



# BETWEEN EMPATHY AND REJECTION

Perceptions of xenophobia and discrimination  
towards Venezuelan migrants in Colombia,  
Ecuador and Peru.



Délégation régionale  
de coopération pour  
l'Amérique du Sud

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In 2019, Oxfam published the report *Yes, But Not Here*. At that time, migration from Venezuela was 3.6 million people. As of August 5, 2023, according to the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, there were 7,710,887 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the world, 6,527,064 of them in Latin America and the Caribbean.

As of August 2023, Colombia is the leading receiving country with 2,894,593 registered Venezuelans, followed by Peru with 1,542,004, Brazil with 477,493, and Ecuador with 474,945.

Through a comparative analysis with the 2019 results, this study seeks to identify changes in the behavior of populations in host countries and the main reflections and opinions towards Venezuelan migrants. The evidence highlights that fluctuating views persist on the perception of migrants, particularly women, and the economic and cultural contribution of migrants in host countries. On the one hand, perceptions show less support for Venezuelan women; opinions stating that host countries are in a "borderline" situation; that migrants should be cared for only while the situation improves so that they can return home; and that migrants have a negative impact on the economy and security. On the other hand, perceptions also identify an interest in mitigating xenophobia and discrimination.

The aim of this report is to sensitize public opinion, authorities, and organizations working on Venezuelan migration to mitigate discrimination and xenophobia.

## OXFAM RESEARCH REPORT - DECEMBER 2023

This quantitative and qualitative study analyzes and compares the results published in the 2019 report *Yes, But Not Here*, on the dynamics of Venezuelan migration in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, and the current perceptions of xenophobia and discrimination towards migrants. The results of this study show the persistence of ambivalent opinions about Venezuelan migration. Although there is empathy for the causes that have forced the migrants' mobility and some concern about xenophobia, most people consider that they should return to Venezuela once the situation improves there. Oxfam issues recommendations to States, the international community, the media, and civil society aimed at guaranteeing the rights of migrants, facilitating their integration into host countries, combating xenophobia, and eradicating gender prejudice against migrant women.

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Cover photo: Migrant, returnee, and host community women from the department of Arauca, Colombia. Colectivo AICA/Oxfam Colombia.

Cover of back page: sisters chatting in the kitchen of their mother's house, Táchira, Venezuela. Marina Calderon/Oxfam, November 2023



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# SUMMARY

Venezuelan migration has intensified in recent years, reaching more than 7.7 million people, and being the second-largest migration in modern history after Syria. Before the pandemic, the routes and final destinations were mostly aimed at South American countries, but today there is a growing trend towards the north of the continent with the final destination being the United States, crossing the Darien jungle and the Mesoamerican corridor despite the serious risks of this journey.

Lack of integration in the host countries, experiences of discrimination, violence, or lack of livelihoods are some of the reasons for these changes. Even in this context, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru are among the main destinations, especially for reasons of family reunification. This study of perceptions on Venezuelan migration was conducted in these countries and compares its results with those documented in Oxfam's 2019 report **Yes, But Not Here**, also by Oxfam.

The results of the quantitative and qualitative work, done between January and August 2023, evidence the persistence of ambivalent opinions on Venezuelan migration. The social assessment of migration collected in this research reveals a matrix of negative opinions on the impact of migrants in the labor sphere, their impact on the economy, the challenges of integration in host countries, and perceptions about the situation of Venezuelan women.

Although people show empathy for the causes that have forced the mobilization of migrants, and some show concern for xenophobia, most hold that migrants should return to Venezuela once the situation improves there. Among the findings, the perceptions of migrant women are ambivalent, but with a predominance of negative beliefs related to their sexuality.

Meanwhile, the heterogeneous and dynamic Venezuelan migration remains mired in a complex vulnerability. This requires designing or adjusting public policies aimed at promoting positive narratives about migrants and preventing the escalation of problems associated with discrimination and xenophobia, guaranteeing rights throughout the migration process (including transit), and integrating migrants in host countries.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

In August 2023, there were 7,710,887 Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide, representing 22% of the country's population. Of this figure, which does not seem to be slowing down, **6,527,064 are in Latin America and the Caribbean**<sup>1</sup>. Venezuelan migration is the second largest in modern history, after Syria<sup>2</sup>. This reality has motivated this study, which analyzes and compares the results published in the 2019 report *Yes, But Not Here*<sup>3</sup> and the dynamics of Venezuelan migration in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, with the current perceptions of the population of those countries towards migrants.

A negative perception of Venezuelan migrants predominates among the people surveyed. As in the 2019 study, the results show changing, ambivalent, and contradictory opinions about migration.

The most important findings of the quantitative and qualitative study show that in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, distrust persists as a generalized opinion about migrants, since it is **understood that, because of them, wages are reduced and working conditions are worsened**; there is little recognition of the benefits and wealth that migrants could generate in the economies; and two out of every ten people in Colombia (23.7%), Ecuador (22.8%), and Peru (22.5%) believe that migration generates economic tensions and labor competition for those who are nationals of those countries.

**The results also indicate that there are factors that influence public perception of Venezuelan migration, such as the media, stereotypes, prejudices, and personal experiences**, which result in the association of migration with crime and loss of cultural identity. However, findings show that rejection is associated more with poverty than with their foreign status: in Colombia, this was reported by 51.8% of those interviewed; 44.7% in Ecuador; and 45.4% in Peru.

The Venezuelan crisis affects women differently. Forced migration, in contexts of defenselessness and lack of protection that place them in a precarious position, is a **risk factor for abuse, labor and sexual exploitation, subjection to caregiving tasks, reproductive roles, and all kinds of violence**. In fact, in contrast to the 2019 study, the results reveal that people are less in favor of supporting migrant women. This trend may be related to the hypersexualization and dehumanization that Venezuelan women have suffered. Nevertheless, positive aspects were identified in the focus groups, such as admiration for their kindness, resilience, work ethic, and determination.

Although in all three countries, there are people with positive attitudes towards welcoming migration, most expect migrants to return to Venezuela once the situation improves. Therefore, this report, in addition to offering a clear assessment of the perception of Venezuelan migration, also identifies transforming narratives and presents concrete recommendations to **mitigate discrimination and xenophobia, which address the barriers that migrants**

*"...the world is made of diversity and we are all part of that set of things we live with on a daily basis. For a culture to be more interesting, competitive, complete and comprehensive, it is necessary to add more factors. I see it (migration) as an opportunity that the country has for its population, as Colombians, we can challenge ourselves to be better persons, better professionals and to have better competencies..."*

Focus group participant in Colombia

have in the host countries and promote their integration, hand in hand with the State and civil society.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

For this report, Oxfam undertook mixed quantitative and qualitative research in three key countries: Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, as these countries account for more than 60% of the Venezuelan migrant population (4.9 million). The research was conducted between January and August 2023.

It began with a *social listening* study on the perception of migrants. This qualitative technique made it possible to identify the narratives of the nationals of the host countries and the testimonies of Venezuelan migrants who had settled in these territories, or who are in the process of returning to Venezuela.

The technique used to collect quantitative data was the survey, and it focused on the perception of:

- a) the presence of migrants in general and migrant women in particular;
- b) personal perceptions and attitudes towards the Venezuelan migrant population and Venezuelan people who wish to return to their country;
- c) the responsibility of integration and the purpose of Venezuelan migration;
- d) the impact of globalization and borders;
- e) the scale of racism.

## TECHNICAL DATA OF THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDY.



### Quantitative methodology:

- For the most part, participants over 18 years of age, residing in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.
- Number of surveys per country, distributed as follows: Colombia, 1,567 surveys; Ecuador, 1,380 surveys; Peru, 1,139 surveys, with a margin of error of  $\pm 1.53\%$  for a confidence level of 95 % under worst-case conditions ( $p=q=0.5$ ) and for overall sample data. 4,086 surveys in total.
- CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) self-administered survey projected to an online panel.
- Gender and age quotas crossed with habitat size and social class.

### Qualitative methodology:

Social listening study in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, under a triple perspective: that of the receiving countries, that of Venezuelan migrants settled in those countries, and that of migrants who have returned, or who are in the process of returning to Venezuela. The social listening analysis of the digital ecosystem in social networks was carried out between January 1, 2023, and April 15, 2023.

Three focus groups were conducted in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Participants with average ages and intermediate positions on Venezuelan migration were selected. The participation of people of different ages and opinions allowed us to obtain a complete and nuanced view of the situation. It was decided to exclude from the groups the people who were most susceptible to and critical of Venezuelan migration.

Source: survey data. Own elaboration

Also, as part of the methodology implemented, experts on migration in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela were interviewed to refine the understanding of the evolution of migratory movements in the region, and the persistence or worsening of negative contexts and perceptions towards Venezuelan migrants.

The research had an explicit focus on the situation of xenophobia, discrimination, and violence against Venezuelan women in mobility. One of the purposes of the report is to make visible the circumstances of vulnerability and risks to which they are subjected during their stay in the host country, return journey, and return to Venezuela (if applicable), and to propose differentiated messages and recommendations with a focus on human rights in favor of Venezuelan migrant women.

# 3. MIGRATION TRENDS IN THE REGION: THE GROWING VENEZUELAN DIASPORA

In 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that there was a total of 281 million migrants in the world<sup>4</sup>. For the same year, the American continent counted some 73.5 million people in this condition<sup>5</sup>. In the Latin American and Caribbean migratory movement, 14.8 million people were estimated to be on the move<sup>6</sup>.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the Colombia-Panama border experienced unprecedented activity. Between 2014 and 2020, the number of irregular entries had remained between 6,175 and 30,055, while by 2021 it had increased to 133,726. In turn, by 2022, a new inter-annual increase of 86% is observed, bringing the total number of irregular entries to 248,284; and, in general, Venezuelan nationals are the most prominent in large movements in the Americas<sup>7</sup>. The Darien route is considered one of the most dangerous in the world<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, there was an increase in the number of Venezuelan returnees from countries such as Colombia, from 15% in 2021 to 28% in 2022<sup>9</sup>.

In the regional context, the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) projects that, by the end of 2023, around 5 million Venezuelan people in destination countries, 2.38 million people from host communities, 1.24 million Venezuela pendular migrants, 940,000 migrants from Venezuela in transit, and 541,600 people returning to their countries of origin from Venezuela will require humanitarian assistance.<sup>10</sup>

The profile of Venezuelan migration is heterogeneous in composition, with solo migrants (mostly young men, of economically productive ages, who consider that their income is not sufficient to meet their needs and those of their families<sup>11</sup>) or in complete family nuclei (a growing trend, with mothers at the head), characterized by flows of asymmetric migrant groups in terms of their socioeconomic and professional characteristics, places of origin, and countries of destination.

This has resulted in a constant, active, moving dynamic<sup>12</sup>: some people leave (migrate), others are in pendular movement (especially at the borders with Colombia), while some have returned to Venezuela (mostly temporarily, between 2021 and 2023), and others decide to leave the countries that initially welcomed them (including Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru) to embark on a new migratory adventure to other countries, especially the United States and Brazil (by August 2023, Brazil was the third largest host country for Venezuelan

*"...many say that they are daring, that they don't even know how to beg, that they are thieves, that they only come to steal and take the work of Ecuadorians, the work that belongs to them and they take it away..."*

Focus group participant in Ecuador.

migrants)<sup>13</sup> .

Both the return to Venezuela and migration to third countries have occurred among Venezuelan people who were part of the migratory flow of the years 2016-2019, pointing out among their reasons the adverse economic effects produced by the pandemic, the democratic fragility in the region, the scarce educational and employment opportunities, and **the situations of discrimination and xenophobia**. On the other hand, since 2018, the Venezuelan government has been implementing a plan called "Return to the Homeland"<sup>14</sup> , announcing the return of migrants to the country by land and air<sup>15</sup> , which has been extended, since October 2023, to people deported by the United States.

Migration to the United States, crossing the Colombian-Panamanian border through the Darien plug and subsequent transit through Central American countries, has increased during the last two years. The Darien is a tropical rainforest through which thousands of migrants walk for several days through 'trochas', sometimes led by guides or 'coyotes', without access to drinking water, food, or health services, that is, in total lack of protection against serious risks. People are exposed to organized crime groups and human trafficking networks. It is estimated that during 2022 more than 150,000 Venezuelan men and women transited through this dangerous route<sup>16</sup> , 50 times more than in 2021<sup>17</sup> .

Overall, between January and December 2022, 1,268 people died in the different migratory journeys in the Americas: 232 women, 616 men, 91 children and adolescents, and 329 unidentified persons<sup>18</sup> . Then, between January and October 2023, 1,006 deaths or disappearances were counted in the Americas region due to different events: accidents, violence, drowning by immersion, environmental conditions, disease, and several others for reasons as yet unknown<sup>19</sup> .

But transit is only one of the first difficulties faced by vulnerable migrants.

Although migration usually has positive economic impacts on the host countries – because the labor force is always available and cheap - labor exploitation, lack of knowledge of rights, and lack of protection in terms of occupational health and safety are always present in the labor context of migrants.

A 2022 study<sup>20</sup> by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) states that the migration of the Venezuelan labor force has occurred in three phases: the first, made up of experienced university professionals; the second, by middle-class young people with university degrees; the third, as of 2018, by migrants whose labor profile corresponds to low-income households with a lower level of education. Almost two-thirds of Venezuelan migrants are of working age, but in reality, there are serious gaps with respect to national workers in the host countries. According to IMF estimates, if the right integration policies are implemented, **Venezuelan migration would contribute between 2.5 and 4.5 percentage points to GDP growth in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru by 2030.**

A large number of Venezuelan migrants travel without documentation and in

circumstances of vulnerability in terms of protection, food security, health, and work, among other areas. However, as stated by Claudia Vargas-Ribas, professor and researcher at the Simon Bolivar University of Venezuela, consulted for this research, the main measure taken by the host countries, almost as a chain reaction, was the implementation of special requirements or visas for the entry of Venezuelan people. These, far from guaranteeing a safe and orderly migration, worsened their problematic irregular legal-administrative situation in addition to the costly and complicated regularization procedures, restricting their integration and access to a decent livelihood. The expert Lucie Laplace, also interviewed for this study, adds that these political measures have created "the southern bottleneck", symbolizing the barriers to migration to the South American Andes.

## 4. SOCIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF VENEZUELAN MIGRATION ON THE ECONOMY

*"...while it is true that there are good people and it is positive for many countries, certain Venezuelan citizens have proven to be more counterproductive for the economy..."*.

Focus group participant in Peru

As we have seen, the phenomenon of Venezuelan migration continues to spread. However, many people still consider it as something circumstantial: almost 60% of the people surveyed in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru believe that Venezuelan migrants enter these countries to "improve their economic situation and return to Venezuela" and an additional 21% think that they do so to obtain resources and go to another country. Only 6% believe they are going to "stay forever".

This position of the host communities in the face of the reality of an unabated Venezuelan migratory flow could imply that the anti-migratory narrative is consolidating.

As in the 2019 study *Sí, Pero no Aquí (Yes, but not here)*, there is still a persistent mistrust of migrants related to the impact on the economy and job opportunities. At that time, seven out of ten people in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, claimed that migration reduced wages and worsened working conditions<sup>21</sup>.

The results of the new survey indicate that less than 6% of all respondents have a positive perception of the economic impact of the presence of migrants:

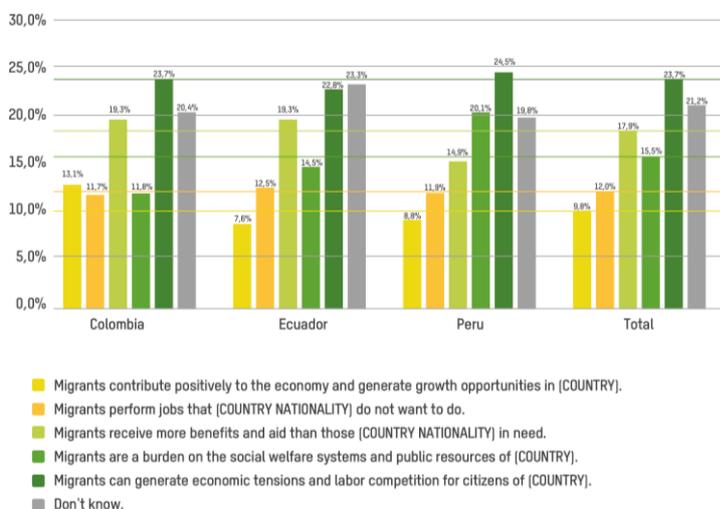
**Colombia (4.9 %), Ecuador (6 %), and Peru (5.6 %).** Ecuador has the highest percentage of people who are concerned about losing their jobs due to migration (23%), followed by Colombia (14%), and Peru (11%).

The particular perception of the "dispute for labor spaces and opportunities" and the narrative of "competition for resources" that Venezuelan migration would have brought with it was already documented in the 2019 study<sup>22</sup>. Four years later, in the focus groups in Peru, it was stated that the irregularity of migrants affects competition for jobs and limited resources, and in Ecuador, there was concern that cheap labor would reduce job opportunities and push down the wages of nationals. In contrast, in Colombia, it is assumed that some Venezuelan migrants have valuable skills that can have an advantageous influence in certain economic sectors.

These ideas are consistent with survey results: **two out of ten people in Colombia (23.7%), Ecuador (22.8%), and Peru (24.5%) believe that migration generates economic tensions and labor competition for nationals of those countries.** However, in Colombia (11.7%), Ecuador (12.5%), and Peru (11.9%) it is recognized that migrants perform jobs that nationals do not wish to do. This translates into the perception that the migrant is willing to do any job to survive, even those despised by nationals. As already noted, **seven out of ten people interviewed in Ecuador (72.9%), Peru (71.7%), and Colombia (65.8%) agreed with the expression "immigration lowers wages and worsens working conditions for many workers in the country".** Only one in ten people in the countries studied **consider that migration is positive for the economy and growth of the host country.** **The idea persists that it is the migrant's fault, freeing employers or immigration and labor legislation from responsibility.**

In contrast to this view of the economy, there is also a prevalent trend regarding the increase in crime due to migrants, with Peru being the country with the most people concerned about it (40 %), followed by Ecuador (23.6 %), and Colombia (21.2 %).

## PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MIGRANTS



Source: survey data. Own elaboration.

## 5. PERCEPTIONS ON VENEZUELAN MIGRANT PEOPLE: WHAT CHANGES AND WHAT REMAINS?

*"...I don't know if I can say that the Ecuadorian population is somewhat xenophobic, but if we see a Venezuelan we say that he is a 'chamo' and we start to bother him in addition to other things that I am not going to say, things like 'go back to your country, socialist'..."*

Focus group participant in Ecuador.

The social, political, economic, and humanitarian crisis affecting the Venezuelan population and the survival strategies that millions of people in the country must adopt, such as forced migration to preserve their lives and those of their families<sup>23</sup>, have given rise to the emergence of negative perceptions of Venezuelan culture. Expert Lucie Laplace explains it well when she states that there has been a progressive degradation of the image of Venezuelan people, associating them with poverty and low levels of education, increasing discrimination, violence, and xenophobia against them.

In Ecuador, for example, Laplace states that when the migratory flow began

(2017) there was sympathy for Venezuelan migrants; but then a change in perception arose, particularly against Venezuelan people of African descent, which deepened racism, since, for certain people in that region, skin tone is associated with poverty, lack of intellectual development and crime, giving rise to situations of discrimination and xenophobia.

**In the three countries surveyed, it was admitted that rejection of migrants is more associated with their poverty (aporophobia) than with their foreign status: in Colombia, 51.8% of those interviewed said so; in Ecuador, 44.7%; and in Peru, 45.4%.**

However, in the words of Gabriel Samudio, an independent expert consultant interviewed for this study, xenophobia and discrimination are not always evident or overt; they usually take the form of microaggressions, derogatory comments, or subtle attitudes, which are often difficult to measure.

The analysis of perceptions in the three countries covered by this study - Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru<sup>24</sup> - shows **the permanence of changing, ambivalent, and even contradictory opinions regarding migration, such as those documented in the 2019 study**. At that time, more than 80% of the people interviewed stated that they understood the circumstances that have forced Venezuelan migration, but close to 70% expected stricter border regulations to be applied<sup>25</sup>. In 2023, in Colombia, 40% of respondents said they were 'totally in agreement' with welcoming migrants, a higher figure than in Ecuador (30.1%), and Peru (32.1%). However, 81.4% of those interviewed in Colombia, 79.8% in Ecuador, and 80.6% in Peru said they agreed that migrants should be cared for only while the situation improves so that they can then return to their country.

Likewise, in all three countries, there are concerns about security and the influence of cultural diversity. Those who participated in the focus groups expressed distrust and fear of cultural differences, especially because migration continues to be associated with increased crime or begging practices. Thus, approximately half of the people surveyed in Colombia (47%), Ecuador (57%), and Peru (58%) believe that culture is at risk due to migration, while only two out of ten people in these countries believe that migrants can improve their culture.

**Nevertheless, it is clear that the media and social networks, stereotypes and prejudices, and personal experiences have a definite impact on public perception of Venezuelan migration.** Therefore, despite the perceptions recorded, a good part of the populations of these countries can feel an emotional connection that transcends the perceptions and concerns related to migration, generating feelings of empathy, compassion, admiration, and recognition.

There are other encouraging aspects: four out of ten respondents from the three countries expressed that Venezuelan migrants should receive the same treatment and opportunities as nationals, regardless of their origin, which generates a positive and equal attitude. Along the same lines, **among the people consulted, there is a marked concern about the growth of racism and xenophobia in the three countries, which translates into signs of awareness of discriminatory attitudes and a willingness to counteract**

them.

They also expressed that they would like to be more "tolerant" of migration. In Colombia, 40.3% expressed interest in participating in concrete actions to help migrants. At the same time, some elements of Venezuelan culture are positively valued in the public perception, such as gastronomy, baseball, and increased labor competitiveness; in Peru, the experience of Venezuelan migrants is valued to strengthen the oil industry and sports.

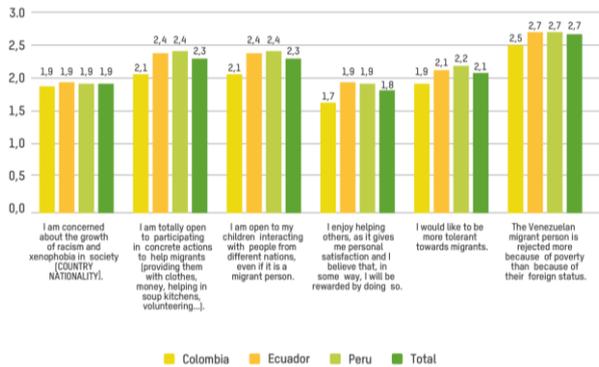
In summary, perceptions towards Venezuelan migration and its culture are diverse, and of course, personal experiences contribute to improve negative ideas and promote understanding.

## PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MIGRANTS

Average of responses coded as follows:

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Strongly disagree

In this way, a result closer to 1 will show greater support from the average of respondents and closer to 5, greater rejection. The average is 3



Source: survey data. Own elaboration.

# 6. CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATION IN HOST COUNTRIES

Although a percentage of respondents consider that Venezuelan migrants can contribute to cultural and social diversity and be a source of learning experiences, **the focus groups detected concerns about the insecurity associated with the presence of migrants.** In Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, the insecurity factor was mentioned as a stereotype associated with migration: one of the most negative perceptions evidenced in the study. This view coincides with the results of the 2019 study: 73.5% in Colombia, 67.9% in Ecuador, and 70.0% in Peru, considered that migration "increases crime and insecurity" and, in fact, identified crime as a 'characteristic' of migrant men<sup>26</sup>.

*"...we should have a firm hand with the Venezuelans who commit crimes and expel these people who are not doing well and keep only the good ones, with a firm hand..."*

Focus group participant in Peru.

In 2023, Ecuadorian participants in the focus groups stated that they have little interaction with migrants in their daily lives, while in Peru, interactions with Venezuelan migrants have had a positive impact on perceptions. In the focus groups in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, some governmental efforts for integration were recognized, and the implementation of culture and art were mentioned as tools to promote it and change stereotypes.

**However, seven out of ten respondents believe that their countries are in a 'borderline situation' because the laws regulating the entry and stay of foreigners are too 'permissive' at the borders: 72% in Colombia, 70.7% in Ecuador, and 70.1% in Peru. A similar percentage in all three countries believe that those who migrate must integrate if they want to stay in the country.**

However, the integration of migrants into the society of the host country involves a long process of change and adaptation to new realities, unknown to most, representing circumstances of vulnerability in the face of the uncertainty of a new culture and customs. **In the three countries there is a similar perception regarding the shared burden of responsibility for this integration: it is recognized that politicians and the legal system must establish policies and measures to facilitate integration (29.9%); that migrants themselves must make an effort and adapt to the host society (27.1%); and that society itself must be willing to receive and welcome migrants (25.2%).**

The participants in the focus groups assume a position of reception (Ecuador), evolution (Colombia), and opportunities (Peru), concerning facilitating the integration of Venezuelan migrants into their societies, but highlight the presence of challenges and tensions. Between two and three out of every ten people in these countries think that migrants make great efforts to achieve their social integration. In Ecuador, however, they believe that integration must go through rigorous prior immigration control; in Colombia, they emphasize the need to grant work permits and create educational programs for migrants'

children; and in Peru, opinions are mixed, highlighting culture and art as viable initiatives.

The survey conducted for this report also reveals that there is concern among Colombian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian nationals about a 'migration pull effect'<sup>27</sup>, i.e., the arrival of more migrants in the future. The country expressing the greatest concern in this regard is Ecuador (47%), followed by Peru (40.5%), and Colombia (39.8%). Four out of ten people in the countries surveyed also say that borders are necessary to protect the cultural identity and resources of each country.

Regarding the return of migrants to Venezuela, in Ecuador, they believe that it would be beneficial in terms of employment and availability of public resources; in Colombia, they consider that it is a personal decision and see returnees as brave; the same opinion is held in Peru, but they add that it would be a loss of skilled labor.

## 7. PERCEPTIONS ON THE SITUATION OF VENEZUELAN WOMEN

Venezuelan women face particular obstacles as a result of the crisis engulfing Venezuela: in addition to poverty, machismo, gender-based violence, lack of opportunities, and stigmatization, forced migration is a new risk factor for women. The contexts of lack of protection faced by Venezuelan migrant women (in the country of origin, en route, and in the host country) places them in a precarious position of minimum conditions of dignified existence, being targets of abuse, labor and sexual exploitation, submission to care tasks, reproductive roles, and violence in all senses, patterns of patriarchy that ignores and invisibilizes their rights.

**The quantitative analysis of this report offers ambivalent results about migrant women, perceiving that they require support, but without showing empathy with the struggle for their rights.** In Colombia (37.5 %), Ecuador (32.1 %), and Peru (24.3 %) recognize that support should be provided to migrant women because they face greater challenges when migrating. However, in 2019 this opinion had greater support: 62.0 % in Colombia, 63.7 % in Ecuador, and 51.5 % in Peru<sup>28</sup>. Likewise, in the three countries (Colombia: 8.2 %; Ecuador: 7.2 %; Peru: 5.1 %) there is a low consideration towards migrant women as agents of change in the struggle for rights and social justice, a perspective typical of the androcentrism in force in Latin American contexts.

This decrease in support for migrant women may be associated with the generalized tendency to hypersexualize and dehumanize them, perceiving

*"...they are very hard-working women, very nice, and the truth is that I recently met a Venezuelan doctor doing my internship in Ayacucho and the truth is that she was the best, they have more experience in their work and the truth is that she taught me a lot about her customs, about how she came, about her country".*

Focus group participant in Peru

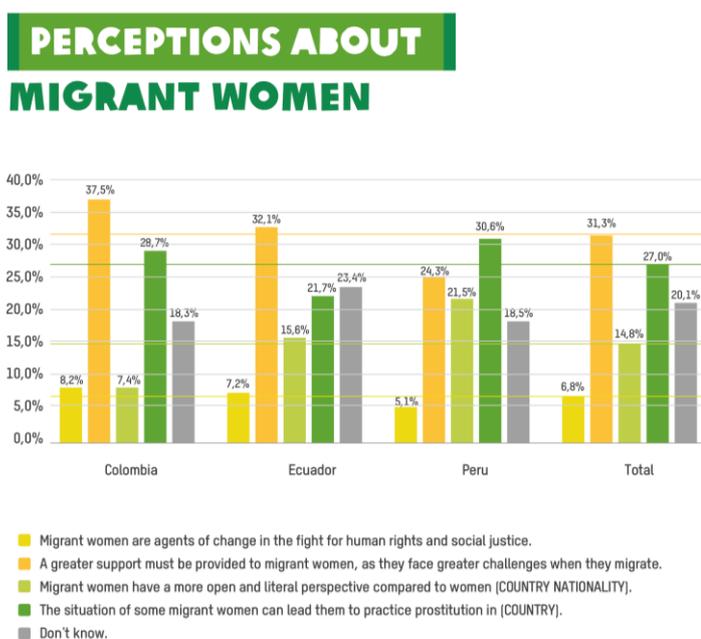
them as people incapable of improving themselves, an issue that is evident in the opinions about Venezuelan women.

Denigrating adjectives such as "Venezuelan women steal the husbands from Colombian women", or "Venezuelan women have come to steal husbands in Peru", were derived from listening to networks in Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, which represents a serious risk to Venezuelan women in terms of their safety and dignity.

In this sense, it is of great concern that **beliefs about Venezuelan women point to their sexuality and suggest their predisposition to engage in activities such as 'prostitution'**<sup>29</sup>. It is a view that was already present in 2019. Listening to networks also found statements such as "Lima is a city full of Venezuelan prostitution", or in Ecuador "Venezuelan prostitution is infected with HIV"<sup>30</sup>. This is a frequent, and almost uniform appreciation among focus group participants in the three countries, which fosters negative stereotypes that are detrimental to the safe development of Venezuelan women, enhanced by situations of poverty and precariousness.

For example, according to the survey data, on average, three out of ten of the participants from the three countries assume that the situation experienced by some migrant women may lead them to engage in 'prostitution'; furthermore, 14.8% consider that migrant women have a 'more open and liberal' perspective compared to national women from Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, the latter being the most prevalent (21.5%).

In contrast, in the focus groups, participants expressed their admiration for Venezuelan migrant women's kindness, resilience, and ability to build positive interpersonal relationships, adding that they recognize their work ethic and determination.



Source: survey data. Own elaboration.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The stories, words, and images we use are essential in constructing the imaginary of migrants. In light of the aspects discussed in this study, and in recognition of the fact that migration is a right, the following recommendations are made to urge the media, the States, and civil society to offer a dignified and respectful treatment that promotes the integration of Venezuelan migrants in host countries:

### Migrant women: eradicating gender bias

- It is very important that the media documents the specific impact on Venezuelan migrant women and sensitize society and the authorities about the challenges that they face. It is crucial to **emphasize that the migration crisis places women and girls at greater risk than other populations.**
- Join efforts between the media and the authorities to design and implement campaigns to **change perceptions related to the sexualization of Venezuelan women.**
- It is essential that the authorities **strengthen access to care and prevention of violence against women** to reduce the risk of exploitation and abuse of migrant women.

### Integration of migrants

- It is essential to ensure that the voice of migrants themselves is heard. In this sense, the international community, donors, and civil society throughout the region should work together to **support and strengthen the organization and leadership of Venezuelan migrants** to design integration programs and policies.
- It is necessary that the media and the authorities **document and design evidence-based migration awareness campaigns** that value the contribution of migrants in different facets of society and the economy, including care work.
- It is important that humanitarian organizations continue and redouble their efforts to **inform people in communities of origin, transit, and destination about the risks, rights, and care services for migrants.**
- From an international cooperation perspective, it would be important to increase funding for projects **that contribute to the integration of migrants**, without discrimination based on nationality, including components aimed at eradicating discrimination, xenophobia, and gender stereotypes.
- **Promote policies encouraging interculturalism in schools, the media, and businesses.** Governments in the region, particularly in transit and destination countries, can play a key role in promoting interaction and diversity of cultures, respect for differences, and the non-imposition of one identity as superior to others.
- Governments and humanitarian organizations in host countries can contribute to the integration of migrants by **implementing mental health programs.** A person who feels different from others or that he or she is worth "less" than others may feel lonely. This feeling can gradually undermine the migrant's own ability to participate in the life of society, affecting, for example, flexibility and adaptability.
- It is essential that host country governments, with the support of international cooperation, **guarantee easily accessible services for regularization of migration status**, allowing for the obtainment of personal

documents, work permits, validation of technical or professional qualification credentials, and access to health, education, care, and housing systems.

- Promote **dialogue between governments, companies, and civil society in host countries to facilitate labor integration** without discrimination, and to guarantee the labor rights of migrants.

# NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V) (August 2023). Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region. Available at <https://www.r4v.info/es/document/r4v-america-latina-y-el-caribe-refugiados-y-migrantes-venezolanos-en-la-region-ago-2023> (last accessed 10/10/2023).
- <sup>2</sup> Inter-American Development Bank (2022). Measuring the impact of migration in Venezuela. Available at <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/spanish/viewer/Medicion-del-impacto-de-la-migracion-en-Venezuela.pdf> (last accessed 10/17/2023). Also, International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2022). World Migration Report 2022. Available at <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/?lang=ES> (last accessed 5/10/2023).
- <sup>3</sup> Oxfam (2019). Yes, But Not Here. Available at <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/si-pero-no-aqui-percepciones-de-xenofobia-y-discriminacion-hacia-migrantes-de-v-620890/#>, (last accessed 5/10/2023).
- <sup>4</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2022). World migration report 2022. Available at <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/?lang=ES> (last accessed 5/10/2023).
- <sup>5</sup> Migration data portal (2020). Total number of international migrants (mid-year) 2020. Available at [https://www.migrationdataportal.org/es/international-data?i=stock\\_abs\\_&t=2020&m=1&rm49=19](https://www.migrationdataportal.org/es/international-data?i=stock_abs_&t=2020&m=1&rm49=19) (last accessed 5/10/2023).
- <sup>6</sup> Idem.
- <sup>7</sup> IOM (2023). Migration trends in the Americas. February 2023. Available at <https://robuenosaires.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl626/files/documents/2023-04/Tendencias-Migratorias-en-las-Américas-ESP-Feb-2023.pdf> (last accessed 10/10/2023).
- <sup>8</sup> Doctors of the World (August 29, 2023). Darien gap: one of the most dangerous migration routes. Available at <https://doctorsoftheworld.org/blog/darien-gap-one-of-the-most-dangerous-migration-routes/> (last accessed 10/26/2023).
- <sup>9</sup> Idem.
- <sup>10</sup> Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V9 (October 2023). Regional refugee and migrant response Plan 2023. September 2023. Available at <https://www.r4v.info/es/node/452#> (last accessed 10/10/2023).
- <sup>11</sup> Observatorio de Investigaciones Sociales en Frontera (Odisef) (2023). Report No. 25: Venezuelan human mobility in July 2023: return prevails. Available at <https://odisef.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/En-Contexto-N25-Movilidad-humana-venezolana-en-julio-de-2023-prevalece-el-retorno-ODISEF.pdf> (last accessed 10/25/2023).
- <sup>12</sup> This can be contrasted with the data contained in the fact sheet Situación humanitaria de la población en movilidad en la frontera Chile | Perú, which documents the movement intention of Venezuelan migrants (IMPACT-REACH, Caritas Peru, Caritas Chile and Catholic Relief Services, August 2023).
- <sup>13</sup> Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V) (August 2023). Evolution of numbers in the 17 R4W countries. Available at <https://www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes> (last accessed 10/17/2023).
- <sup>14</sup> Ministry of People's Power for Communication and Information (2018). SPECIAL | Plan Vuelta a la Patria continues to protect thousands of Venezuelans. Available at <http://www.minci.gob.ve/especial-plan-vuelta-a-la-patria-continua-protigiendo-a-miles-de-venezolanos/> (last accessed 5/10/2023).
- <sup>15</sup> Ministry of People's Power for Foreign Affairs (2023). Subject: Plan Vuelta a la Patria. Available at <https://mppre.gob.ve/tema/vuelta-a-la-patria/> (last accessed 5/10/2023).
- <sup>16</sup> National Government of the Republic of Panama (2002). Irregular transit of foreigners through the border with Colombia by country according to order of importance. Year 2022. Available at [https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2022/PDF/IRREGULARES\\_POR\\_DARIEN\\_DICIEMBRE\\_2022.pdf](https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2022/PDF/IRREGULARES_POR_DARIEN_DICIEMBRE_2022.pdf) (last accessed 10/10/2023).
- <sup>17</sup> IOM Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean (2023). 2022 doubles the number of migrants on the dangerous Darien Gap route. Available at: <https://rosanjose.iom.int/es/news/2022-duplica-el-numero-de-migrantes-en-la-peligrosa-ruta-del-tapon-del-darien> (last accessed 10/10/2023).
- <sup>18</sup> IOM (2023). Migration trends in the Americas. February 2023. Available at <https://robuenosaires.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl626/files/documents/2023-04/Tendencias-Migratorias-en-las-Américas-ESP-Feb-2023.pdf> (last accessed 10/10/2023).
- <sup>19</sup> Missing Migrants Project (2023). Deaths during migration, recorded since 2014, by region of incident. Available at <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/data> (last accessed 10/10/2023).
- <sup>20</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2022). Venezuelan migrants bring economic opportunities to Latin America. Available at <https://www.imf.org/es/News/Articles/2022/12/06/cf-venezuelas-migrantes-bring-economic-opportunity-to-latin-america> (last accessed 10/10/2023).
- <sup>21</sup> Oxfam (2019). Ob. cit. Page 9.
- <sup>22</sup> Idem.
- <sup>23</sup> Economic, political and social conditions continue to be difficult to cope with in Venezuela. Local and humanitarian actors continue to report the persistence of unmet needs in health, water, sanitation and hygiene, food security and education. During the first quarter of the year, more than 2,400 demonstrations were recorded in Venezuela, 88% of which corresponded to demands for guarantees of economic, social and cultural rights, related to labor rights and basic services such as water, gas and gasoline, access to which continues to deteriorate. Mixed Migration Center, 2023, Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean. Available at [https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/QMMU\\_Q2\\_2023\\_LAC\\_ES.pdf](https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/QMMU_Q2_2023_LAC_ES.pdf) (last accessed 10/17/2023). More recent data on the scale, severity, intensity and depth of the complex humanitarian emergency have been published by the Hum Venezuela initiative, which highlights the increase in the intention to migrate, specifically to another country. Hum Venezuela (2023). Community diagnostics, July-August 2023. Available at: <https://humvenezuela.com/wp->

content/uploads/2023/10/HumVenezuela-Diagnosticos-comunitarios-Agosto-2023-2.pdf (last accessed 10/25/2023).

<sup>24</sup> According to the survey data, 13.5% said that Colombian society is very racist, and 29.2% of the migrants interviewed stated that they had experienced a mixture of positive and negative experiences in their incorporation into Colombian society. In Ecuador, 21.2% said that it is a society that is moderately open to migration, but 47.5% of the migrants surveyed had a mixture of positive and negative experiences. In Peru, 23.7% considered Peruvian society to be "somewhat open to migration", while 43.3% of migrants experienced both positive and negative situations.

<sup>25</sup> Oxfam (2019). Ob. cit. Page 4.

<sup>26</sup> Oxfam (2019). Page 13.

<sup>27</sup> According to this idea, the positive evaluation by migrants of the circumstances of their migration (integration, access to services, job opportunities, among others) or the existence of laws that favor migration in a given country, would stimulate more people to want to migrate to that country. However, there is no evidence to prove the existence of this effect, but it is often used in narratives to justify anti-migration measures. Among the studies that refute the 'call effect', a recent one on migration across the Mediterranean Sea stands out: Rodríguez Sánchez, A., Wucherpfennig, J., Rischke, R. et al. (2023). Search-and-rescue in the Central Mediterranean Route does not induce migration: Predictive modeling to answer causal queries in migration research. *Scientific Reports* 13, 11014. Available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-38119-4> (last accessed 10/25/2023).

This effect refers to a presumed stimulation of migration to host countries, driven by migrants who positively value the circumstances of their migration (for better access to services, job opportunities, among other reasons).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Pages 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> This term is used because it was the one pronounced in the focus groups and the *social listening* study, but it is a term that carries a pejorative charge and, according to Oxfam's *Inclusive Language Guide*, expressions such as 'sex work' or 'sex industry' should be used.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Page 12.



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