



# Pensas En Chicago

Unlocking Economic Potential of Venezuelan Migrants with Mobile Application

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# Executive Summary

After long being the host for many South American migrants, Venezuela is now facing its own displacement crisis. According to the UN, more than 7.7 million Venezuelans have left the country since 2014, an exodus representing around twenty percent of their population. More than 200,000 Venezuelans have been legally recognized as refugees, but that represents only the lucky few who were able to achieve documentation, with many more lost in the mire of the bureaucratic mess that is applying for asylum. Chicago has become one of the main destinations for those hopefuls for a better life away from rampant violence, catastrophic shortages of resources, and a lack of opportunity to better their lives in a meaningful way. Pansas en Chicago is the first registered Venezuelan organization in Illinois, founded in 2017 as a non-profit organization (NPO) by a group of Venezuelans to support the others who were able to trek the monumental distance of over 4000 miles from Caracas through the entirety of Central America to get to Chicago. The organization promotes unity, welcoming Venezuelans regardless of their background or profession. Their mission is:

**Partnering to build a home for Venezuelans' in Chicago.  
And continue to provide aid for Venezuela.**

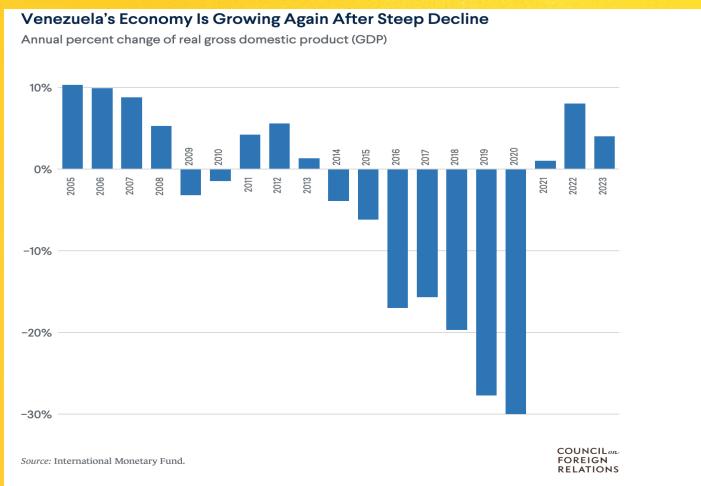
When they say build a home, it means literally. One of their services is the "House for the Panas", where they want to build a house where they can receive Venezuelans Immigrants for a week where they will have time to adapt to the city and find a lodging elsewhere. Furthermore, often the immigrants arrive with bustling families, and the NPO is looking to build a daycare so parents can work without worrying about their children. Alongside those services, they are developing a program to support people with clothing and medicine. This organization represents the tens of thousands refugees living in Chicago today. The flood of people has been met with a deluge of support. There is a pressing need for assistance, for translation, for help navigating the complex process of asylum and citizenship. Fortunately, Pensas en Chicago is here to help.

# Background

## Historical Context

Venezuela's profound crisis, both political and economic, has driven over 7.7 million people to emigrate since 2014. This turmoil rooted back to 1999 when Hugo Chávez was elected president, initiating a governance domination with his party, the PSUV, which continued under Nicolás Maduro. The PSUV's control over crucial state institutions weakened the checks and balances essential for a balanced democratic system.

The crisis intensified when global oil prices, the backbone of Venezuela's economy, plummeted. This led to a prolonged recession starting around the time Maduro was elected. The economic downfall triggered hyperinflation and severe shortages of basic necessities, pushing the populace into hardship. Political unrest followed, marked by waves of anti-government protests in 2014 and 2017 were met with violence. The situation worsened as Maduro was re-elected in 2018 in an election widely criticized for its lack of fairness and freedom, fueling the mass exodus seeking refuge from the economic and political strife. The chart below displays the fall in GDP that precipitated the turmoil.



## Immigrants in the US

Cambodian immigrants, led by the entrepreneurial spirit of the "Donut King" Ted Ngoy, transformed California by establishing a network of successful donut shops since the 1970s. Ngoy's story is a testament to how immigrants can foster economic growth and innovation. Similarly, Venezuelan immigrants have the potential to invigorate Chicago. Drawing on their diverse experiences and resilience, these people can develop businesses and cultural enrichment. Immigrants are almost twice as likely to start businesses as native-born Americans. For instance, as of 2020, immigrants accounted for 25 percent of new entrepreneurs, despite making up about 13.7 percent of the population.

# Current Work

Panas En Chicago is playing a crucial role in supporting Venezuelan immigrants by addressing their immediate and long-term needs as they settle into their new environment. Their multifaceted approach includes:

- **Temporary Housing:** One of the primary services provided by Panas En Chicago is securing temporary housing for newly arrived immigrants. This ensures that individuals and families have a safe and stable place to stay.
- **Daycare Services:** Panas En Chicago strives to offer daycare solutions. This not only helps parents work and it acclimatizes of children to their new community.
- **Resource Collection and Distribution:** Acting as a central hub, Panas En Chicago collects essential items such as food, clothing, diapers, baby supplies, toys, and medicine. These resources are crucial for families who may arrive with limited possessions and help alleviate the financial burdens associated with resettling.
- **Community Center Activities:** The organization also serves as a community center, hosting events such as food drives and cultural celebrations like Christmas gatherings. These events are vital for fostering a sense of community and belonging among the immigrants.
- **Legal Services:** Panas En Chicago assists immigrants in navigating the complex legal landscape, which is crucial for their integration and legal status.



# Mobile Application

A survey done in Peru, the country that has received the most Venezuelan immigrants, has found that approximately 86 percent of the refugees own a cell phone. The development of a mobile application for Panas En Chicago can significantly enhance the support and resources available to Venezuelan immigrants. An app can be an effective and accessible tool for delivering aid and fostering community integration. It also can organize and provide data for leaders so they can best manage their resources. While it is impossible to personally contact every person who needs help; it is a lot easier to spread the word about an app so that people can find the help they need instead.

Mobile apps can provide on-the-go access to resources and services, essential for migrants who may not have stable housing. Migrants also can receive instant notifications about important information such as legal changes, available housing, or emergency alerts. An app can facilitate greater interaction among the Venezuelan community in Chicago by providing a platform for communication and event coordination. This will provide them the much needed connection to the community that can help them flourish and succeed here. It should be a given that we need to offer it in Spanish to connect with those that can not speak English. This will allow us to connect with those people who are the most vulnerable here. Penas en Chicago offers a wide array of resources, and the app can help people in need find food pantries, legal assistance, healthcare services, and educational programs. Furthermore, it can be a source of information for urgent news like changes in immigration law or policies. By creating this app the connection between those that need help and those that can offer it becomes that much more seamless.

While providing services and community is essential for the immigrants in the beginning, it must not be forgotten that these people do not need our pity, but our help so that they can help themselves. They were able to survive a broken country, and a long treacherous road. These people are survivors with grit and determination reminiscent of the generations of immigrants who built this country. The goal should be to provide them with a economic opportunity once they have been established in Chicago. This app can be a space where their dreams and reasons that they came to this country can be fulfilled. If Penas en Chicago can replicate the success of Cambodians in California with this mobile application; it can not only help these people but it can let them prosper.

# Recommendations and Conclusions

In concluding the proposal for the development of a mobile application for Panas En Chicago, it is crucial to highlight the transformative potential of such a tool in providing economic opportunities to Venezuelan immigrants. This application will not only serve as a platform for immediate aid and resources but also as a catalyst for long-term economic integration and empowerment.

The inclusion of an interactive map in the application is fundamental. This feature can guide users to essential services such as job centers, educational institutions, and childcare facilities, thereby reducing the navigation burden on new arrivals who may be unfamiliar with the city's geography. Alongside the map, legal and immigration aid resources within the app will provide invaluable support, offering up-to-date information on legal rights and immigration processes. This is particularly critical given the complex and often intimidating nature of the US immigration process.

A community forum within the app can foster a supportive network where immigrants can share their experiences, advice, and resources. Such peer-to-peer support is not only vital for emotional and social integration but also for sharing job opportunities and professional tips, directly contributing to economic upliftment. Moreover, integrating a donation feature facilitates a simple and immediate way for the broader community to contribute financially to the initiatives of Panas En Chicago, ensuring a steady flow of resources to support the organization.

Additionally, incorporating multimedia learning tools addresses a significant barrier to employment: language and cultural integration. Providing accessible language learning modules and cultural orientation can help both children and adults assimilate more effectively into their new city. For adults, particularly, mastering English is often critical to unlocking employment opportunities and engaging more broadly with community resources, including education for their children.

Central to this mobile application is its potential to act as an economic driver. By connecting Venezuelan immigrants with local employment opportunities through a dedicated job board feature, the app can play a direct role in enhancing their economic status. The job board could list opportunities that do not require high levels of local qualifications or language proficiency initially, thereby serving as a stepping stone to more stable and lucrative employment as immigrants settle and further develop their skills.

Education is another critical avenue for economic empowerment. The application should emphasize linking both children and adults with educational resources. For children, ensuring they have access to local schools and educational programs is crucial for

# Recommendations and Conclusions

their development and long-term integration. For adults the application can serve as a bridge to adult education programs, including English language classes and vocational training. These educational opportunities are essential not only for personal and professional development but also for enhancing the overall economic potential of the entire family unit.

In conclusion, the proposed mobile application by Panas En Chicago is envisioned as more than just a tool for resource distribution; it is a comprehensive platform designed to foster economic independence and robust community integration for Venezuelan immigrants by focusing on providing direct access to job opportunities, educational resources, and legal assistance, the app aims to address immediate needs while laying a foundation for sustainable economic growth and integration into the broader Chicago community. The compounding effect of getting job and training will help these families achieve citizenship and independence that they so desperately worked hard to achieve. The success of this initiative will require ongoing evaluation and adaptation to ensure that the app meets the evolving needs of the community. With careful implementation and a clear focus on economic empowerment, Panas En Chicago's mobile app has the potential to transform lives.

