



Venezuelan Migration

A Discussion Paper by Claudia Vargas Ribas

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Context

Venezuelan migration in the last two years has taken on unprecedented dimensions at the national and regional levels. We are in the midst of an exodus that does not discriminate in terms of socioeconomic status, educational level, or age. It has extended to the poorest and youngest sectors of the population, who find in emigration the possibility of addressing their basic needs of food, health, housing, and safety.

Although a large part of the population uses formal emigration channels, there are migrants who, because of the urgency of their situation, emigrate illegally. This increases their level of vulnerability and their exposure to situations like labor exploitation, human trafficking, and xenophobia, to mention a few.

The main destinations of Venezuelan migrants are countries in the region, predominantly the bordering countries of Colombia and Brazil, but also Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, and some Caribbean islands. Migration to any particular destination is driven by geographical and cultural proximity, family connections from prior migrations on the continent, and those countries that offer legal recourse for integration (those that do not have restrictions related to visas, residency, etc.).

Venezuelans are experiencing forced migration, as people perceive and respond to violations of their fundamental rights, including failure or absence of public services, an increasing shortage of medicines (according to the Living Conditions Study), 26,000 homicides per year (especially among youth, according to the Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, the Venezuelan Violence Observatory), inflation that is estimated to be at 1 million percent by the end of 2018 (according to the International Monetary Fund), and institutional crises, which, according to the UN Human Rights Council places Venezuela last in a ranking of countries for the existence of the rule of law.

Venezuelan migration will most likely worsen, considering that its internal drivers are not being adequately addressed and there are still no public policies aimed at resolving the matter. That is why states in the region, primarily those receiving large groups of Venezuelans daily through their borders, are calling for protection of and assistance to migrants as international law demands.

Within this context, the following general recommendations are made for a variety of stakeholders: members of regional organizations, public officials, civil society organizations, and nongovernmental/religious organizations.

In Border Zones

Maintain focus on border zones: Provide medical, nutritional, and housing/receiving (shelter) assistance. This means that states allow the relevant organizations on the ground access to immigrants, including public institutions or international agencies such as the International Organization for Migration, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and other actors from civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work on borders and control points, such as the Jesuit Refugee Service.

Provide information services: Develop and distribute a legal guide that informs immigrants about their fundamental rights, such as access to documentation (in the case of asylum seekers), work, housing/shelter, and administrative processes. Those who are aware of their rights and immigration options are less vulnerable.

Raise awareness within and about receiving/border zones: Design and develop information campaigns about the situation in Venezuela. Directing these to the residents of the recipient zone and to officials at migration and border areas will generate empathy based on knowledge of the Venezuelan immigrants' situation. Campaigns should specifically include references to protection of vulnerable populations, such as children, pregnant women, the chronically ill, the malnourished, and the elderly.



Document, report, and circulate: Authorize the presence of civil society organizations, community leaders, and media in border zones. This permits increased visibility and reporting of what happens in regard to Venezuelan immigrants. Documentation may be useful for large-scale processes or as evidence for individuals to request a specific status (asylum, refuge, and/or protection) based on the characteristics of their case.

Establish public opinion campaigns about migrant potential: Promote civil society or related associations' efforts to change the narrative with regard to immigration. By showing the benefits of receiving migrants and the positive impact they have had in different areas, there is greater potential where formal integration processes exist.

State Actions

Strengthen regional cooperation: Develop joint strategies among countries in the region using regional and multilateral institutions or organizations such as the Union of South American Nations, Mercosur, and the Andean Community of Nations—which is still active, particularly regarding social policies.

Comply with international laws and mechanisms founded on the need to protect: Acknowledge the commitment of states to do what is necessary to address the root causes of migration (i.e., the Cartagena Declaration, 1984) and protect vulnerable Venezuelan migrants.

Review national approaches for the integration of immigrants: Knowledge of internal legal mechanisms and their specificity on migration matters is important, in order to identify which mechanisms are suitable to address the unprecedented Venezuelan crisis.

Inside and Outside Venezuela

Work across all sectors: Identify actors in international organizations/agencies, government institutions, and civil society organizations and NGOs specializing in human rights and migration who can take initiative to address the Venezuelan migration emergency.

Identify actors that can support the main receiving countries: These include community leaders, NGOs, and Venezuelan associations that can respond immediately and provide safety for migrants.

Assess and diagnose the situation: Classify Venezuelan migration by establishing a sociodemographic profile of the migrants and identifying their various migration routes. To do this, civil society organizations inside and outside Venezuela should coordinate with regional organizations.

Establish documentation and reporting networks: Include academia, research groups, and civil society organizations.

Seek humanitarian assistance: Start with training on how to apply for and receive financial support for humanitarian assistance from international organizations with experience in conflict situations and complex migration processes.

About the Author

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