



Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid Newsletter

VIAnews



A Decade In

VIA Reaffirms Emotional Support as a Core Part of Its Mission

In 2026, Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) turns ten. And one of the pillars that defines its first decade is neither a legal program nor a large-scale event. It is a space for listening. The Peer Support Program (Soporte Entre Pares or SEP), founded in 2018, was born from a simple and urgent conviction: leaving your country by force leaves wounds that no immigration process can heal.

"Migrating is an act of courage. So is healing," reads SEP's new website. And that phrase captures better than any report what VIA has built over a decade.

Eight years later, SEP has accumulated more than 90 virtual group meetings, 39 workshops on migratory grief and emotional resilience, more than 40 in-person gatherings, and over 2,300 direct beneficiaries. A 24/7 WhatsApp channel keeps more than 280 people connected between sessions. "Legal guidance is essential, but it is community accompaniment that helps people sustain themselves through prolonged migration processes," say Héctor Arguinzones and Niurka Meléndez, co-founders and co-directors of VIA.

As part of the tenth anniversary celebrations, VIA will soon launch a landing page dedicated to SEP at www.vianyc.org, where donors, allies, and community members can explore the program's full scope, its well-being spaces, and the impact achieved over eight years of uninterrupted work. "Migrating is an act of courage. So is healing," reads the site, a phrase that captures the spirit of everything SEP has built.

VIA will also announce additional activities to honor SEP and its eight years of collective resilience. Events will feature interactive activities and the program's founding psychologists. More information at www.vianyc.org and VIA's social media channels.

The "Granny Square" Crochet Workshop Closes Its Sixth Cycle

On April 12, VIA celebrated the closing of the sixth cycle of its community crochet workshop "Granny Square," one of the initiatives that make up the Peer Support Program. With the sustained support of the James Cohan Gallery, more than 90 participants have taken part in its classes since its launch. "Spaces like this demonstrate that art and collective creation are also mental health tools: a way to rebuild bonds, ease uncertainty, and remember that community is possible even far from home," say Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones. The seventh cycle will be announced soon.



Volunteerism as the Foundation: How VIA Reaches Its Ten-Year Mark



Behind every legal orientation, every Peer Support session, and every edition of VIAnews, there is something that appears in no budget: volunteer work. VIA has functioned for ten years thanks to the dedication of an unpaid team, the commitment of volunteers who give their time and knowledge, and the support of allies and donors who believe in a mission built from the inside. That is not a minor detail. It is the reason VIA is still standing.

Staying together as a team for a decade, in an environment as demanding as forced migrant assistance, is in itself an act of credibility.



VIA does not just talk about resilience: it practices it. And in that living example lies the true meaning of its community: proving that migrants and Venezuelans can build something solid, sustained, and with real impact in the country that receives them. That is what VIA hopes to see in every person it accompanies. And that is what it has been for ten years. #WeAreVIA



Ten Years of VIA: Every Donation Is a Story That Continues

Your donation makes this possible:

- Free legal orientations
- Peer Support sessions
- 24/7 community support network
- In-person resource fairs
- Essential supplies and winter coats
- Holiday dinners and toy drives
- Digital educational content
- VIA Media and Communications channels
- vianyc.org, a hub for resources and information
- Volunteer training and capacity building

Every dollar goes directly to the community.



Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) was born in 2016 from lived experience, not an institutional plan. Its founders, Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones, arrived in New York as forced migrants and understood firsthand what it means to face a complex system without information, without guidance, and without community. From that experience grew an organization that today marks ten years accompanying people from different nationalities through one of the most vulnerable moments of their lives.

Over a decade, VIA has built a comprehensive model that combines accessible legal guidance, emotional support through the Peer Support Program, cultural and recreational activities, and community events ranging from winter coat distributions to holiday dinners that bring the flavors of home. Alongside that in-person work comes a sustained communications presence: more than 400 consecutive weeks of digital content, a community of over 45,000 Instagram followers, millions of views on YouTube, and VIAnews, its institutional newsletter, serving as an editorial channel that documents, informs, and connects its network of allies and collaborators with every edition.

What makes each legal orientation, each emotional support session, and each piece of content possible, apart from institutional budget, is the generosity of individuals and organizations who believe in this mission. VIA operates with an austere structure where every donated dollar translates directly into services for migrant families who have nowhere else to turn. "Our lived experience is applied knowledge," say Meléndez and Arguinzones. "It allows us to respond with precision, urgency, and ethics."

At ten years, VIA does not celebrate by looking only backward. It celebrates with its eyes on what comes next: strengthening its sustainability, expanding strategic alliances, and ensuring that no migrant has to navigate alone a system that was never designed with them in mind. If you want to be part of that story, visit www.vianyc.org/donate.



VIA Takes the Floor at Fordham

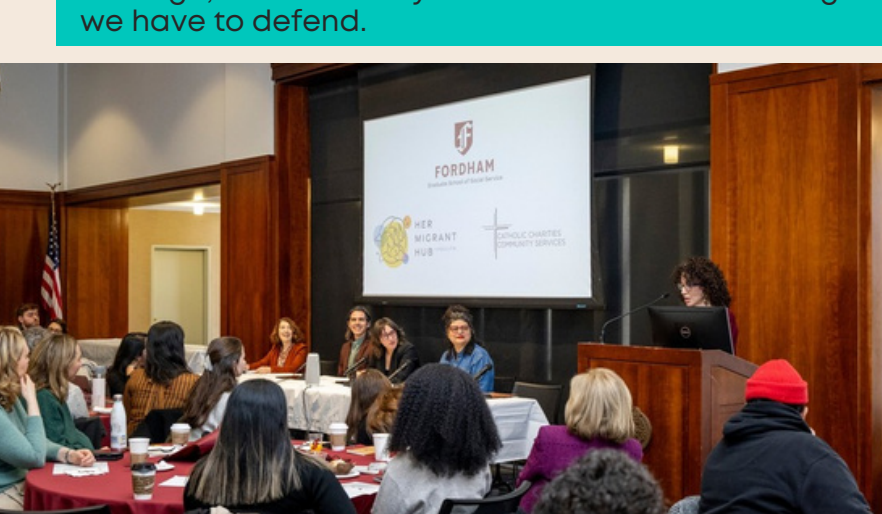
"Forced Migration Is Not Accidental"

On April 14, Niurka Meléndez, co-founder and co-director of Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA), was invited as a guest speaker in the graduate course on Forced Migration at Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Work, led by Professor Sameena Azhar. The invitation came through VIA's relationship with the research and community outreach projects.

During her presentation, Meléndez put forward a central argument that guides VIA's work: the most fundamental human right is not the right to seek asylum, but the right to never have to flee your own country in the first place. From that premise, she traced the gap between what the law promises and what migrants actually experience: inaccessible forms, language barriers, and misinformation that spreads in the void left by the absence of reliable guidance.

Meléndez also affirmed the role of grassroots organizations as producers of legitimate knowledge. "Our experience does not come from reports or press statements. It comes from daily action, from showing up consistently, from being accountable to the people most affected," she stated. A voice that arrives at Fordham carrying the weight of a decade of uninterrupted work: in 2026, VIA marks ten years accompanying forced migrants and asylum seekers in New York.

VIA at "Criminalizing Compassion"
On February 6, Meléndez participated as a panelist at the "Criminalizing Compassion" conference organized by Fordham University, where the keynote was delivered by humanitarian activist Scott Warren, who faced a 20-year prison sentence for providing assistance to migrants at the border. In the panel that followed, VIA brought the perspective of grassroots community organizations: accompanying a neighbor should never require courage, and humanity should never be something we have to defend.



VIANonStop

As part of its tenth anniversary, VIA has maintained an active and consistent presence through a series of activities designed to inform, accompany, and strengthen the migrant community in New York.

February 6 | Niurka Meléndez participated as a panelist at the "Criminalizing Compassion" conference organized by Fordham University, alongside humanitarian activist Scott Warren as keynote speaker.

March 2 | In-person session with attorney Julia Ponce and Raluca Oncioiu of Catholic Migration Services at St. Paul & St. Andrew Church, as part of the Miracle Mondays program. Free guidance on immigration appointments, no prior registration required.

March 4 | Virtual live conversation with attorney Guillermo Nollivos on voluntary departure, changes to work permits, and asylum case dismissals under Asylum Cooperation Agreements.

March 9 | "Poniéndonos al día" informational live with Co-Counsel NYC on the blocked proposal to change appeal rules in immigration cases.

March 14 | In-person event "Dando una mano" community event in Jackson Heights, Queens. Legal guidance, health insurance enrollment, cultural orientation, hygiene product donations, and a raffle of suitcases and shopping carts.

March 17 | Virtual Peer Support session dedicated to migrant women: challenges, resilience, and emotional well-being.

March 25 | Virtual live legal orientation with attorney Victoria Gámez on humanitarian programs: asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), and others.

March 30 | Virtual conversation with attorney Rebecca Press on asylum hearings: what judges ask and how to respond with clarity and confidence.

Late March | "Poniéndonos al día" informational live with Co-Counsel NYC on the deployment of ICE agents at 14 airports across the country and guidance for the migrant community.
April 12 | In-person Peer Support gathering in Manhattan. A space for community, resilience, and emotional support networks, with relaxation and empathy activities.

April 14 | Niurka Meléndez participates as guest speaker in the graduate course on Forced Migration at Fordham University's Graduate School of Social Work.

April 27 | Instagram Live with Hot Bread Kitchen on their free "New New Yorkers" program: six weeks of culinary training, English classes, food handler certification, and employment support with a weekly stipend.
April 28 | Virtual Peer Support session on silent grief: emotional losses associated with migration, streamed on YouTube and Instagram.

April 29 | Virtual live legal orientation with attorney Victoria Gámez on humanitarian programs: asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), TPS, and others.



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