



Venezuelan Migration to Nonbordering Countries

A Discussion Paper by Luisa Feline Freier

Translated into English from the original Spanish version

Context

With 3 million people having left Venezuela since 2015, the country's emigration represents the largest displacement phenomenon in Latin American in such a short period of time.¹ Factors that have contributed to the exodus include hyperinflation, a grave shortage of food and medicine, political repression, and an increase in violence and organized crime. In addition, there was a recent electricity and water crisis in the country. The displaced Venezuelans come from increasingly diverse demographic backgrounds with respect to income, level of education, and profession. There has also been an increase in the migration of children, nursing mothers, and the elderly. This migration is primarily carried out in a forced manner and—precisely because of its unplanned nature—creates conditions of high vulnerability. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, between 2014 and 2018 there were close to 400,000 asylum applications recorded from Venezuelan citizens around the world.

A recent report by the Migration Policy Institute indicated that at the beginning of 2019, there were more than 1.1 million Venezuelans living in Colombia and 98,000 in Brazil. As for nonbordering countries in the region, there were 250,000 Venezuelans officially living in Ecuador, 635,000 in Peru, 130,000 in Argentina, and 108,000 in Chile. These numbers demonstrate that Venezuelan people are primarily emigrating to nearby countries that were not destination countries in previous decades, with the exception of Argentina. The scale and rapid growth of Venezuelan migration represents a huge challenge for regional institutions, civil society, and governments that seek to manage these flows and address the needs of migrants and refugees.

In this context, it should be noted that most countries in the region could have addressed Venezuelan migration using three existing

mechanisms: the residence agreements of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) or Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) regional blocs, complementary or humanitarian protection figures, or application of the expanded definition of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees of 1984. Most nonbordering countries, however, opted to implement special residence permits that are temporary and discretionary in nature. Additionally, the regional meetings of the Lima Group and Quito Process have not been able to provide a coordinated response.

Only Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and Uruguay have unilaterally extended the residence agreements of MERCOSUR and UNASUR in favor of the Venezuelan population, and Mexico is the only country that has applied the Cartagena Declaration's definition to this displacement phenomenon. Colombia, Chile, and Peru have implemented special permits for Venezuelan citizens, while Panama and Bolivia have established regularization processes for migrants who were already living in their territory. Paraguay and Costa Rica have not created any specific migratory category for Venezuelans, while some Caribbean countries have applied sanctions and expulsion policies.

Thus, the responses from the states in the region have been quite heterogeneous. However, they share four similar characteristics. First, the adopted measures are not laws and depend on the executive power, with little or no intervention from the parliaments. These measures also contain numerous clauses that grant discretionary power to public officials. Second, the ad hoc instruments established by governments do not apply to all Venezuelan citizens and include restrictions, such as time limits related to the filing of applications and/or entry into the country. Third, the temporary nature of residence permits creates legal uncertainty for individuals and, on the broader level, generates devastating effects for any ongoing attempt to build South American citizenship. Finally,



in practice, access to the rights established in legal instruments is complicated by bureaucratic and administrative obstacles.

Recommendations

Based on this context, the following recommendations are provided for nonbordering countries of Venezuela that are receiving migrants:

- For countries that have not yet done so, look at expanding and facilitating the use of the MERCOSUR Residence Agreement for Venezuelan citizens.
- Expand and facilitate the use of complementary or humanitarian visas and prevent discrimination in the form of prerequisites that are impossible or extremely difficult to fulfill.
- Avoid the use of humanitarian visas that must be applied for from within Venezuela. In practice, these visas create limitations for individuals based on socioeconomic status.
- Expand and facilitate the use of the definition of refugees found in the Cartagena Declaration at a national and regional level.
- Avoid closing borders through the use of impossible, or hard to achieve, prerequisites. In countries with thousands of kilometers of porous borders, this only increases the number of undocumented migrants and places them in a more precarious situation.
- Avoid excessive charges for administrative fees and tickets for migratory infractions.
- Work on comprehensive migration and refuge policies. These should not only focus on migration regularization but should also promote measures on the inclusion and integration of migrant populations, including recognition of academic

degrees in accordance with the Andres Bello Convention and access to public services, especially health and education. Additionally, to facilitate access to public services, countries should simplify the requirements for the recognition of identification documents.

- Work to moderate political and media discourse to prevent the stigmatization of the Venezuelan population present in the different countries of the region. Discourse should focus on informing the public on the situation in Venezuela, the experience of migrants, and the positive impact of migration. In addition to reporting facts and objective data, discourse should also appeal to the public's emotions by presenting personal stories that promote empathy for migrants.
- Improve the coordination of regional responses to migration from functional regional organizations such as MERCOSUR, the Andean Community of Nations, and the South American Confederation of Migration to avoid repetition of statements in other forums with less capacity and knowledge of migration issues. Along the same line, governments and civil society members in the Caribbean should be invited to coordinate humanitarian efforts.
- Promote collaboration between states, civil society, and multinational corporations to raise international funds.

Endnotes

- ¹ The analysis and recommendations presented in this document are based on the working document “La emigración venezolana: respuestas latinoamericanas,,: https://www.fundacioncarolina.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/DT_FC_03.pdf.



About Us

The Stanley Center for Peace and Security partners with people, organizations, and the greater global community to drive policy progress in three issue areas—mitigating climate change, avoiding the use of nuclear weapons, and preventing mass violence and atrocities. The center was created in 1956 and maintains its independence while developing forums for diverse perspectives and ideas. To learn more about our recent publications and upcoming events, please visit stanleycenter.org.



CRIES

The Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES) is a network of research centers and non-governmental organizations that acts as a regional think tank, promoting analysis, debate, and policy creation about topics of regional, hemispheric, and global relevance, from the perspective of civil society. CRIES is an independent nonprofit institution that promotes pluralism and citizen participation. It is not affiliated with any political or religious organization. For more information about its activities and its virtual publications, please visit www.cries.org.

