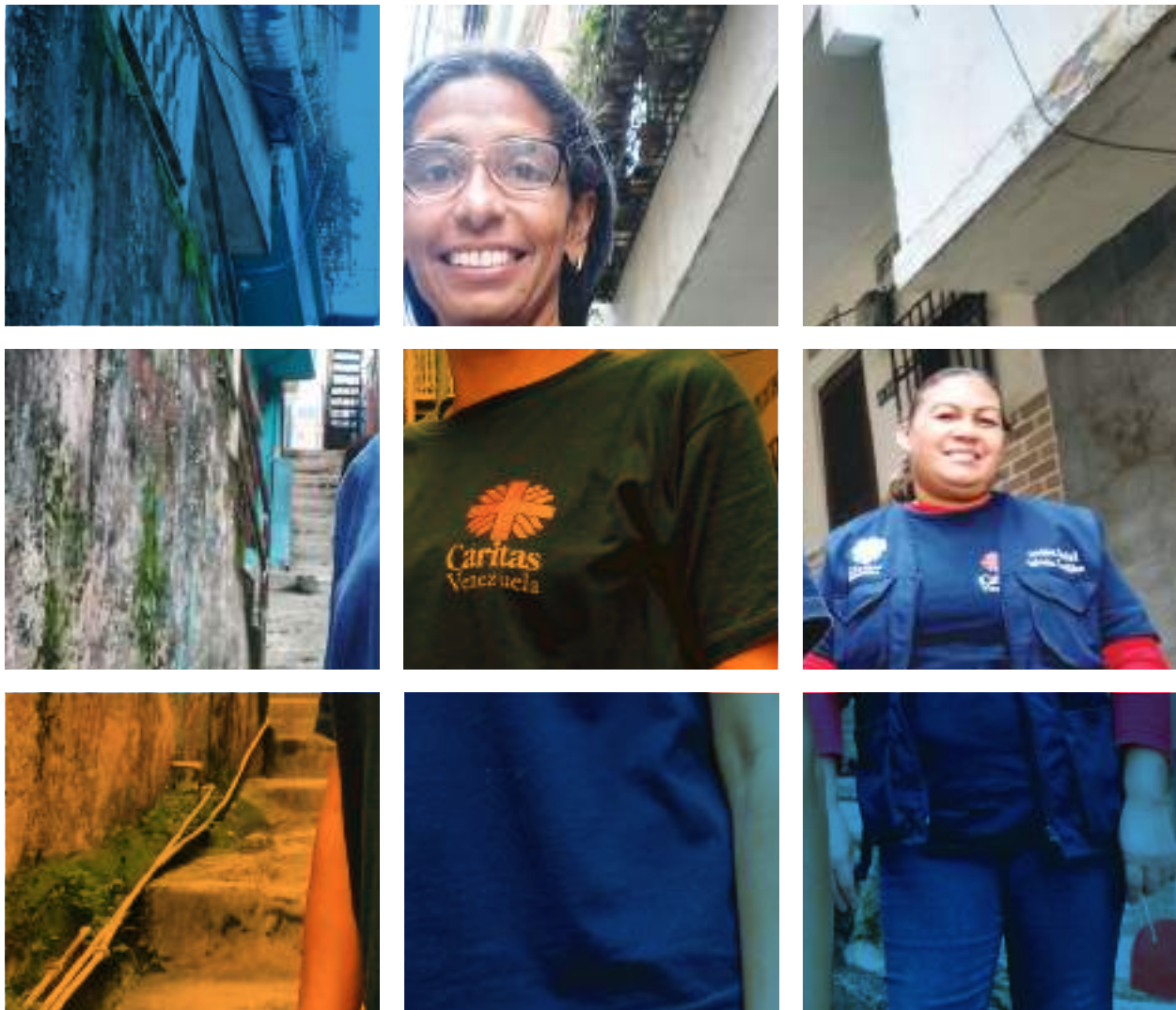




The contributions of **community volunteering** in Venezuela

The experience of Caritas Venezuela



I STUDY OF COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING IN VENEZUELA

September 2023



Volunteers in Caracas, 2017

Many times, the word charity has been underestimated and made invisible the true Christian meaning of the term that drives the action of Caritas in Venezuela and the world. Charitable action is the testimony of love and service that each baptized person offers to another person in need. "It is love that comes true, made testimony of life."

The Venezuelan Catholic Church, through its social action, has endorsed the preferential option for the poor. Day by day assumes, together with thousands of nuns, priests and laity, the construction of a network of love, care, and assistance throughout the country.

It is about brothers and sisters taking care of other brothers and sisters. Around charity, Venezuelans from the most distant regions, of various ages and levels of education have joined the church in gestures as modest as making soup, to broader ones like participating in complex programs to take care of malnutrition.

Within the framework of the campaign "Compartir, voluntarios agentes de esperanza" (Sharing, Volunteers Agents of Hope), the Venezuelan Catholic Church undertook a series of actions to recognize and get in-depth knowledge about the motivations of the people who have contributed to the care of the most vulnerable Venezuelans in the country.

In this investigation, we find the gifts and talents of volunteering motivated by gratuitousness, service to others and God. A volunteering that has supported the most excluded during these hard years, those who are left alone and hurt, victims of inequality, injustice, and poverty.

May these results, that we present from this investigation, help us to find the moral and spiritual beauty of a country that perseveres in showing the love of Christ for Venezuela.



Janeth Márquez Monsalve
National Director of Caritas Venezuela

After a period of massive impoverishment of the population between 2014-2021 and a humanitarian crisis that expelled 7 million people, some studies indicate that Venezuela is today the most unequal country in the region with the highest inequality in the world.¹

The Venezuelans who remain in the country survive amid a reduced, unstable, and asymmetric economy in which poverty, restriction of freedoms, the social fracture produced by the exodus and the effects of climate change are causing human and social damage that citizens will have to face in the years to come.

For seven years, volunteers have created a space for collective resilience at the emergency: during the period of 2017-2021, when the sharpening of political polarization and the humanitarian crisis coincided, Venezuelans found a way to overcome the confrontation, through the practice of volunteering, in organizations, institutions or by individually helping people with urgent needs.

The appearance of Venezuela in the Global Giving Index published by Gallup in 2022², among the countries with the highest growth in behaviors of helping others in the same period 2017-2021, could confirm the idea of collective resilience in the face of a crisis. Within the framework of the campaign “Compartir, voluntarios agentes de esperanza”; of the Catholic Church, in 2021 research was done allowing us to characterize community-based volunteering in Venezuela, the dimension of its contributions to the attention of humanitarian needs as well as its learning expectations.

The I National Study of Community Volunteering in Venezuela carried out an ample survey in the second semester of 2022, within a conceptual framework that understands volunteering as an individual, free behavior without coercion to dedicate time and/or resources in doing activities in favor of the common good without financial compensation.³

The research covered 2,500 people in 23 states of the country, directly involved in the activities of Cáritas de Venezuela.

The study allowed us to characterize the sociodemographic profile of volunteering and get to know its contribution from the front-line saving lives, and from within a Catholic-based organization, which has been sustaining a humanitarian response since 2016, and working in the country for more than 60 years.

¹<https://elucabista.com/2022/11/10/encovi-2022-cae-la-pobreza-aumenta-la-desigualdad-y-se-agrava-la-crisis-educativa/>

²<https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2022-publications/caf-world-giving-index-2022>

³llis Paine, Angela, Hill Mathew, Rochester Colin. *A Rose by Any Other Name*, 2010, page 9, Institute of Volunteering Research.

Research Methodology

This study falls into the category of Mixed Research, of the descriptive type, where the characteristics and most significant features of community volunteering are reviewed in detail, considering the Cáritas de Venezuela groups as the object/subject of the study.

Components

Quantitative Component

National survey: an instrument with open and closed questions, self-administered by digital software. The sample was designed based on the ecclesiastical structure that is formed by 38 dioceses, for a national population universe according to Statistics National Institute 2011 data, with a confidence level of 90% and an error margin of +/- 1.84% in the sample totals. For this, the sample size was 2,181 interviews, during the period of September-October 2022.

Qualitative component

Participatory methods: participatory techniques have been integrated, typical of ethnographic methodology, as well as case studies for the inquiry/interpretation of reality. Structured interviews administered in focus groups and in-depth interviews have been designed. The dynamics consider reaching 400 people in different regions of the country. This component is still on-going in 2023 and the findings will be shared in an additional report.



Mariches, 2017



Las Tejerías, 2022



Caracas, 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This investigation had the benefit of the strong commitment of the National Directorate of Caritas of Venezuela, and the active participation of its diocesan directors and volunteers from all over the country.

We are thankful to the International Forum for Understanding for their special support of this research. Likewise, we are thankful to Professor Miguel Lovera, Director of the School of Sociology at the Central University of Venezuela, and to Dr. Santi Ripoll, from the Social Science Humanitarian Action Platform.

Research team

Research design and coordination: Nirma Hernández Ramos.

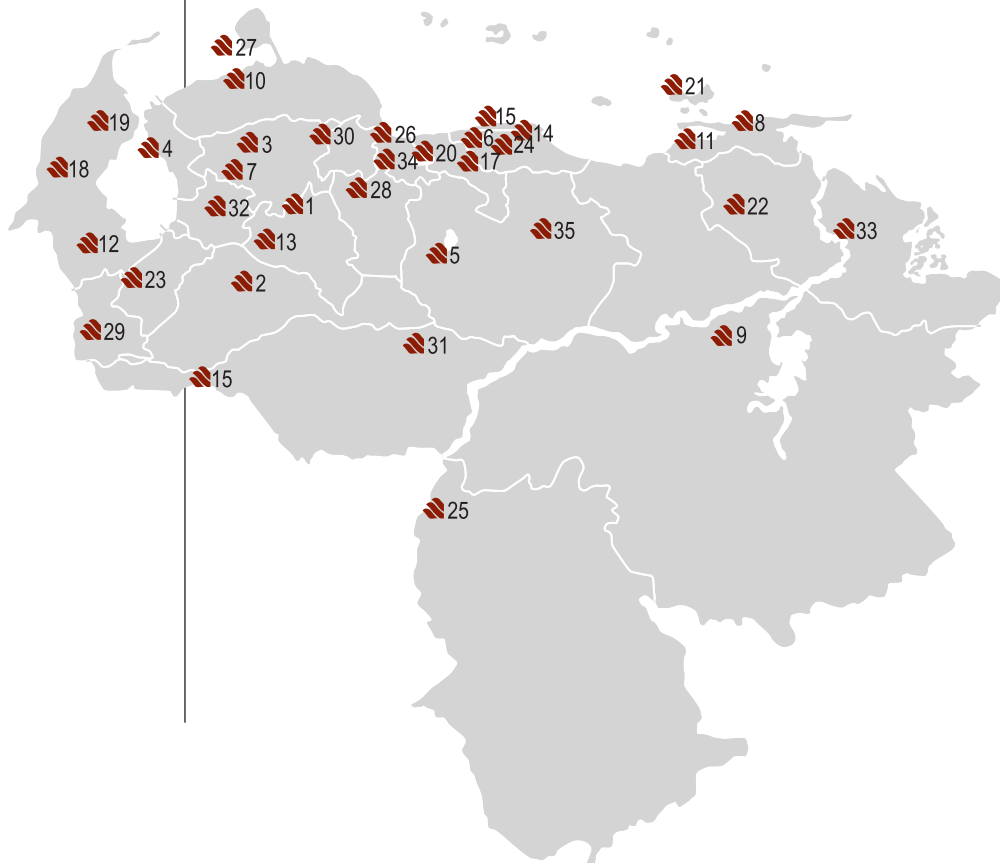
Data systematization: Monitoring team of Cáritas de Venezuela: Annie Romero, Luis Palacios and Octavio Montiel.

Research's sample design and projections: Miguel Angel Calvo Hitcher.

Photos: Diocesan teams, parish volunteers, Venancio Alcázares, Alejandro Pico, María Mercedes Guevara, María Eva Lobo, and Nirma Hernández Ramos.

Graphic design and Infographics: Nathalie Naranjo.

Translation and proofreading: Kira Kariakin.



Participating locations

1. Cáritas Acarigua-Araure
2. Cáritas Barinas
3. Cáritas Barquisimeto
4. Cáritas Cabimas
5. Cáritas Calabozo
6. Cáritas Caracas
7. Cáritas Carora
8. Cáritas Carúpano
9. Cáritas Ciudad Bolívar
10. Cáritas Coro
11. Cáritas Cumaná
12. Cáritas El Vigía-San Carlos
13. Cáritas Guanare
14. Cáritas Guarenas
15. Cáritas Guasdualito
16. Cáritas La Guaira
17. Cáritas Los Teques
18. Cáritas Machiques
19. Cáritas Maracaibo
20. Cáritas Maracay
21. Cáritas Margarita
22. Cáritas Maturín
23. Cáritas Mérida
24. Cáritas Petare
25. Cáritas Puerto Ayacucho
26. Cáritas Puerto Cabello
27. Cáritas Punto Fijo
28. Cáritas San Carlos
29. Cáritas San Cristóbal
30. Cáritas San Felipe
31. Cáritas San Fernando de Apure
32. Cáritas Trujillo
33. Cáritas Tucupita
34. Cáritas Valencia
35. Cáritas Valle de La Pascua

- **The community volunteering case studied has mainly female participation, it is located inside the country and is highly prepared.** 80% of the participants in the volunteer groups are women and 20% men. 67% have university education and 32% hold intermediate, basic levels of formal education, or have developed a trade or skilled occupation. 65% stated living in cities inside the country, 31.19% in towns and hamlets and 3% in hamlets and indigenous communities.
- **Community volunteering in Venezuela has allowed to articulate, from within the communities, continuous and systematic humanitarian activities for seven years.** In questions with multiple options to choose from, the main activities identified were 54.1% food preparation/provision and 59.26% healthcare day/medicines provision. 18% declared community learning activities related to domestic sanitation and safe water management.
- **The practice of volunteering intensified to respond to the urgent needs that have spread in Venezuela in recent years.** 92% of the participants in the survey declare having recent volunteer experience, with ranges of permanence that span from 6 months to 5 years in volunteer groups of the organization studied. More than 70% of the participants state that the social contribution of volunteering in solving priority problems in their community is high.
- **The motivations for volunteering are mostly linked to emotional, spiritual and resilience rewards.** When inquiring, with a multiple options question, what are the perceived benefits of volunteering, 58% value the knowledge acquired, 57% the personal satisfaction received, 45% the spiritual and emotional accompaniment, among others. Advantages related to access to health or food were also mentioned.
- **The learning expectations reflect an interest both in emergency care preparation activities and in techniques for self-care, motivation, and livelihoods.** 53% would like to learn first aid techniques, 50% self-care and motivation, 49% health and self-care of the volunteer, and 43% entrepreneurship and livelihoods, among other topics where they could identify more than one option.
- **The growth of volunteer groups in the organization studied has been organic: 77% have integrated one person or more into their volunteer group.** Today, the network of volunteers could complement in number and territorial extension the state emergency response systems.
- **Projections carried out over a base of 30,000 volunteers and the time donated to volunteering allowed estimating their contribution to humanitarian activities at more than 15 million man-hours per year.** Contributions to the development goals 2, 3, 6 and 17 were identified.

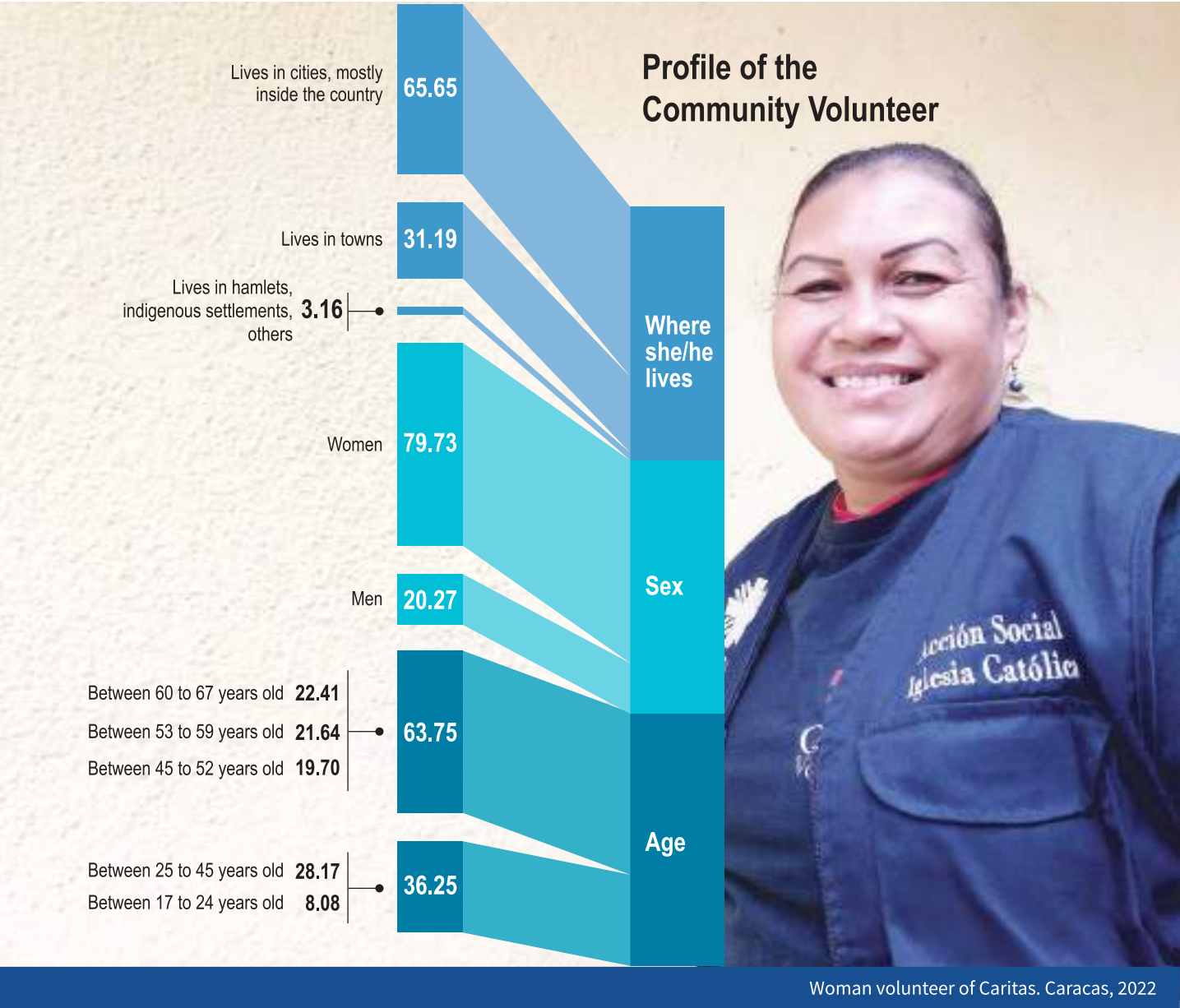


Women
volunteers in
San Diego,
2019

The Profile of the Community-Based Volunteer

A decentralized experience, feminine, adult, and educated

In the context of Venezuela’s complex necessities, an important factor in coping with emergencies and humanitarian needs have been the forms of community organization for which people have united to address pressing matters. In the midst of the crisis, first humanitarian and then exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic, we have seen how some features of the Venezuelan culture and its religiosity, such as the closeness between neighbors, the emotional ties of protection to those most affected, the willingness to serve and care for others as an expression of “love for God”, constituted a heritage of values that have been key to facing and overcoming adversity.



Volunteering and the different expressions of solidarity that have emerged in the country have provided concrete responses, from the individual contribution to the collective, to sustain life, build new capabilities and learning at the community level, as well as rebuild a sense of unity, common purpose, and fraternity, which for many years were affected by political conflict and social violence.

In interviews carried out for this project we have gathered the testimony of hundreds of volunteers who, throughout the country, have been moved by compassion towards those most affected by emergencies. But also, we have found in these voices the need to save their own humanity, through the gesture of contributing, helping, and accompanying the most vulnerable.

Even when they experienced the impacts of the humanitarian crisis, the volunteers' aid and assistance behaviors occurred from within the communities themselves. This response contributed, at the most acute moment of the humanitarian emergency, to mitigate minimal needs of food or health that yet continue to be a daily struggle for most people in middle-class suburbs, humble neighborhoods, and parishes.

“There is no ideal volunteering with common characteristics, but various volunteering situations, each of them related to the context where they are unfolding, their purposes and focus of action. In other words, it must be understood as a social and historical phenomenon”.⁴

In the volunteer experience observed in Venezuela between 2017 and 2022, we found a citizenry that overcame social indifference. Men and women of different occupations like construction workers, doctors, professors, teachers, nurses, retirees, young people, with different levels of education, ages, and social classes, joined in a humanitarian action, and in addition to distributing material supplies, providing medical aid, and preparing food, they have found reciprocal ways to offer each other relief, company, and consolation.



Volunteers in Maracaibo, 2018



Acarigua

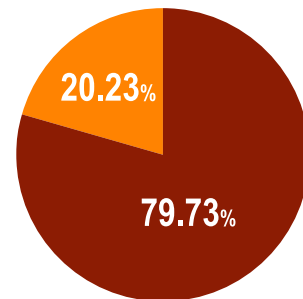
⁴Thompson y Toro, *El Voluntariado Social en América Latina* citado por Shaw y Karl "Voluntariado una forma de hacer y de ser", 2008.

This decentralized participation, which provides the largest number of volunteers in the organization studied, corresponds to an organizational structure rooted in the parish life of the Church. This institution progressively strengthened its network in communities since 2010, consolidating a space for participation that had the necessary time and accompaniment for a real operation and expansion. The emergency accentuated the need to meet in structures that facilitate voluntary and humanitarian action. The organization studied went from 325 parish structures to 600 in the year 2022, according to reports published.⁵

Relevant Characteristics

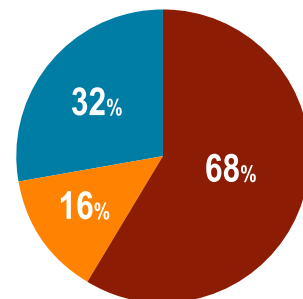
1 WOMEN ARE THE PROTAGONISTS

In community volunteering, women prevail: 79.73% are women and 20.23% are men.



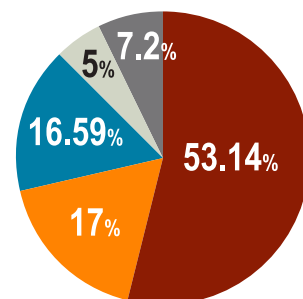
2 HIGH LEVEL OF EDUCATION

- 68% completed or have some university education.
- 16% holds postgraduate level.
- 32% have training in specific skills and have finished high school.



3 PART OF THE WORK FORCE

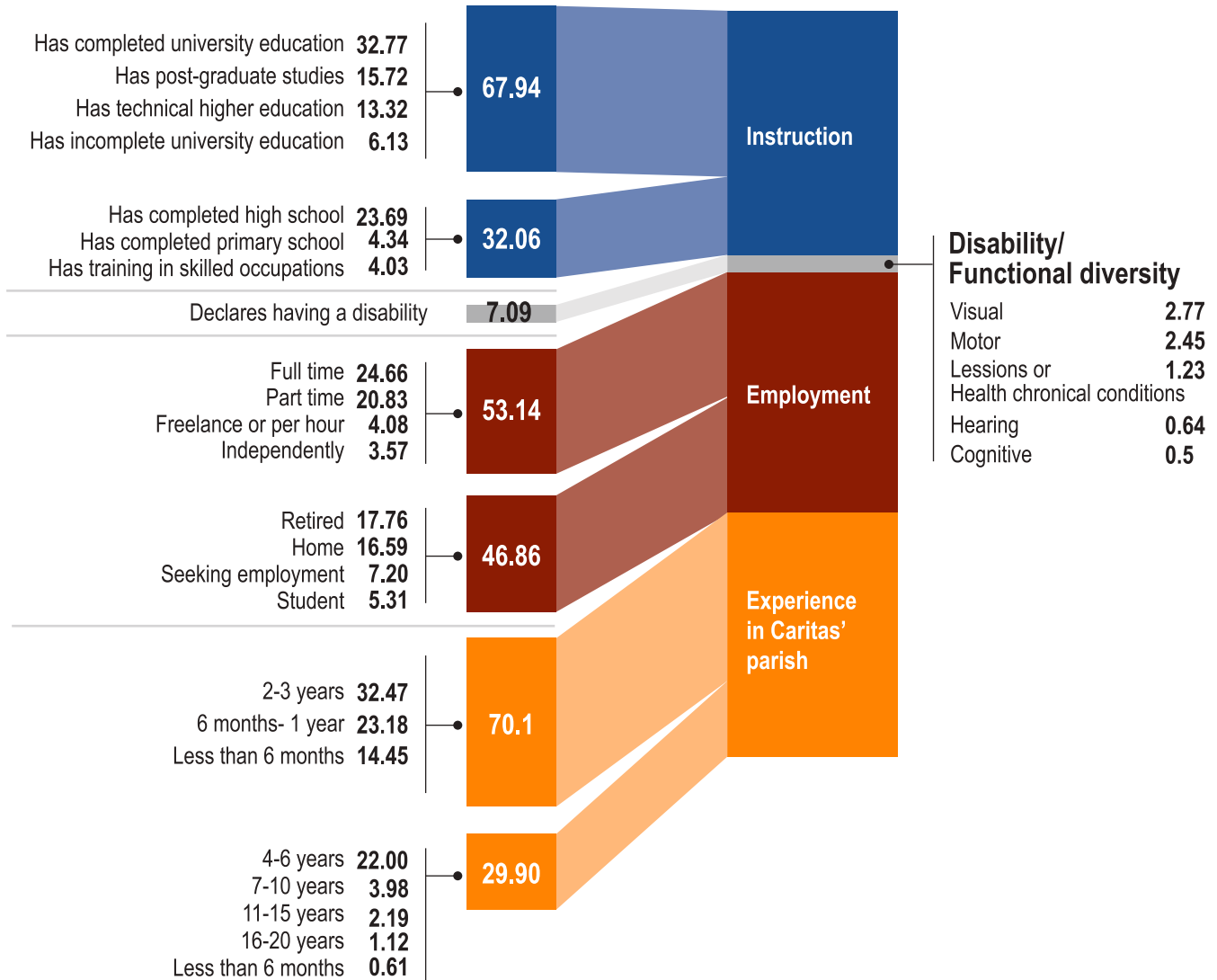
- 53.14% of the participating people stated that they are actively working.
- 17% are retired.
- 16.59% work at home.
- 5% are students.
- 7.20% are actively seeking employment.



⁵<https://caritasvenezuela.org/caritas-de-venezuela-presento-su-cxix-asamblea-del-episcopado-venezolano/>

4 INTEGRATED IN THEIR FUNCTIONAL DIVERSITY

7.09% had declared a disability, predominantly motor or visual impairment. This makes it possible for us to infer ways to organize volunteer work that allows non-exclusive participation based on abilities.



5 IT IS A RECENT EXPERIENCE

87% of the participants have recent volunteer experience, identifying grouped ranges that go from 6 months to 5 years. This period coincides with the worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela and confirms the exercise of volunteerism as a citizen response, including the most vulnerable sectors, through participation in aid, relief, and assistance activities. 7.29% of the participants declared greater experience in volunteering, in ranges that go from 7 to 20 years.



Volunteering
in Barinas,
taking care
of the economically
excluded, 2023

Mobilization and Social Impact of Community Volunteering in Venezuela

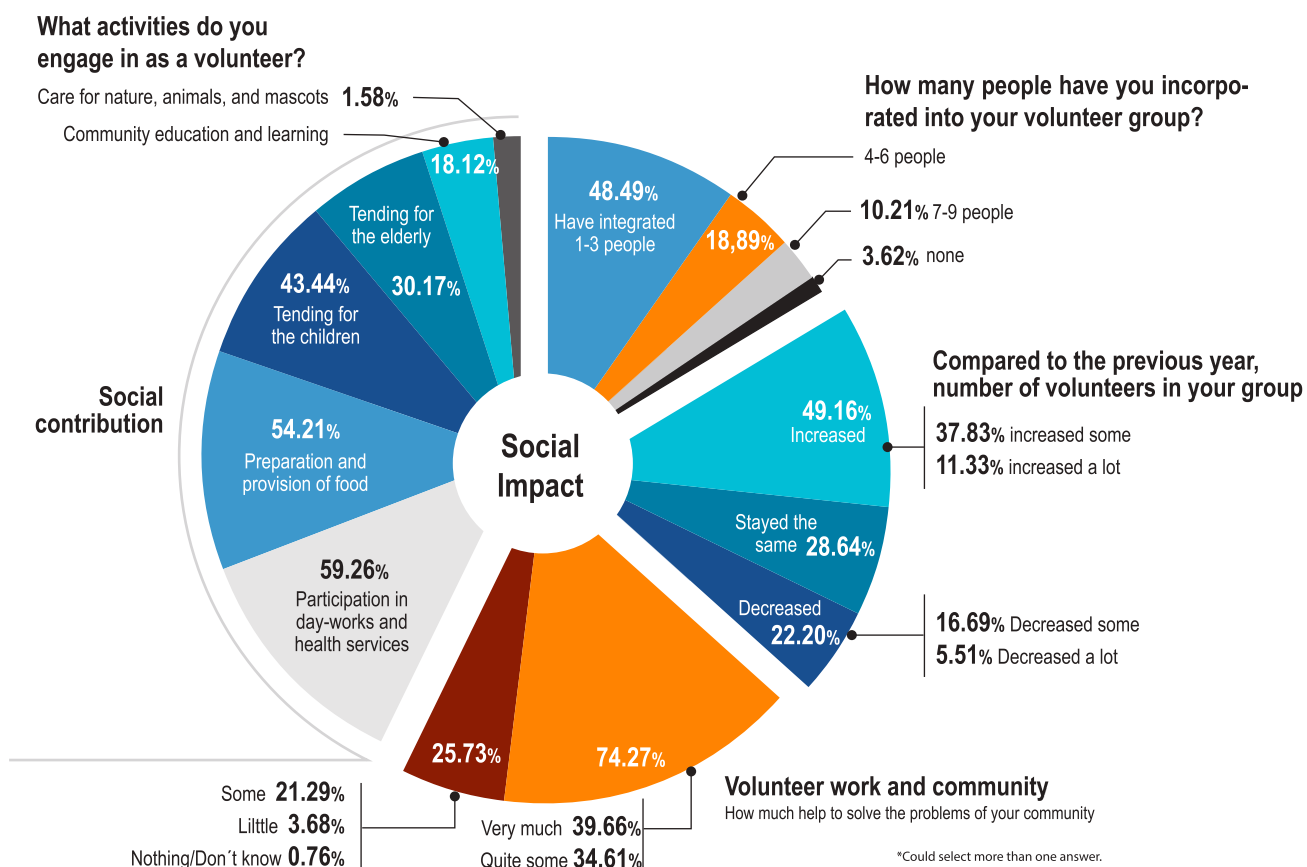


Volunteering in Machiques during COVID 19. Venezuela 2020

In Venezuela, the social capital built through the articulation of volunteers represent an essential network for coping with emergencies

In Venezuela, volunteering has become an activity that is publicly revalued and recognized for its contribution to the common good. We find in the organization studied dynamics, in which participation is promoted by the members themselves for the benefits received. The majority of those consulted in this study mainly value the emotional, spiritual, and learning rewards associated with the practice of volunteering.

In the **I Study of Community Volunteering in Venezuela** we collected evidence on spontaneous strategies that volunteers implemented in their communities, and that allowed people to integrate into the humanitarian responses that were developed by the organization studied.



In our research, we found evidence that the social mobilization generated by volunteer groups in aid and assistance activities occurs organically, with a positive perception of solving community problems. It is a direct intervention of people on matters that cannot wait, especially in a country with an institutional framework affected by the crisis and with limited attention capacities.

81% of the people participating in the study had spontaneously integrated others into volunteer activities: 48.49% integrated between 1 and 3 people, which allows to know the articulation capacities of people within their communities seeking to solve urgent problems.

In Venezuela, the social capital built through the volunteering represents an essential network for coping with sudden emergencies, especially in the complementarity of the work of the Risk Management System within the attention, preparation, and recovery of communities. The Global Risk Poll⁶ considers social capital as a key factor for coping with adversity. Their 2021 report shows that the indicator of community or neighbors support was higher in low-income countries (35%) than in high-income countries (20%).

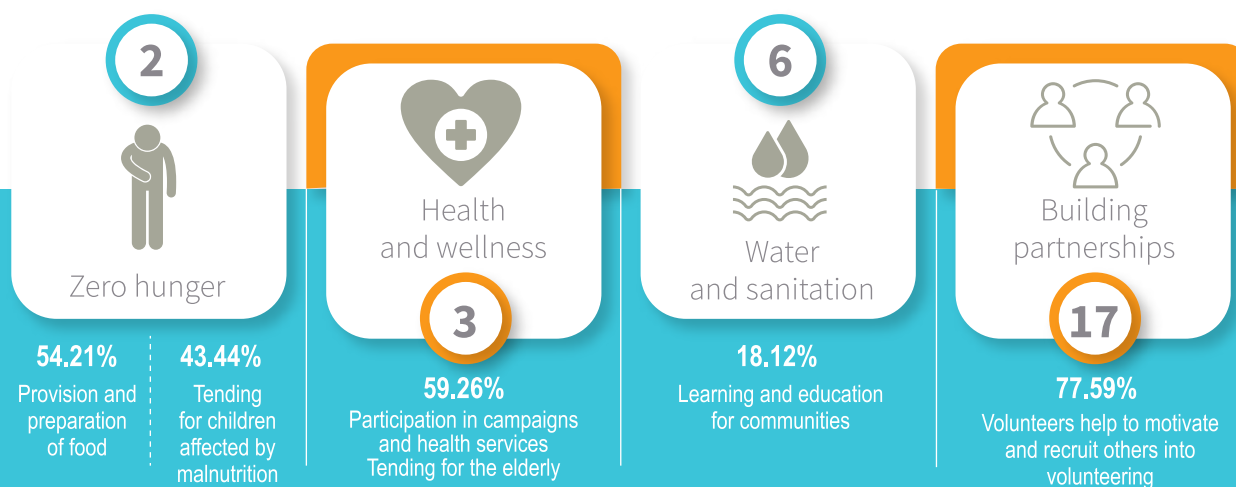
After 6 years of activities, community volunteering continues to generate interest, attracting new participants in community groups: 49% of the volunteers consulted declared that the number of volunteers in their groups increased a lot or some, 28% report that the number of volunteers remained the same, while 22% reported that it had decreased some.

⁶Lloyd's Register Foundation (2022). World Risk Poll 2021: A Resilient World? Understanding vulnerability in a changing climate. Available at: https://wrp.lrfoundation.org.uk/LRF_2021_report2-resilience_online_version.pdf

Concrete contributions to development goals

The contribution of volunteering has a triple impact on the lives of Venezuelans: front-line assistance to those most vulnerable due to the crisis, the reconstruction of the social fabric and the construction of resilience to confront emergencies.

Some projections have allowed to determine the concrete contributions that volunteering—in the organization object of the study—have achieved towards reaching the development goals, specifically on the Objectives:



Volunteering in Puerto Cabello



Hours dedicated to volunteering

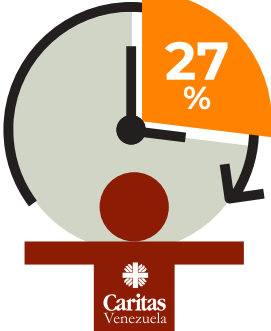


donate →



524.72
HORAS AL AÑO

A Caritas' volunteer donate per year almost a third (27%) of the hours worked by a private sector employee



Average sessions of volunteering at Caritas per year

95.28 times



5.51 hrs



Average hours dedicated to volunteer in each session

$$95.28 \times 5.51 = 524.72 \text{ hrs year per volunteer}$$

15,741,554 hrs
Annual average of total hours invested in volunteering at Caritas Venezuela

Inferential estimates, illustrative of the sample studied, without statistical representation of the national population

Assessment of volunteer activity in solving problems

74.25% have a high level of positive perception of volunteer activities for improving community life. 25.74% consider that volunteering contributes little or very little to improving the lives of communities.

But when the question about the contributions to solving the country's problems is expanded, the range of positive perception drops to 62.48%. In the qualitative phase of this research, we will offer an in-depth study of these results.

From within the communities, we found evidence that this immense social mobilization could be based on the realization of purposes that answers—from the individual to the collective—to a framework of transcendent values, built from the Christian experience which is characteristic of Venezuelan popular culture. In this framework of interpretation, volunteering is not only an activity to distribute aid, but a space for the construction and reciprocal recognition of social, affective, and spiritual ties between both who participate: the recipients of help, and those who assist them.



Volunteering in Cáritas, Carúpano, 2020



Emergency action in Socopó, Cáritas Barinas, 2022



Volunteers in Las Tejerías, Aragua, 2023

Benefits from the volunteer work

When asked about the personal benefits that volunteers receive when volunteering, they mention various aspects. Among the ones prioritized are those that represent a spiritual, emotional, and learning gain. In a question about the benefits obtained by volunteering, where more than one option could be chosen, 58% indicated receiving training and knowledge, 57.12% stated that personal satisfaction, and 45.69% indicated emotional and spiritual accompaniment.

Access to essential health and food services were also mentioned as benefits: 41% referred access to protective health equipment such as masks and gel, 37% indicated access to medical consultations and medicines, 24% indicated access to food.

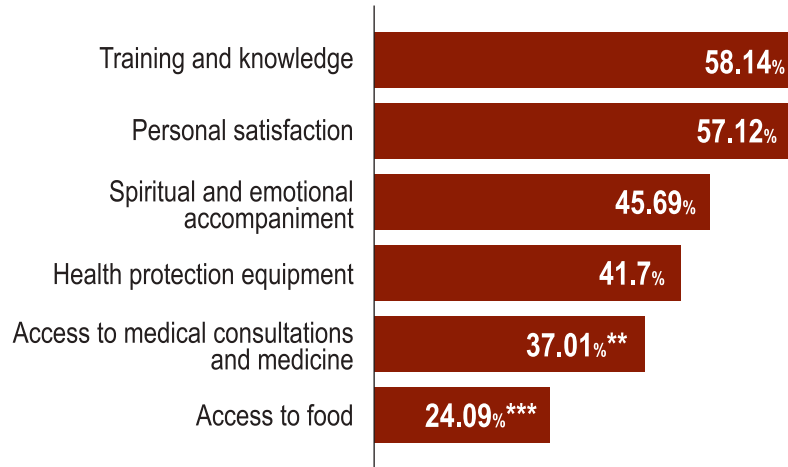
The idea of “personal satisfaction” was one of the themes explored in focus groups. In the process of building a taxonomy on motivations and rewards, we found four central ideas that drive the volunteers participating in this study: 1) The satisfaction of serving God, 2) The moral satisfaction of alleviating people’s suffering, 3) The satisfaction of serving without expecting anything in return, 4) the emotional satisfaction of giving and receiving love, joy, peace, and brotherhood.

An in-depth look at motivations and remuneration will be shared in a future report.



San Cristóbal

Benefits received during volunteering*



*Could select more than one answer

** The organization studied offers its volunteers access to medical services when required.

***In the organization studied, volunteers can participate in community meals. An in-depth study of this variable will be carried out in the second research cycle in 2023.



Pregnancy care. Cáritas La Guaira, 2021



Volunteers in
Yaguaraparo,
Sucre, 2023

Knowledge Management

Communities learning expectations

The cycle of training and knowledge management in volunteer organizations is essential for strengthening capacities in communities and organizations that are carrying humanitarian and development programs in Venezuela.

The need to learn self-care techniques and motivation must be properly addressed. This need could be an indication of wear and tear by the constant demands of the context where volunteers are immersed, where the intersectionality of vulnerabilities overlaps with demands that are difficult to meet, and necessities exceed available resources. Today in Venezuela, the humanitarian response only has 16% of the funds required.⁷

In the case studied, the volunteers positively value the learning achieved and expressed their expectations in some training areas. During the research, we found that issues related to reactive response to emergencies, risk management and psycho-emotional strengthening are areas about what volunteers would like to learn more, as well as other ones linked to the strengthening of their group identity.

It is important to consider that for volunteers, getting training in issues related to community diagnosis, violence management and peace building, entrepreneurship, updating their tech knowledge, and administration, among others, is best appreciated within the options proposed.



Community cooking pot in Bolivar, 2020



Volunteers in Maturín, 2021



Nutritional care. San Felipe, 2021

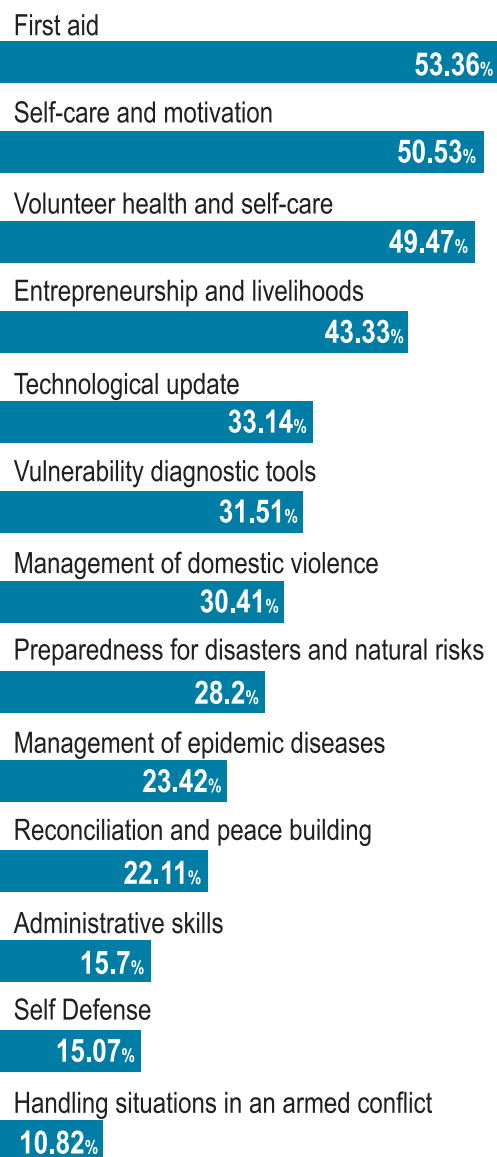
⁷OCHA , Financial Tracking Venezuela <https://fts.unocha.org/>



Learning expectations of the community-based volunteering*

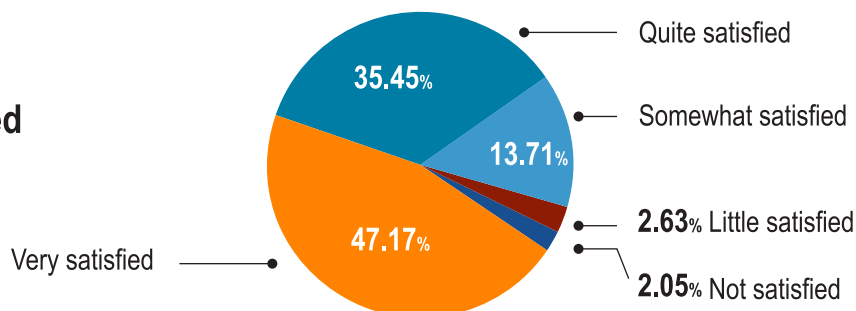


Caracas, 2022



*They could select more than one answer

Satisfaction of the volunteers over the training received



Key considerations

The contributions of Venezuelan citizens to facing with emergencies in the country shed light for a better understanding of the dynamics, motivations, and expectations of volunteering in a complex humanitarian context. Some findings derived from this first study are listed below, with the objective of being considered to strengthen the practice of volunteering in the country.

- **The need for more horizontal responses with greater citizen participation:** In a global context of greater increment in events and derived impacts from socio-natural threats, the humanitarian actors, governments, and social organizations acting vertically will not be able, by themselves alone, to face the needs of a world with more emergencies. Decision makers and public policy makers must adapt their articulation dynamics to ensure more horizontal practices that guarantee a greater and real participation of volunteers in the preparation, response, and recovery phases.
- **Preservation of the social capital built by volunteering during emergencies:** Volunteering has built skills and knowledge related to attending health needs, as well as spiritual and emotional support to face adversity. Contributing to this network preserving and transmitting what has been learned in various community instances will help them truly strengthen their ties, increase their capacities for mutual help and influence changes in favor of people's well-being.
- **Stimulate volunteering with more balanced participation between men and women and a greater inclusion of young people:** Although culturally, care and help behaviors among women can favor participation in volunteer organizations, the search for strategies that involve men can add new knowledge and capacities to the



consolidated groups of volunteers in Venezuela. The integration of young people into volunteer groups, in a country whose demographic structure has been severely affected by migration, is a challenge. But it is also an opportunity for these young people to participate in alternative spaces that mitigate risks in a socially deteriorated context that can lead to the adoption of negative strategies to face life.

- **Knowledge management with greater local participation:** The high level of education and knowledge of the participants in volunteer activities could lead to a greater involvement of the volunteers in the training cycles on different activities related to humanitarian and emergency assistance. This aspect should be considered by the cooperation implementing actors, as well as government agents, promoting the recognition of those who are at the first line of response.
- **A greater emphasis on the care and management of volunteers:** The design of aid programs must consider the very experience of volunteering in challenging community realities. It is necessary to include activities for emotional care, relationship management within the group, and the motivation of the participants.
- **Strengthen the value of purpose in the practice of volunteering:** In the experience studied, personal satisfaction and the perceived emotional and spiritual benefits have a greater value for the mobilization, integration, and permanence of volunteering. This notion of “donating oneself” to serve those most in need could be one of the strongest pillars identified in the answers of the volunteers. It is important to monitor the risk of commodification of volunteer activity, either due to variables derived from the context or introduced by the dynamics of the execution of international cooperation programs. This aspect is being explored in the qualitative phase of this study and will be shared in an additional report.



Volunteers in Trujillo, 2023



Cáritas



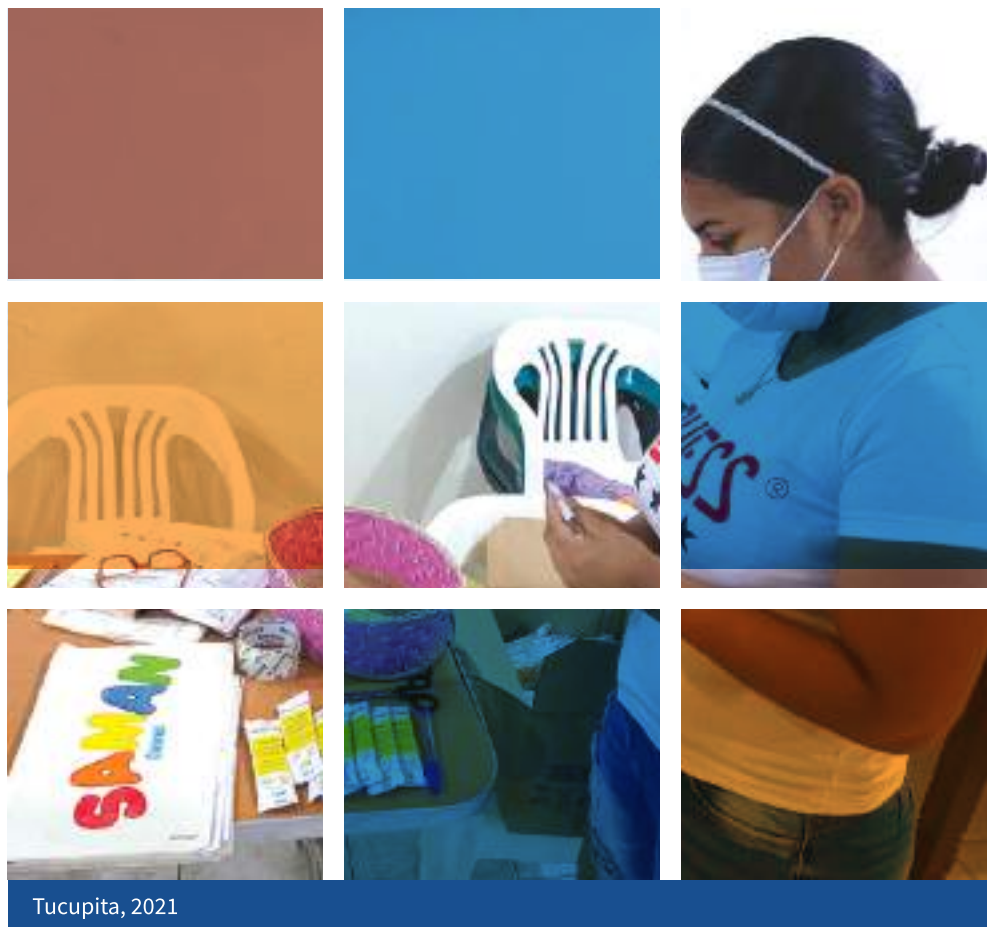
Iglesia Católica
Ayudanos a Ayudar

CÁRTAS



Iglesia Católica
Ayudanos a Ayudar

The contributions of **community volunteering** in Venezuela



Asociación Civil Caritas de Venezuela, 2023.



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.