Venezuela. And I really thank you for your help, and to all of you on the panel, for the amazing work and help, that you have been providing, and that you will keep providing in larger amounts, hopefully. Thank you so much. (Applause)

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