

VENEZUELAN MIGRATION IN PERU: PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

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Summary

The deep crisis in Venezuela has generated the largest migratory flow in Latin America. It is estimated that, by the end of 2022, Peru –the second host country after Colombia– will have a population of Venezuelan migrants and refugees close to 1.45 million. In this regard, it is clear that no population is prepared either to forcibly leave their country of origin –due to the critical existing crisis– or to welcome a large number of immigrants in such a short time, generating a context of extreme vulnerability for the migrant population, as well as discomfort and even rejection in the host or receiving population. Achieving the full integration of the Venezuelan population into Peruvian society and economy requires the decisive involvement of the State and civil society with a view to promoting an intensive and progressive change of mentality among Peruvians (moving from rejection to empathy) through education and culture. Otherwise, situations could arise that seriously affect not only security, but also the stability required for the integral development of the country.

Keywords: *Crisis in Venezuela, Venezuelan Migration, Migratory Trajectory, Xenophobia.*

Introduction

During the last decade, the political and economic situation in Venezuela has generated a deep crisis, causing the forced and massive migration of more than six million Venezuelans in search of better opportunities, of which some five million have been welcomed in different countries of Latin

America.¹ In this context, the region faces the largest flow of refugees and migrants in its history, creating a series of challenges and opportunities for both the migrant population and the host or receiving population.

Undoubtedly, no population is prepared either to forcibly leave their country of origin, or to massively receive immigrants in a short period of time. These circumstances generate a context of extreme vulnerability for the migrant population, as well as discomfort and even rejection by the receiving population, especially when the State of the host country is not able to manage this situation. For example, on September 26, 2021, there was a demonstration of almost five thousand people, expressing their rejection of the arrival of Venezuelan immigrants who occupied some public spaces in the Chilean city of Iquique, located in the north of the country, resulting in the burning of personal belongings and tents where the migrants were staying.²

Although this aggression was widely rejected by the Chilean population and organizations, including the central government, it shows how the receiving population can externalize its discontent and frustration through xenophobic expressions and violent acts against the migrant population, especially when the authorities are not able to generate empathy in their citizens or face the challenges caused by the massive arrival of foreigners. During this demonstration, approximately three thousand Venezuelan migrants were stranded in Iquique, many of them occupying parks and public places in the city waiting to regularize their migratory status.³

What happened in Chile is not an isolated event in the region. Similar cases of xenophobia and violence against Venezuelan citizens have occurred in Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru, which –coincidentally–

1 R4V - Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, (May 5, 2022), <https://www.r4v.info/es/refugiadosymigrantes> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

2 BBC News World, “Chile: la marcha contra migrantes que terminó con la quema de pertenencias y carpas de extranjeros”, (September 26, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-58700359> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

3 Ibid.

are the Latin American countries that have welcomed the largest number of Venezuelans. It is estimated that, as of May 2022, Colombia had received around 1.8 million Venezuelans, followed by Peru with 1.3 million, Ecuador with 513,000, Chile with 448,000 and Brazil with 345,000 Venezuelans.⁴

To understand both the painful situation experienced by Venezuelan migrants, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by the Peruvian State during this migratory process, this article analyzes the existing crisis in Venezuela, the difficult migratory trajectory that Venezuelans must follow, as well as the reaction of the Peruvian population to migrants and refugees, including the influence of the media on the perception of the population. In this sense, the institutions of the Peruvian State must play a more active role to turn this situation into an opportunity for integration and growth, for the benefit of the country and the citizens who inhabit it. Otherwise, situations could be generated that would seriously affect not only the security of the Venezuelan population residing in Peru, but also the stability required for the integral development of the country.

Crisis in Venezuela

In practice, Venezuela has had only two presidents in the past 23 years. After the death of Hugo Chávez (who governed between 1999 and 2013), Nicolás Maduro assumed the presidency, remaining in office to date, even though governments of various countries do not recognize him as such. On the one hand, the political crisis, with a fragmented and practically annulled opposition, is undeniable in Venezuela. On the other hand, the economic crisis has deteriorated the living conditions of Venezuelans. It is estimated that the annual inflation rate of that country reached 1,300,000 % during

4 R4V, Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela.

the year 2018.⁵ This hyperinflation caused a very rapid and sustained rise in the price level, causing money to quickly lose its value.⁶

Venezuela's proven oil reserves are the largest in the world. However, the country is experiencing an unprecedented economic crisis. The international fall in the price of crude oil in 2014 was devastating for the Venezuelan economy, because oil represented about 95 % of its export earnings.⁷ As a result, the country ran into a foreign exchange deficit, limiting the importation of goods and causing critical shortages of goods. As a result, companies increased the prices of scarce products, generating inflation, which was aggravated by the Venezuelan government's decision to issue more paper money to cover its currency needs and increase the minimum wage as a populist measure.⁸

Although in 2021 there would have been an annual inflation of 686.4 % (showing some improvement), Venezuela continues to have the highest inflation in the world.⁹ In March 2022, the government of Nicolás Maduro ordered the increase of the minimum wage by 1,705 %, from 1.6 to almost 29 dollars.¹⁰ Despite this significant increase, the minimum wage in Venezuela is insufficient to cover the basic food basket; it is estimated that an average Venezuelan family of five needs at least \$ 353 per month to meet their minimum food needs.¹¹

The Venezuelan State has not only made its citizens dependent on government services and products causing the collapse of the private

5 BBC News World, "Crisis en Venezuela: 5 claves que explican cómo se ha desarrollado hasta ahora", (January 10, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-46821723> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Daniel González, "Cómo salió Venezuela de la hiperinflación y qué significa para la golpeada economía del país," *BBC News World* (11 January 2022), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-59939636#:~:text=La%20hiperinflaci%C3%B3n%20de%20Venezuela%20ha,8%25%2C%20dijo%20el%20BCV> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

10 EFE Agency, "Nuevo salario mínimo en Venezuela, insuficiente para salir de la pobreza", (March 17, 2022), <https://gestion.pe/mundo/nuevo-salario-minimo-en-venezuela-insuficiente-para-salir-de-la-pobreza-noticia/?ref=gsr> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

11 Ibid.

sector but has also imposed mechanisms of control and coercion through various social programs. After the collapse of the socialist system imposed on Venezuela, citizens have been left without supplies. In that sense, the departure of Venezuelans abroad constitutes what Alexander Betts calls a “survival migration”¹² as the political and socioeconomic crisis existing in that country generates the total lack of protection and deprivation of human rights of its citizens. In this context, food insecurity has been a key factor in making this migration so massive.¹³ Food security “exists when all people have at all times, physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their daily energy needs and food preferences for active and healthy lives.”¹⁴ Consequently, the majority of Venezuelans who have left their country have done so to obtain a job that will ensure an income to get food.

After the closure of the border with Colombia in 2015 and the shortage of food in Venezuelan stores¹⁵ and supermarkets, social programs and state enterprises were the only alternatives for citizens to get food. In the Food Markets (MERCAL), for example, the head of the family –according to the ID number– had a day assigned to buy food according to his family size, with problems regarding quality and availability of the products.¹⁶ Subsequently, in 2016, the Venezuelan government ordered the Local Committees of Supply and Production (CLAP) to distribute bags or boxes with basic foodstuffs, sold (at a subsidized price) to each family previously registered in the Communal Councils. Although what is received through this program only is sufficient to feed a family for a week, the followers

12 Alexander Betts, “Survival Migration: Failed Governance and the crisis of Displacement”, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 4. <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/30779/642723.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (Agreed the 11 of June of 2022).

13 Stéphanie Borios, “Huir para vivir: crisis social y migración de supervivencia”, in *Migrant trajectories: Venezuelan youth in Peru*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 47.

14 Food and Agriculture Organization, “Una introducción a los conceptos básicos de la seguridad alimentaria”, (2011), <https://www.fao.org/3/a036s/a036s00.pdf> (Accessed June 11, 2022).

15 BBC World, “Venezuela: Maduro decreta el estado de excepción en una parte de la frontera con Colombia”, (August 22, 2015), https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/08/150821_venezuela_estado_excepcion_colombia_ep (Accessed June 11, 2022).

16 Borios, “Huir para vivir ...”, 55.

of the Maduro government praise this measure because, otherwise -they would- not have food on their tables. Meanwhile the government's detractors say that the need for food makes Venezuelans accept and, without much choice, assume a position favorable or, at least, neutral to the government.¹⁷

As of 2018, after the entry of imported products into Venezuela, food can be found in stores, but at very high prices and out of reach of most Venezuelan families. This situation clearly shows the food insecurity existing in that country since this is not only due to the absence of food but also due to the impossibility to acquire it when available.¹⁸ According to a 2019 assessment by the World Food Programme (WFP), an estimated of one in three people in Venezuela (32.3 %) is food insecure and in need of assistance.¹⁹ Likewise, the WFP points out that Venezuelan families have had to adopt different survival strategies to face this crisis. These include: reducing the variety and quality of food consumed, reducing the size of the portion of their meals, working in exchange for food, and selling family goods to cover basic needs.²⁰ Parents, as a consequence, prefer to eat little or skip meals to prioritize the feeding of their children and / or other dependents.

With regard to sources of income in Venezuela, the WFP points out that 59 % of households do not have enough income to buy food and 65 % are not able to buy essential hygiene items, clothing and footwear.²¹ In this context, remittances sent by relatives who managed to leave the country constitute

17 Herminia Fernández, "Comités locales de abastecimiento: instrumentos de Maduro para paliar el hambre," *France 24* (11 February 2019), <https://www.france24.com/es/20190210-comites-locales-abastecimiento-maduro-venezuela> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

18 Borios, "Huir para vivir...", 56.

19 Reliefweb, "WFP Venezuela - Evaluación de seguridad alimentaria: Principales hallazgos. Datos recolectados de julio a septiembre de 2019", (February 23, 2020), <https://reliefweb.int/report/venezuela-bolivarian-republic/wfp-venezuela-evaluaci-n-de-seguridad-alimentaria-principales#:~:text=El%20Programa%20Mundial%20de%20Alimentos,de%20los%20hogares%20en%20Venezuela> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

a fundamental pillar allowing Venezuelans who have remained to get food. However, the constant outflow of migrants, while allowing remittances, generates a worrying loss of human and social capital in Venezuela, including a reduction in the number of professors, doctors, scientists and other skilled workers.²² On the other hand, in relation to basic services in Venezuela, the WFP indicates that four out of ten households have daily interruptions in electricity service, affecting food conservation and impacting the health of the population. Likewise, 25 % of Venezuelan households do not have stable access to drinking water, while 72 % of households have an irregular gas supply, resulting in a reduction in the number of meals per day due to such problems.²³

The lack of a diversified diet (due to low consumption of meat, fish, eggs, vegetables and fruits) has generated inadequate nutritional intake in most Venezuelan households. According to Caritas, child malnutrition in Venezuela rose to 26 % between December 2019 and March 2020.²⁴ This has undoubtedly been aggravated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation has different repercussions (short and long term) both on the health and performance of the population, mainly affecting the most vulnerable.

The collapse of the health system is another reason why Venezuelans choose to leave their country.²⁵ It is estimated that during 2016, infant (under one year) and maternal mortality increased by 30.12 % and 65.79 % respectively compared to the previous year.²⁶ In that sense, insufficient and inadequate

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Caritas “Lucha contra la desnutrición infantil en Venezuela”, (2020), <https://www.caritas.org/ayudenos-a-luchar-contr-la-desnutricion-infantil-en-venezuela/?lang=es#:~:text=La%20desnutrici%C3%B3n%20infantil%20en%20Venezuela%20subi%C3%B3%20al%2026%25%20entre%20diciembre.m%C3%A1s%20desfavorecidas%20con%20numerosos%20programas> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

25 BBC News World, “Crisis en Venezuela: falta de medicamentos, equipos rotos y hasta cucarachas en los hospitales,” (February 8, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47177510> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

26 Venezuelan Health Observatory, “ El Boletín Epidemiológico Venezolano ¿Por qué ahora y no antes?”, (May 23, 2017) <https://www.ovsalud.org/noticias/2017/el-boletin-epidemiologico-venezolano-por-que-ahora-y-no-antes/> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

food for patients, the deterioration of infrastructure and equipment, the lack of medicines and medical supplies, as well as the shortage of qualified personnel are some of the problems that affect the care of patients in public health facilities in Venezuela.²⁷ In this context, the shortage of medicines in pharmacies and hospitals endangers the lives of thousands of chronic patients and transplant patients in that country.²⁸

In addition, the economic crisis also impacts the Venezuelan education system. Low budgets not only affect the infrastructure of educational institutions, but also educators, many of whom have left the country or have had to engage in other work due to low salaries. As of 2019, more than 50 % of students at the Libertador Experimental Teaching University (Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador) had dropped out of classes because they didn't have money to pay for their tickets or because they had to work to help their families survive. The situation is aggravated because the university does not have water or permanent electricity and the student dining facility has stopped operating.²⁹

Widespread corruption is another reason why Venezuelans are leaving their country. Venezuela is among the nations with the highest perceived corruption in the public sector in the world, leading to serious violations of the social rights of its citizens.³⁰ Unfortunately, the Venezuelan judicial system acts as an instrument of repression against dissent and voices critical of the government.³¹ Likewise, the obstacles to the issuance of passports and criminal records, as well as the apostille of documents have

27 Ibid.

28 Álvaro Fuente, "La escasez de medicinas mata en Venezuela", *The Country* (Caracas: May 7, 2018), https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/23/planeta_futuro/1524502559_810295.html (Accessed June 18, 2022).

29 Management "Venezuela: Sistema educativo golpeado por la crisis", (Lima: December 4, 2019) <https://gestion.pe/gestion-tv/venezuela-sistema-educativo-golpeado-por-la-crisis-noticia/?ref=gesr> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

30 Alejandra Arredondo, "Venezuela entre los países más corruptos del mundo: informe de Transparencia Internacional," *Voice of America* (Washington D.C.: January 25, 2022),

<https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/informe-corrupcion-transparencia-internacional-/6411242.html> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

31 Ibid.

not only become a strategy used by the Venezuelan government to hinder the emigration of qualified citizens, but have also allowed corruption and slowness to dominate these administrative processes.³² In this sense, it is interesting to analyze the role of the “homeland identity card,” as an instrument of control and blackmail used by government supporters to avoid attending to those who, according to them, are enemies of the nation.³³

In addition to corruption, other problems, such as violence and criminality in Venezuela, influence Venezuelans’ decisions to leave their country. In 2017, Venezuela had become the second country with the highest number of homicides, with Caracas being the most violent city in the world Venezuela has 71 murders per 100,000 inhabitants and more than 90 % impunity.³⁴ This situation is exacerbated by violence caused by some of the so-called “Colectivos,” groups of armed civilians who threaten and attack opponents of the Maduro regime.³⁵

As can be seen, the Venezuelan State does not safeguard the rights of its citizens, thus putting them in a situation of survival.³⁶ Consequently, what motivates Venezuelans to begin a difficult migratory journey is the search for a place where they can enjoy these rights.

A difficult migratory journey

Migratory trajectories have two essential elements: the migratory project (which includes the choice of a destination, route, time of stay, and purpose

32 Yazmely Labrador, “Corrupción, burocracia y dólares: las trabas para emigrar de una Venezuela inmersa en crisis”, *El Diario de Caracas* (2 July 2019), <https://medium.com/@ElDiariodeCCS/corrupci%C3%B3n-burocracia-y-d%C3%B3lares-las-trabas-para-emigrar-de-una-venezuela-inmersa-en-crisis-149b7f212572> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

33 Borios, “Huir para vivir...”, 78.

34 Transparency Venezuela, “Inseguridad para el pueblo hecha en revolución”, (2021), <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/inseguridad-pueblo-hecha-revolucion/#:-:text=Venezuela%20se%20ha%20convertido%20en,m%C3%A1s%20de%2090%25%20de%20impunidad> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

35 Daniel García, “Qué son los colectivos y cómo operan para ‘defender la revolución bolivariana’ en Venezuela”, *BBC World* (7 July 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40527998> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

36 Borios, “Huir para vivir...”, 82.

of migration) and migration strategies (the actions to execute said project).³⁷ In addition, as a process, a migration trajectory includes preparation, migration, settlement and, ideally, integration.³⁸ In this sense, it can be affirmed that the migratory strategy adopted by Venezuelans depends on the nature of the migratory project, the characteristics of the host country, the time of permanence, the work aspirations, the intentions of return and, mainly, the type of documents available.³⁹

Faced with this reality, Venezuelan migrants are forced to adapt their trajectories, modifying not only the routes, but also the strategies along their journeys in order to deal with the migratory controls imposed by the countries of the region.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the migratory trajectory should not only be understood as a route between two points, but also as a life experience that is shaped by the reality between the possible destination (the one that the limitations and the legal framework allow) and the ideal destination (the one really desired).⁴¹ Therefore, it is essential to know and understand the migratory trajectories followed by Venezuelans to reach Peru. In this regard, Robin Cavagnoud identifies different types of migratory trajectories from two mobility modalities: the individual and the family group.⁴²

On the one hand, migration as an “individual initiative” occurs when young Venezuelans choose to leave their country without being accompanied by their direct relatives. Under this approach, three types of migratory

37 Elizabeth Salmón, et al. *Trayectorias migrantes: la juventud venezolana en el Perú*. (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 29.

38 *Ibid.*, 30.

39 Luciana Gandini, et al. *Crisis y migración de población venezolana. Entre la desprotección y la seguridad jurídica en Latinoamérica*. (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2019), p 10, <https://www.sdi.unam.mx/docs/libros/SUDIMER-CyMdPV.pdf> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

40 Cécile Blouin, “Entre la esperanza y el miedo: las trayectorias legales de la población venezolana en la región de Tumbes”, in *Migrant trajectories: Venezuelan youth in Peru*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 134.

41 *Ibid.*, 138.

42 Robin Cavagnoud, “Género, cuidados y responsabilidades familiares de los jóvenes venezolanos: una tipología de las trayectorias migratorias en contexto de crisis”, en *Trayectorias migrantes: la juventud venezolana en el Perú*, December 2021), 185.

trajectories towards Peru can be identified. The first is that of “adventure” migrations, carried out by those young people who migrate without a pre-established travel plan or specific objectives of economic support of the family that remains in their country. Most of these are men between 18 and 22 years old, who did not finish secondary education and who have no parental responsibilities or obligation to send remittances to their relatives in Venezuela.⁴³ The permanence of these young people in a place depends on the opportunities that arise, the friendships that are developed along the way or friends already living abroad who inform them about the work options in some locality. These young people have limited access to health services and perform mostly informal jobs (such as street vendors, construction workers, or food deliverers).⁴⁴

The second type is that of “self-denial” migrations. These are carried out by young Venezuelans who also travel alone to Peru, but with the explicit objective of supporting their immediate family in Venezuela.⁴⁵ Mostly, they are men and women between 25 and 35 years old, who are in better physical condition to travel long distances and who contemplate –at some point– family reunification, although not necessarily in Peru. These young people perform mostly informal work (Street trade, domestic activities in private homes, care of children or the elderly, among others).⁴⁶

The third type is that of “exploratory” migrations. These are carried out by young people (mostly women) who leave Venezuela to work, send remittances to their families and –based on an economic income and stable accommodation– contemplate the possibility of bringing their immediate relatives to Peru. Unlike the previous category thus, these young people do contemplate family reunification with continued residence in Peru.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Venezuelans who engage in these three types of migratory trajectories often suffer both situations of labor exploitation, as well as discrimination.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*, 188.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*, 191.

47 *Ibid.*, 192.

By contrast to “individual initiative” migration, according to Cavagnoud, “family dynamic” migration is what occurs when young Venezuelans leave their country accompanied by their direct relatives. Cavagnoud identifies within this category three types of migratory trajectories that converge in Peru. The first is “family reunification” migration, which aims at family reunification linked to “exploration” migration.⁴⁸ The reconstitution of these families may lead to the birth of new children of Peruvian nationality, reinforcing the decision to stay in the country for the long term, thus ruling out the possibility of returning to live in Venezuela in the future.

The second type is that of “nuclear family” migration, in which family members make the decision to travel together to Peru, involving a significant economic investment by them.⁴⁹ Although this is a smaller group, after a period of adaptation, these families achieve some stability (including the schooling of their children) and send remittances to their relatives (particularly their parents) who remained in Venezuela. These families manage to overcome the initial condition of migrants without the intention of returning to Venezuela.

Finally, the third type is that of migration “from a single-parent family.” This is carried out by mothers separated from their partner or the father of their children, and who migrate with their young children under very precarious conditions.⁵⁰ These families have many needs, but they are allowed to enter the country, benefiting from the exceptions granted to people in vulnerable situations. In addition to being diverse and complex, the typologies presented here are also framed in changing migration policies of the Peruvian State.

The Peruvian State Response

As mentioned previously, Peru is the country in Latin America which hosts the second largest number of Venezuelans. Most of them (almost 90 %) have entered by land, and require immediate satisfaction of their basic needs,

48 *Ibid.*, 195.

49 *Ibid.*, 198.

50 *Ibid.*, 201.

such as food, housing and health services. It is estimated that, by the end of 2022, there will be 1.45 million Venezuelans in Peru.⁵¹ In that sense, the permanent and massive arrival of Venezuelans has forced the Peruvian State (particularly the executive branch) to make various changes in its migration policy. In recent years, this policy has oscillated between “hostility” (due to the tightening of immigration control, expulsions, rejections at the border, and identity controls, among others) and “selective hospitality” (seeking to differentiate between desirable and undesirable persons within the immigrant population).⁵²

These changes in Peruvian migration policy have generated ambiguous situations and contributed to a lack of protection for Venezuelan migrants. In 2017, the adoption of the Temporary Stay Permit (PTP) was a clear example of the selective hospitality policy, insofar as it was only intended for the Venezuelan immigrant population and, being temporary, did not grant them residence, thus limiting their rights.⁵³ Subsequently, in 2018, the Peruvian State demanded the presentation of passports by Venezuelans as a condition for entry into the country. However, both the high cost and the collapse of the Venezuelan administrative system for the issuance of this document made it extremely difficult to obtain.

In 2019, the Peruvian State began to require a humanitarian visa for Venezuelans entering the country. Although the processing of this document is free, it contemplates as a requirement -among others- of the presentation of an internationally certified document of one’s criminal record in Venezuela, for anyone over 18 years of age.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, the process of certification of this document is expensive and extremely bureaucratic. This situation has forced Venezuelans to request asylum

51 Working Group for refugees and migrants GTRM, “Plan de respuesta para refugiados y migrantes 2022. Capítulo Perú” (2022), 5, https://www.r4v.info/sites/default/files/2021-12/RMRP%202022%20Peru%20no%20oficial%20ESP_PL_Vfinal.pdf (Accessed June 18, 2022).

52 Blouin, “Entre la esperanza y el miedo...”, 144.

53 Ibid., 145.

54 Unique digital platform of the Peruvian State, “Visa humanitaria para ciudadanos venezolanos” Obtener visa para ingresar al Perú”, *gob.pe* (4 July 2022), <https://www.gob.pe/1063-obtener-visa-para-ingresar-al-peru-visa-humanitaria-para-ciudadanos-venezolanos> (Accessed June 18, 2022).

in Peru to avoid these migratory procedures, expanding to 530,000 the number of Venezuelans seeking asylum in the country.⁵⁵

While States have the sovereign power to regulate the entry of any alien, they also have a duty to respect the human rights of these persons, including the right to non-refoulement.⁵⁶ However, in order to issue policies and legislate on migration issues, States –including Peru– must also face the challenges arising from the lack of an internationally accepted concept of both “migrant” and “family.” On the one hand, the International Organization for Migrants (IOM) points out that the term “migrant” includes “all cases in which the decision to migrate is taken freely by the person concerned for ‘reasons of personal convenience’ and without the intervention of external factors that obligate them to do so.”⁵⁷ However, this concept does not include those people who migrate forced by serious crisis in their country in order to survive, as is the case with Venezuelan migration. On the other hand, the Royal Spanish Academy defines the “family” as the “group of related people who live together,”⁵⁸ but this concept does not involve those families whose members have had to migrate to achieve certain conditions that allow them to bring the rest of their family to their side and reunify it.

In recent years, Peruvian migration policy has undergone a series of changes as a result of the creation of various entities and new jurisprudence. In this context, in 2011, the Intersectoral Working Group for Migration Management was created, as part of to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to develop the guidelines of the comprehensive migration policy in Peru. Subsequently, in 2012, the National Superintendence of Migrations was created, attached

55 Working Group for Refugees and Migrants GTRM, “Plan de respuesta para refugiados y migrantes 2022. Capítulo Perú”, 3.

56 Organization of American States, “La CIDH urge a los Estados proteger los derechos humanos de las personas migrantes, refugiadas y desplazadas frente a la pandemia del COVID-19,” (Washington: April 17, 2020), <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2020/077.asp#:~:text=Vinculado%20a%20lo%20anterior%2C%20la%20pandemia%20de%20COVID%20D19> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

57 International Organization for Migration, “Glosario sobre Migración. Derecho Internacional sobre Migración”, (2006), https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_7_sp.pdf (Accessed June 25, 2022).

58 Royal Spanish Academy, “Familia” in Dictionary of the Spanish language, (2001), <https://www.rae.es/drae2001/familia> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

to the Ministry of the Interior, as an agency responsible for the migration control of nationals and foreigners.⁵⁹

Despite such changes, it was only after the application of Legislative Decree 1350 of January 7, 2017 and its subsequent regulation that the most important modifications took place from the perspective of the rights of migrants and their families.⁶⁰ This new regulatory framework includes the principles of family unity and the best interests of children and adolescents. It also recognizes the rights of the family based on marriage and de facto union. It distinguishes between the migratory status of the foreign holder and that of their relatives, as well as broadening the recognition of persons in vulnerable situations.⁶¹

In a similar fashion, in 2017, through Supreme Decree 015-2017-RE, the National Migration Policy 2017-2025 was approved in order “to guarantee respect for and protection of migrants, promoting equality, equity, inclusion, integration and observance of national security, through an efficient integral management of the migration process, and which articulates the State and society according to the needs, interests and expectations of the migrant population and their families.”⁶² However, despite advances in Peruvian legislation, regulatory frameworks for family ties have not been sufficiently expanded to include extended families (grandparents, grandchildren, etc.) or families based on same-sex couples.⁶³

This situation was aggravated by the restrictions adopted by the Peruvian State to limit entry into the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. The later generated an increase in irregular entries through new routes to

59 Marcela Huaita Alegre, “Políticas públicas, familias y reunificación en el contexto de la migración venezolana al Perú”, in *Migrant trajectories: Venezuelan youth in Peru*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 232.

60 *Ibid.*, 230.

61 *Ibid.*, 238.

62 El Peruano, “Decreto Supremo que aprueba la Política Nacional Migratoria 2017 – 2025”, (Peru: April 27, 2017), <https://busquedas.elperuano.pe/normaslegales/decreto-supremo-que-aprueba-la-politica-nacional-migratoria-decreto-supremo-n-015-2017-re-1513810-1/>

63 Huaita Alegre, “Políticas públicas, familias y reunificación...”, 248.

avoid migration controls, putting the lives of Venezuelan migrants at risk by exposing them to criminal organizations dedicated to the smuggling of migrants and human trafficking. Correspondingly, it is necessary to understand the harsh conditions to which Venezuelan migrants arriving in Peru are exposed.

Attitudes Toward Venezuelan Migration in Peru

The massive arrival of Venezuelan migrants has rapidly transformed Peru's migratory posture from a country of origin of migrants, to a destination country. Undoubtedly, the migratory trajectories chosen by Venezuelans to reach Peru are difficult and complex. The rapid insertion of Venezuelans into the informal sector of the Peruvian economy, although it allows them to generate income, exposes them to different forms of exploitation and discrimination, particularly xenophobic discourses.

Xenophobia includes “attitudes, prejudices and behaviors that reject, exclude and often defame people based on the perception that they are outsiders or strangers to the community, society or national identity.”⁶⁴ In that sense, xenophobia “manifests itself through beliefs, attitudes and behaviors hostile towards people of origin other than one's own, such as contempt, discrimination, and physical or verbal aggression.”⁶⁵ Unfortunately, xenophobia and racism often go hand in hand.

According to a survey conducted by the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP) in 2019, 73 % of respondents disapproved of Venezuelan migration to Peru. This was due to economic and labor reasons (perceiving they take away jobs, affect the economy, and increase informality), their perceived role in increasing crime and insecurity, and poor relationship with Peruvians,

64 UNHCR “Guía sobre Racismo y Xenofobia: Cómo ACNUR puede abordar y responder ante situaciones de racismo y xenofobia que afectan a personas bajo su mandato”, (2020), 16, <https://www.unhcr.org/6087cc104.pdf> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

65 Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid Euskadi, “Diccionario de Asilo”, <https://diccionario.cear-euskadi.org/xenofobia/> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

among others.⁶⁶ However, 83 % of those who expressed their disapproval with Venezuelan migration had not had contact with them. This clearly shows that the reasons for their rejection are unfounded, and are based on perceptions, as is the case with the increase in crime and insecurity allegedly due to the fault of Venezuelan migrants.

In this regard, according to the National Police of Peru, of the 730 thousand complaints received in 2019, only 1.8 % involved foreign citizens, with the rest being Peruvians.⁶⁷ Despite this evidence, in January 2020, the Ministry of the Interior announced the creation of the “Special Brigade against Criminal Migration.” and the then Minister of the Interior, Carlos Morán, publicly stated that “foreign criminals, those Venezuelans who have come to commit crimes, have two paths: leave the country or go to jail.”⁶⁸ The negative perception towards Venezuelan migrants is therefore motivated by both inadequate political discourses and media messages.

It is important to emphasize that in countries or places with notable deficiencies in public services, as well as with structural problems rooted in society, migrants are often identified as the culprits of these ills, thus contributing to their rejection.⁶⁹ Peru is no exception to this type of behavior. There are examples in its recent history that show how social and symbolic mechanisms operate to link migrants with problems specific to the country.⁷⁰

As an example, the arrival of Chinese migrants in the late nineteenth century generated discrimination and rejection of their presence due to

66 Institute of Peruvian Studies, “Conocimiento y actitudes hacia la migración venezolana”, (Lima, June 2019), 9, <https://iep.org.pe/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Informe-OP-Junio-2019-Actitudes-hacia-la-migraci%C3%B3n-venezolana.pdf> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

67 Milagros Berrios, “Polémica por creación de brigada especial contra la ‘migración delictiva’”, *The Republic* (27 January 2020), <https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/2020/01/22/policia-crea-brigada-especial-contra-la-migracion-delictiva-ministerio-del-interior-dirincri/> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

68 Ibid.

69 Pablo Vega Rome, “Experiencias de discriminación hacia jóvenes migrantes venezolanos: construcción del discurso e impactos en la vida cotidiana”, en *Trayectorias migrantes: la juventud venezolana en el Perú*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 264.

70 Ibid.

racial prejudices existing in the population of Lima. They were accused of lack of hygiene, of practicing vices, and of causing bad odors and filth in the area, yet at that time the lack of sanitation and hygiene in the streets was an already existing problem in the country.⁷¹ In a similar fashion, the massive internal migration to the cities, which occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, once again generated discrimination and rejection against migrants from Andean regions, who were considered sole responsible for urban deterioration due to their informal economic activities, their poor hygiene habits and even their appearance.⁷²

At present, in the XXI century, similar attitudes are manifesting themselves against Venezuelan migrants, who are blamed for all the social problems already existing in the country, such as informality, lack of employment or citizen insecurity. In this context, the term “veneco” has been used to refer disparagingly to a Venezuelan, presenting the same negative connotation of words such as “cholo” or “serrano” with which migrants from the Andes and their descendants are still discriminated against in large cities such as Lima.⁷³

Unfortunately, not only negative and unfounded political discourses influence attitudes of rejection towards Venezuelan migrants, but also the hostile rhetoric towards this population by the Peruvian media, which conducts media coverage of both expulsions of and criminal acts committed by Venezuelans, despite the fact that statistics show their scarce involvement in this type of actions in Peru.⁷⁴ The daily consumption of this type of information by the Peruvian population predisposes them to assume a negative attitude when interacting with Venezuelan citizens in public spaces.⁷⁵

The restrictions imposed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic also negatively impacted Venezuelans in Peru, insofar as they could not go

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., 271.

74 Blouin, “Entre la esperanza y el miedo...”, 159.

75 Vega Rome, “Experiencias de discriminación hacia jóvenes migrantes venezolanos...”, 275.

out to earn a daily living, while those who worked without legal contracts (the vast majority) were left unprotected. In addition, the Peruvian government did not provide economic aid bonds to Venezuelan migrants who were living in poverty or extreme poverty, leaving such support in the hands of international cooperation agencies.⁷⁶ In this prevailing policy, the Peruvian government was reflected, in part, by the sentiments of former congresswoman Esther Saavedra, who during an intervention in the Congress of the Republic, in September 2019, rebuked former President Martín Vizcarra, saying that “a million immigrants both legal and illegal, workers and criminal bandits, have to eat, have to sleep, and have come to take away jobs from our Peruvians. (...) I want to tell you *that he is the president of all Peruvians and not of foreigners, (...), not of Venezuelans. Good or Bad, Venezuelans must now leave the country: let them go.*”⁷⁷

However, a large part of Peruvians disagree and condemn this attitude of rejection towards the Venezuelan population, showing empathy and commitment to facilitate or promote their insertion into society.

The Peruvian State must be much more proactive and emphatic in valuing, promoting and disseminating the innumerable contributions and opportunities offered by Venezuelan migration to Peru, and thereby avoid generating scenarios of instability that do not favor the inclusive and sustainable development of the country.

Contribution and Opportunities of Venezuelan Migration in Peru

According to the survey conducted by the IEP in 2019, 22 % of respondents agreed with Venezuelan migration to Peru, because: (1) their country is in crisis and they have nowhere to go, (2) historical reciprocity (Peru is a

76 Bia Alcázar, “En Perú, familias migrantes hacen frente a la pandemia gracias a las transferencias de efectivo,” *United Nations Children’s Fund* (Peru: December 16, 2020), <https://www.unicef.org/lac/historias/en-peru-familias-migrantes-hacen-frente-la-pandemia-gracias-a-transferencias-de-efectivo> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

77 Canal N, “Esther Saavedra: Venezolanos malos o buenos tienen que salir del Perú,” (September 30, 2019), <https://canaln.pe/actualidad/esther-saavedra-fuerza-popular-venezolanos-malos-buenos-tienen-que-salir-peru-n300200> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

country of migrants and has been supported by other countries), (3) they are friendly, hardworking and well-educated, and (4) because they will help economic growth, contributing more labor to the labor supply.⁷⁸ These reasons show a high level of understanding and empathy internalized in a part of the Peruvian population, which the State must help develop in its entire population.

In this regard, according to a 2019 World Bank study, the Venezuelan population that has emigrated to Peru is mainly young (42 % are between 18 and 29 years old), has come mostly from urban areas and is highly qualified (57 % have some type of higher education, of which half have completed higher university education).⁷⁹ It is estimated that the investment in education of this Venezuelan population would have cost Peru about 3.3 billion dollars, which represents a third of the country's annual education budget.⁸⁰ Likewise, this organization highlights that Venezuelan migration to Peru takes place primarily in family groups, which are composed of men and women, including some 117,000 children who, in many cases, will be an active part of the future of Peru.⁸¹

Venezuelan migrants and refugees represent a great economic opportunity for Peru. They are able not only to increase the country's productive capacity, but also to boost its growth significantly.⁸² For example, 8 % of the growth of the Peruvian Gross Domestic Product in 2018 was due to the contribution of Venezuelans as consumers and workers. Likewise, the Venezuelan population could contribute more than 600 million dollars in net tax revenues to Peru between 2020 and 2024, as well as possibly

78 Institute of Peruvian Studies, "Conocimiento y actitudes hacia la migración venezolana".

79 World Bank "Una oportunidad para todos. Los migrantes y refugiados venezolanos y el desarrollo del Perú", (2019), 23, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/107621574372585665/pdf/Una-Oportunidad-para-Todos-Los-Migrantes-y-Refugiados-Venezolanos-y-el-Desarrollo-del-Per%c3%ba.pdf> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

80 *Ibid*

81 *Ibid*.

82 World Bank, "La migración venezolana puede impulsar la productividad y el crecimiento económico del Perú," (Peru: November 26, 2019), <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/news/press-release/2019/11/26/migracion-venezolana-peru> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

increasing labor productivity by 3.2 % (based on the number of migrants who were in the country in 2018).⁸³

If this opportunity is to be seized, it requires both the adequate formulation and implementation of policies, as well as the active participation of public institutions to properly integrate the Venezuelan population into Peruvian society and the Peruvian economy.⁸⁴ In fact, 30 % of Venezuelan migrants who held positions as scientific and intellectual professionals in their country now work as cooks of prepared food on the street, kitchen assistants and street vendors in Peru.⁸⁵ Likewise, Venezuelan migrants who have technical or professional university training (who represent 57 % of Venezuelans in Peru) cannot occupy positions for which they are trained, since the vast majority do not have legal permission to work or have not validated their studies in the country.

In this context, it is worth highlighting the great work done by Venezuelan health professionals and technicians who joined the Peruvian health system to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the current lack of health professionals in Peru, coordinated work among the corresponding entities must continue in order to incorporate as many of these Venezuelan professionals into the country's health system. As of 2019, of the nearly 500,000 Venezuelans who had obtained PTP in Peru, 3,147 were doctors.⁸⁶

Conclusions

As mentioned, no population is sufficiently prepared either to leave their country forcibly, or to welcome large numbers of outsiders in a short time. On the one hand, the Venezuelan State is not able to safeguard the fundamental rights of its population, forcing a considerable part of it to emigrate. On

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 World Bank, "Una oportunidad para todos.", 30.

86 International Labour Organization, "El aporte de las personas refugiadas y migrantes venezolanas frente a la pandemia de la COVID-19 en los servicios esenciales de salud", (February 2021), 22, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---Americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_794074.pdf (Accessed June 25, 2022).

the other, the Peruvian population usually identifies Venezuelan migrants as the culprits of the structural problems already existing in the country, generating a rejection expressed through discriminatory acts and discourses.

Achieving the full integration of the Venezuelan population into Peruvian society and economy requires the involvement of the State and civil society to achieve a change in the mentality of Peruvian citizens (from rejection to empathy) by means of information, education and culture. In that sense, developing empathy –that is, the ability to identify with someone and share their feelings–⁸⁷ requires putting oneself in another’s shoes and feeling like them. Peruvians should be aware that many Venezuelans have had to migrate abroad in order to survive, experiencing terrible deprivation and suffering during their migratory journey. Likewise, Peruvians cannot be indifferent to discrimination and misunderstanding since in recent decades many of their relatives and friends also had to emigrate to other cities in Peru or from various countries of the world to seek a better future. Therefore, Peruvian society must be in solidarity with migrants, acknowledging them as opportunities instead of as threats.

The social and cultural composition of many countries reflects the result of large and constant migratory processes. This statement also applies in Peru, where internal migration, as well as that from Europe, Africa and Asia has generated a rich and diverse social and cultural conformation, reflected in different expressions (artistic and culinary, among others) that are a source of local pride and international recognition. It therefore makes no sense for some Peruvians to reject and discriminate against Venezuelan migrants from a perception of “what is Peruvian” or “what is ours”, when such purity does not exist in Peru.⁸⁸

87 Royal Spanish Academy, “Empatía” in *Dictionary of the Spanish language*, (2001), <https://dle.rae.es/empat%C3%ADa> (Accessed June 25, 2022).

88 Gonzalo Gamio Gebri, “Ética y migración: reflexiones sobre la migración venezolana en tiempos de crisis”, in *Migrant trajectories: Venezuelan youth in Peru*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, December 2021), 303.

To be sure, the Peruvian state has made some appropriate decisions to protect Venezuelan migrants, but these measures are still insufficient. In this regard, political and awareness-raising measures must be adopted by various State institutions to enable the change of mentality of the Peruvian population. Likewise, the media must assume the responsibility to inform without sensationalism and avoid the construction of a negative perception towards Venezuelans. Unfortunately, the fight against xenophobia -as a form of discrimination- takes time. Thus strategies to combat it must not only be thought out in the long term, but must also facilitate the creation of an intercultural project that fosters mutual knowledge, respect, dialogue and encounter between the receiving population and the migrant population.⁸⁹ These strategies should allow Peruvian society (including its political class) to face with a positive attitude the challenges of a migration process, as well as recognize the opportunities and potentialities of this process.

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89 Vega Rome, "Experiencias de discriminación hacia jóvenes migrantes venezolanos...", 281.