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Unidad 6, Aperturas.

Why Colombia has taken in 1 million Venezuelans

0:02

Johnny Harris: There is a crisis here.

00:09

Johnny Harris: Millions of people have fled Venezuela as the country crumbles.

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Johnny Harris: Many of them are coming over this border in Colombia.

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Johnny Harris: Here in this border town of Cucuta, you see people with suitcases full of all their belongings. They don’t know where they’re going, they just know they need to get out of their country.

00:48

Johnny Harris: If you need proof of how bad it is in Venezuela right now, look at this purse. This purse is made entirely of the bills of the Venezuelan currency, the Bolivares. Inflation is so high that this money is now completely worthless. So, my friend Jorge over here has gathered a ton of this stuff and turned it into commodities, into purses, into sculptures.

01:10

CNBC Interviewer: It is worse than it sounds and it sounds pretty bad.

01:14

CNN reporter: The country’s inflation rate will rise to one million percent.

01:26

Johnny Harris: More than a million Venezuelans have moved to Colombia in recent years. And in an era in of record setting migration, when borders seem to be getting thicker, harder to cross, Colombia is doing something that you don’t see very often. It’s opening its doors and it’s letting people in.

01:46

CNBC Interviewee: The border crisis is shocking. It’s a real humanitarian crisis.

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CNN Reporter: The economic crisis there is about to get even worse.

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Female voice: Is there a point which Colombia and other countries in Latin American step in and say “Enough is enough now?”

02:07

Johnny Harris: This border town of Cucuta is now totally bustling.

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Johnny Harris: This is the very end of the border, where these people are entering. And the one thing you’ll hear that is a little interesting is…

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Johnny Harris: “Compra çabello,,” we buy hair.

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Johnny Harris: To continue on their way to make some money, the women will sell their hair. You basically get 100,000 pesos, which is like 30 dollars.

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Johnny Harris: I’m eating a Venezuelan-style hotdog and the guys are reflecting on how much this hot dog would cost If they were trying to buy it in Venezuela with the current economic situation.

02:58

France 24 reporter: 87% of the country’s households into poverty.

03:02

Male voice: Images that we’ve just never seen in Latin America before is unfortunately something that we’re seeing now.

03:06

Johnny Harris: The collapse of Venezuela didn’t happen because of a civil war or natural disaster, it rather the colossal economic mismanagement by the country’s leader, Nicolas Maduro. In just a few years, Maduro grabbed control of most of the government and then drove the country into an economic disaster worse than the Great Depression and the fall of the Soviet Union.

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Johnny Harris: Of the 2 million people who have left Venezuela in the midst of the crisis, about 1 million have come to Colombia, easily more than any other country. The response by most countries in the region has been to put up new measures to stop migrants from flooding into their country. But not Colombia; here the border stays relatively easy to cross. And even though Colombia has millions of its own people in need of humanitarian assistance, the Colombian people and politicians continue to let migrants in.

04:09

Ivan Duque: So I have decided that we’re not going to close the border. We have to give them support.

04:17

Johnny Harris: Now we’re in the refugee camp, that’s what they’re calling it. Here the government provides all sorts of services to these people.

04:28

Johnny Harris: Haircuts and manicures.

04:35

Johnny Harris: Today in the camp, they’re playing music. Some Colombian, some Venezuelan and everyone, locals, migrants, start singing and clapping along.

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Johnny Harris: The Colombian government has given most of these migrants status, allowing them to live in the country, get healthcare, work, and study for two years. But it’s not just the Colombian government opening its doors.

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Johnny Harris: In a neighborhood near the border, people have started taking migrants into their homes indefinitely and for free.

06:13

Johnny Harris: And to understand why these people are opening up their doors to Venezuelan, you have to understand their past.

06:21

Johnny Harris: If you go back to the 1800s, Colombia and Venezuela were actually part of the same country, called Gran Colombia. This country eventually broke up into the modern states we know today. Decades later, in the 80s and 90s, Colombia was experiencing some of the worst violence in its decades long war with a rebel group called the FARC. This war displaced more than 7 million people, more than any other modern war. Hundreds of thousands of those people fled to Venezuela, where the economy was thriving. And the Venezuelans took them in.

07:00

Johnny Harris: So, in a sense, this is the Colombians way of paying backing the Venezuelans for the hospitality they were given. Here at the border, you go down the street a little bit, and you see this sign that says “Welcome to Colombia”. Above it is says, “Colombia and Venezuela, united forever.” It’s part of these two different, having very different governments. There’s this common identity among the people.

07:24

Johnny Harris: But there are reasons to believe this sense of solidarity might not last forever. A slew of crimes, allegedly commits by Venezuelans, have led to a new wave of skepticism in the country. Earlier this year, the police chief in this border town told people that they shouldn’t rent their properties to Venezuelans after a migrant was arrested for a homicide.

07:54

Johnny Harris: But despite the growing skepticism, many Venezuelans continue to see tremendous support in Colombia, a country that has chosen to keep its doors open to the thousands of migrants who come in every day.

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