



Venezuela Hit by Two Devastating Earthquakes

A Tremor That Was Also Felt in New York

The earthquakes of June 24, 2026 had their epicenters in northern Venezuela: the first, a magnitude 7.2, near San Felipe in Yaracuy state; the second, a magnitude 7.5, just seconds later, between Yumare and Montalbán in Carabobo. But for Venezuelans living abroad, the ground shook here, too. It didn't matter whether you were in New York, Madrid, Bogotá, or any corner of the world: the moment the news arrived, something deep in the chest jolted with the same force. That's what happens when your homeland trembles. It's felt everywhere a Venezuelan exists.

VIA is, first and foremost, an organization for forced migrants in the United States. But it is made up largely of Venezuelans. And that means that no matter how many years we've spent here, no matter how many roots we've put down in this new land, there is something about home that never lets go. This week, VIA News is making space to speak about what happened in Venezuela on June 24, because staying silent in the face of this tragedy was never an option.

The double earthquake that struck Caracas, Vargas state, and other regions of the country was more than a news story: it was a wound shared by millions of Venezuelans inside and outside the country's borders. For millions of people, the phone became the most vital extension of the body, with every unanswered message weighing a ton and distance (geographic or otherwise) feeling crueler than ever.

The Impact That Can't Be Measured in Rubble

Beyond the material damage (still being assessed), there is something that is felt immediately and appears in no official report: the emotional toll. The fear. The disorientation. The feeling that the ground beneath your feet, both literally and figuratively, is no longer the same.

Héctor Arguinzones, co-founder of VIA, notes that in the face of all this, "mental health and collective empathy are our best tools for helping one another." And he is right. In an emergency, the way we treat each other can be just as decisive as any other protective measure.

How to Take Care of Each Other Right Now

Fear and confusion affect everyone, without exception. It is completely normal to feel them, but in these moments it is essential to avoid acting on impulse. Taking a deep breath before reacting, seeking information from reliable sources, and refusing to spread rumors are small acts with enormous consequences.

If you need to go out or interact with others, it is worth remembering that the person next to you may also be frightened or emotionally overwhelmed. Many people respond from a place of fear, not bad intention. Kindness, on days like these, literally saves lives: it prevents confrontations, makes room for others, and reminds us that we are all in the same boat.

And for everyone: being a calm center in your own environment does not mean not feeling. It means choosing, as much as possible, to respond rather than react. One person's steadiness can ripple outward to everyone around them.

Stay Strong, Venezuela

From VIA, Niurka Meléndez, Héctor Arguinzones, and the VIA volunteers send their prayers, their solidarity, and an embrace that knows no distance. The hope is that every family is safe and that any damage suffered can be repaired. You are not alone. You never have been. Stay strong, Venezuela, and to every Venezuelan out there.



VIA Launches New Website, Opening a New Digital Window for New York's Migrants

Turning ten is a milestone that sounds simple to say but is built slowly, one day at a time, held up by values that aren't up for negotiation: solidarity, humanity, compassion, resilience, community, and family. Today, those values aren't a memory of the past: they are VIA's compass for the present.

Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) launched this week on its website, vianyc.org, a renovated space that becomes a platform presenting, for the first time, the history, programs, and reach of an organization that has spent a decade operating on the front lines of forced migration in the city, in a complete and accessible way.

"Since we founded VIA, we knew the migration process was not just bureaucratic: it was profoundly emotional," said Niurka Meléndez, co-founder and co-director of the organization. "This site is now a reflection of everything we've built alongside our community. Peer Support was born from that reality, and today it has the digital space it deserves."

VIA was founded in 2016 by Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones, a Venezuelan couple who arrived in New York in 2015 as forced migrants and who, rather than simply adapting, decided to organize. What began as volunteer work providing orientation and interpretation for other Venezuelans grew into a nonprofit organization that today offers legal orientation, English classes, humanitarian assistance and cultural integration programs, all free of charge and regardless of immigration status.

But Peer Support holds a special place within that map of services. The program combines biweekly group sessions with specialists in migration trauma, a 24-hour WhatsApp support network, and individual crisis care through Psychological First Aid. Since its founding, it has benefited more than 2,400 people.

"We want any migrant arriving in New York to know they're not alone," said Arguinzones. "This site is an open door. The first of many steps they can take with us."

The redesign was led by Ronald Rosales, VIA's web coordinator and the site's architect. For Rosales, the challenge wasn't only technical. "Building this site was an exercise in translating VIA's mission into an accessible, human digital experience," he explained. "Peer Support is the heart of the site, and every design and architecture decision was aimed at making sure anyone, regardless of their level of digital literacy, could find that resource easily and with confidence. Technology here serves the community, not the other way around."

The site also reflects a reality that few community organizations in New York have managed to articulate clearly: that emotional health is not a luxury or a supplement to the migration process, but a condition for that process to have any chance of success. VIA operates entirely with volunteers. Its new website can be visited at www.vianyc.org/peer-support/.



VIA Accompanied Families Affected by Earthquakes in Venezuela During the Third Session of Giving a Hand

The third 2026 session of Giving a Hand (Dando Una Mano), a program by Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) as part of its humanitarian assistance initiative, took on a different tone this Saturday, June 27. At the UnitedHealthcare location in Jackson Heights, Queens, many of the families in attendance said they had lost relatives or had been affected by the earthquakes that struck Venezuela.

For that reason, the gathering opened with a Peer Support session via Zoom, led by psychologist Liliana Torella, dedicated to providing psychological support to those living in New York as tragedy touches their loved ones back home. It was a moment of deep emotion: many attendees appeared distressed, and more than a few were moved to tears, in a space where shared grief found listening and companionship.

About thirty people took part in the event, which brought together emotional support, legal, health, and practical guidance services for daily life in New York, all in one place.

Attorney Victoria Gámez led a question-and-answer session on the asylum process and the juvenile visa, offering in-person legal guidance to those navigating these procedures.

Meanwhile, the UnitedHealthcare Community Plan team, led by Wendy Mezquita and Jennifer Rodríguez, provided guidance on the health care system and helped attendees enroll in health insurance.

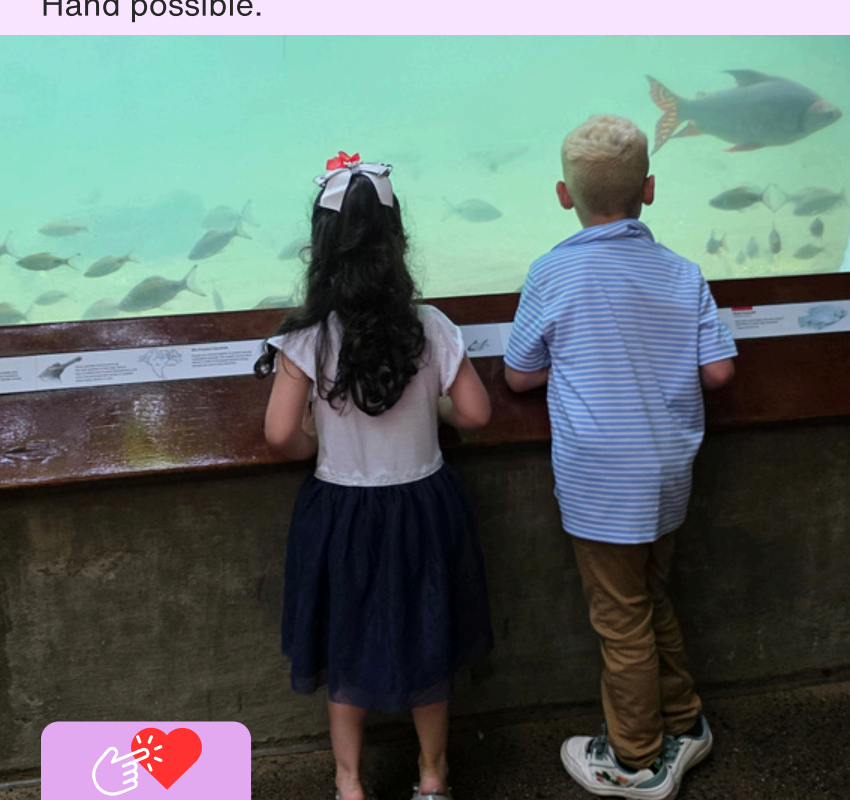
Héctor Arguinzones also shared information about the Blue Campaign from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which educates the public, law enforcement, and industry partners on recognizing indicators of human trafficking and responding appropriately to potential cases.

The event also included a guide to the city's financial system, led by Rohan Varia, a VIA ally, who shared tools and tips to help those present move toward financial independence and stability.

Giving a Hand also featured an educational talk on the prevention and early detection of tuberculosis and its symptoms, given by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. As in every edition, VIA distributed donated personal hygiene kits with sanitary pads, razors, deodorant, soap, toothbrushes, and toothpaste, and raffled off suitcases, shopping carts, bedding and linen sets, laundry bags, baby diapers, diaper bags, and backpacks among those present. It also shared Venezuelan snacks, including tequeños, prepared by VIA volunteer Liébana Durán.

Hundreds of families have benefited from Giving a Hand since its creation, an effort made possible by the ongoing support of individuals and institutions who believe in VIA's mission and back it with their contributions. Once again, VIA shows that its commitment to the immigrant community isn't limited to paperwork and resources: it also embraces the community in its hardest moments.

Niurka Meléndez and Héctor Arguinzones closed the event by thanking the team of volunteers and their partners for helping make this edition of Giving a Hand possible.



A Sunday of Relief at the Bronx Zoo

The day after the Giving a Hand event, VIA took eight children to the Bronx Zoo, offering them recreation and a break from the pain their parents say their families have been living through after losing loved ones in the earthquakes in Venezuela. A day of play and wonder, meant so that, at least for one day, childhood could have room to be childhood.



Ten Years of VIA: The Words That Matter More Than Ever Today

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24 Words, One Shared Path

Marking its tenth anniversary, VIA recently unveiled "24 Words," a project of hand-crocheted bags created in collaboration with the James Cohan Gallery. These words (which will also be translated into English) represent 24 values, one per bag, designed to support the organization's fundraising. Each word, among them community, solidarity, belonging, humanity, resilience, dignity, hope, shelter, and sisterhood, captures a decade of history and of the people connected to VIA.

When Words Become Action

The two earthquakes that struck Venezuela on June 24 didn't only affect people in the north of the country; they also affected their family and friends abroad.

That was the moment the 24 words stopped being an art project and became a mandate. Community: not just the place where you are, but the reason you keep going. Solidarity: because a decade of solidarity doesn't stop in a crisis; it activates. Resilience, because action is born from pain, and VIA once again becomes the compass that turns uncertainty into a path forward. Shelter, because ten years of being home to those who need it most takes on new meaning when that home, on the other side, starts to crack.

Other words deeply meaningful to VIA are sisterhood and family, because in the face of distance, the Venezuelan community in New York once again proved that family is chosen and sustained, even without sharing the same land. And action, because the antidote to pain has never been waiting.

These aren't new terms for VIA. Its members have carried them since the beginning. What's changed is how urgent they feel today.

What's Next

Ten years of VIA is an anniversary that is celebrated, but also lived out: according to its directors, every volunteer gathering, every word woven into a bag, every hand extended after an earthquake are part of the same story. A decade of solidarity, a future without limits.

A Space to Breathe Together

As part of VIA's tenth anniversary, on June 6 the organization brought together 21 of its volunteers to give them space for reflection, relaxation, and well-being to mark the occasion.

Artist Lara Alcántara welcomed the group into her studio and led a workshop designed to release tension, reconnect with oneself, and strengthen the bonds within VIA's team. Each volunteer created a piece based on a variation of Kintsugi: writing words on a plate that was then broken, beginning a process of rebuilding with gold leaf and paint on a frame. It was a meaningful, moving, and deeply reflective afternoon for VIA's members.

VIA's directors confirmed that more activities with the community and the organization's partners are on the way, continuing to honor this decade of work, dedication, and presence.

