

Migration in Colombia: The challenge of integration

By Juan Manuel Sarasua Suárez

Photos 123RF

DOI https://doi.org/10.12804/dvcn.10336.37646_num6



“Thank you, Lord, for these open doors. May they never close under any circumstances.” This is how Gabriel García Márquez’s speech ended on October 22, 1982, after receiving the Order of the Aztec Eagle in Mexico City, a distinction created to honor foreigners who have taken prominent actions to support the Mexican community or humanity in general. García Márquez thanked the country that welcomed him so many times over the course of his life in different circumstances and always with open arms.

The Colombian government has opened one of those doors with the creation of the Estatuto de Protección Temporal para Migrantes Venezolanos (Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants, ETPV by the acronym in Spanish), which will offer legal protection to migrants, access to rights, and an opportunity to plan a personal future. The decision has been described as generous by governments and international associations, as it is the first major step toward the integration of this population into the social, political, cultural, and economic fabric of Colombia. But, more importantly, it is the first step to allow Venezuelan migrants to enjoy and exercise their rights.

The integration of the migrant population is the next great challenge that all Colombians must face since its success depends not only on local authorities. Based on data from the [Study of Perception of](#)

[Migrants in Colombia](#), carried out by the Universidad del Rosario, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and *Time*, 62 percent of the Venezuelan migrants who are in Colombia want to stay in the country and around 50 percent have already begun to apply for the Statute.

In this issue of *Advances in Science*, we have two articles that address the phenomenon from very different, but complementary and necessary, perspectives to understand the mark left by migrants and how critical it is that we receive and integrate them. The research from Professor Julia Seithner at the Faculty of Economics will tell us about the impact that migration has in their countries of origin. The research coordinated by the director of the Human Rights Research Group of the Faculty of Law, María Teresa Palacios, describes a series of good practices carried out in various Latin American countries, which can help us to prepare for the reception, management, and integration of migrants.

Notably, the humanitarian crisis in the neighboring country is far from over. Furthermore, 72 percent of those surveyed say they do not want to return to Venezuela. Despite the re-opening of the borders and the economic respite Venezuela is experiencing this year, there is no reason to believe that the economic and social situation in the country will change in the near future. Thousands of Venezuelans continue to leave their country and many more remain in transit to their destination. We cannot avoid this reality and must support all efforts for management and integration.

In his speech to the Mexican authorities, García Márquez respectfully pointed out the obvious that he cannot represent anyone and that he is not a so-called typical immigrant. Neither he nor the small percentage of migrants from all over the world who have found those doors open can, since there are millions who still find them tightly shut. But their plea is a common denominator for all. Many continue walking, resisting, and most likely praying to find those open arms that will allow them to live with dignity.



Migration from a human rights perspective: Good practices in managing the Venezuelan crisis

Not everything has gone wrong in managing Venezuelan immigration. The study coordinated by María Teresa Palacios describes a series of good practices carried out in various Latin American countries so that we can make the best of each experience and offer integration based on human rights.

By Juan Manuel Sarasua Suárez

Photos 123RF

DOI https://doi.org/10.12804/dvcm_10336.37646_num6

On March 10, 2022, U.S. President Joe Biden received President Iván Duque at the White House. [In his welcome speech](#), the American thanked Colombia for its leadership on key issues for the region, such as the fight against the pandemic, the promotion of health security, and, in particular, for receiving refugees from Venezuela and “working for an orderly, safe, and secure way of life.”

We cannot know for sure, but the reason for this congratulations may have been in the national government’s publication 10 days before this meeting, of [Decree 216 of 2021](#) that approved the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants (ETPV), a legal mechanism that intends to generate information on migrants, create a complete registry of them,



using biometric identification, and offer them protection under the country's laws. The ETPV provides Venezuelans with documentation and access to rights, which is basic to have the opportunity to integrate into the country for the next 10 years. According to reports from Migración Colombia, its application has reduced the irregularity of this migrant population by 70 percent between 2021 and 2022.

"Colombia's response has been a milestone in terms of the development of the temporary protection status system, something that has provided the possibility for people to leave the chaotic situation," said Simone Schwartz Delgado, Deputy Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), during the presentation

↑
There are currently 281 million people displaced from their places of origin in the world. Only by acting together will countries be able to respond to this reality.

of the [The Integration challenge report. Challenges and opportunities of migrant management in Colombia 2022-2026](#), an event organized by the authors of the report, the [Venezuelan Observatory](#) from the Universidad del Rosario, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation ([KAS](#)), on November 24.

As rarely happens, the government then decided that the most correct and humane way to manage the high number of migrants entering the country was to offer options for them to plan a life within our borders. It did so, like many other countries in the region, without having previously experienced a migratory flow of such scale, for which it had to count, register, issue visas, and begin the asylum process for all migrants. Other countries such as Argentina and Peru established mechanisms to regulate the migrant population, but they were not as broad and did not affect as many migrants.

The [report of the Venezuelan Observatory](#) indicates that from 2016 to August 2022, 6,805,209 Venezuelans have left their country, 72 percent of them corresponding to the eco-

nomically active population. Colombia is the country that has received the most: about 2.475 million (72.44 percent between 2018 and 2019); followed by Peru (1.286 million), Ecuador (508,935), Chile (448,000), and the United States (394,000). Added to this is the serious problem the country has with displaced persons. Data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) record that 70,267 people in Colombia have been victims of forced displacement between January and October 2022, 6 percent more than that in the same period of 2021.

Actions such as those of the national government are necessary not only because of the extremely complex management of such a large number of migrants but also because respect for human rights must be at the center of political decisions. For this reason, researchers [María Teresa Palacios Sanabria](#), director of the Research in Human Rights Group of the Faculty of Law at the Universidad del Rosario; [Beatriz Londoño Toro](#), emeritus professor at the Universidad del Rosario; and attorney [Nathalia Hurtado Diaz](#) decided to focus not only on the negative of the immigration approach but also on the positive. Their interest was to understand and describe the good things that had been done, locally, regionally, and nationally in the main receiving countries of the Venezuelan diaspora in South America.

“In 2015, when the wave of emigration began, and in 2018, when the largest flow occurred due to the closure of the borders, Colombia had no experience in managing immigration nor did it have the legal resources or the institutional structure to manage it,” Palacios explains. “There is still a regulatory weakness regarding the accessibility of rights not only for Venezuelans but also for all foreigners in the country; the debt to all is historical. However, at the local, regional, and national levels, there were responses and initiatives that served to advance an effective and humane management of these migratory flows.

The results of this study were summarized in the study [Experiences in migration: good local practices in South American cities](#), published in 2021 in *PUCP Law journal*, from the Universidad Católica de Peru. Here we will share the details of the research and why it is so important to apply its findings to achieve country collaboration in migration management.

This aspect is the basis of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration ([GCM](#)), a document signed in December 2018 by all UN member states (except the United States). The pact, which is non-binding, is



In 2017, the UN stated that good practices can be adapted within each country but must be fully in line with international human rights treaties.



structured around 23 major objectives, and the good practices of this work respond to several of the needs raised by these objectives.

The basis of the study

“In the fieldwork we conducted, we arrived at this research on good practices in the absence of regulations and the barriers that people expressed in terms of access to their rights,” says the professor. She adds that “each city began to do what it could to manage this situation, and that is where we discovered these desirable procedures or good practices.

The basis for this research arose from two other projects coordinated by Palacios. “The first of these showed that during the management of migration, there were very heterogeneous responses of the regional institutions to migration,” she says.



“This was due to the fact that in the national focus, there was no law that would unify the answer; there was only [Law 1465 of 2011](#), which provides only [some](#) provisions alluding to Colombians living abroad and a complement to the Law of Return to facilitate the immigration of Colombians to the national territory. There is no talk of the migrants’ rights.

In the first project, titled [Regional assessment of migration in Colombia with a focus on human rights: 2014-2018](#), 24 universities and 43 researchers collaborated to characterize the immigrant population in five regions of the country (Antioquia, Centro, Costa Caribe, Eje Cafetero, and Nororiente) from a Human Rights perspective, that is, seeking to identify the challenges that migrants must face to effectively recognize the rights that any other person has: to work, to be healthy, to have an education, and to access justice.

Working to integrate migrants

Latest measures taken by the Colombian government for the management of Venezuelan migrants:

- Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants (ETPV), in operation since March 2021.
- Permit for Temporary Protection (PPT) for the validation of academic titles
- Venezuelan R Visa for migrants with at least 5 years with ETPV, available digitally as of June 2023
- Recognition of the PPT by the Directorate of National Taxes and Customs (DIAN) to obtain the Unique Tax Registry (RUT)

Among other results, they found many constitutional and regulatory weaknesses in the country, which prevented any successful integration initiative from being deployed.

Immediately afterward, Palacios and her team analyzed the role of migrant women from Venezuela in the project called [Feminization of Venezuelan migration in Colombia: regional analysis with a human rights approach 2014-2018](#). The results show that migrant women are at greater risk of suffering violations of their rights and that there is greater vulnerability as women: inequalities prevailing in their own countries and inequalities entrenched by the patriarchal system continue and are magnified by their new status as migrants, making them more vulnerable to dangers such as human trafficking and smuggling, labor exploitation, and violation of their rights.

Here we refer not only to Venezuelan women but also to Colombian women who are returning to the country. This return is a recent phenomenon in the migratory processes in Latin America. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) states that migrants usually move to countries with higher levels of development, but the flow is reversed when there are economic crises in the host countries or, as we saw recently, because of the barriers imposed by countries to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. This further complicates the situation of migrant women.

In these two projects, the researchers found that, both at the regional level in the interior of Colombia and at the national level, along with the other countries, the institutions in each place implemented and proposed positive, effective solutions with great short-, medium- and long-term impacts on the migrant and host populations.

The path taken with these two studies prepared them to study the issue of **good practice (GP)**. But it was the exchange with foreign researchers, during an analysis of Venezuelan immigration in several countries of the region, which allowed them to learn, for example, about more mature legislative developments. At the same time, they implemented more restrictive measures, as was the case of Peru and Ecuador: while these countries curbed entry by enacting strict requirements, Colombia did not require anything.

For the study, they analyzed the migration policies of Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia between 2014 and 2018, seeking to find the lines of action that sought to improve migrants' rights. These countries were chosen because they receive the majority of Venezuelan migrants and are also those where the State and society have implemented actions to ensure these rights.

In addition, each country has its own experience and tradition in migration management, and this is an important factor that helps define whether or not a measure will be successful. Argentina, for example, has received migrants since the 19th century and has developed regulatory frameworks. Currently, 4.9 percent of its population is of foreign origin, and in Buenos Aires, it is 12.8 percent. According to 2019 data from the IOM, 70 percent of the migrants received by this city come from Venezuela and the country hosts around 145,000 Venezuelans in its country. It should be noted that Argentina has led the adoption of the Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (**RMRP**), a plan coordinated by the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (**R4V**), made up of more than 200 organizations, for migrant support in 17 Latin American countries.

Meanwhile, in Colombia, migration flows have been much smaller and at the time of the large Venezuelan diaspora, the country did not have clear constitutional support or regulations to enforce the few existing laws or structures to deal with the huge number of migrants.

In addition, the lack of contact with migrants means that demonstrations of racism, unequal treatment, abuse, and mistreatment



of migrants are much greater compared with those in other countries with more experience dealing with foreigners. Traditionally, Colombia has been a country where the emigration rate tends to be higher than the immigration rate. For Venezuela, our neighbors have a long history of managing and including Colombian migrants.

Good practices (GP)

Researchers define good practices (GP) in their study as the “development of coordinated actions with a focus on human rights, carried out by state authorities, international organizations, or civil society that are replicable, adaptable, that can



“Colombia has made a very generous decision with the temporary protection status. Now, it is necessary to achieve local recognition that the public, companies, and society knows and welcomes.”
Stefan Reith,
Konrad
Adenauer
Foundation.

regulations, the “**Good Regulatory Practices.**” It may also take emergency or temporary actions that produce, among others, “coordinated proposals for work or new ways of attending to the migrant population, which are combined with bolstering social services in host communities,” as stated in the study. These are denoted as “**Good Administrative Practices.**”

The purpose of these is to enable all members of society, at the local, regional, and international levels, to work together to guarantee migrants’ rights. Thus, they analyzed the actions that the State had deployed and those that had been implemented by civil society and international organizations (such as UNHCR, IOM, ILO, and the Church). A clear example can be seen in Lima (Peru), where the Jesuit Refugee Service has created four Support Centers for Refugees to date ([Caremi](#)).

The second aspect was to see at what level this action had an impact and at what moment this support was provided.

1. GP in emergency relief: this is the first contact with the migrant population when the aim is to “meet the immediate needs of migrants and ensure their survival.” These actions include delivering food, water, hygiene kits, vaccinations, and temporary shelters. Its application is intended to reduce the vulnerability of these people in risky trips to their final destination. For example, [the Ecuadorian Red Cross activated](#) in various provinces 15 points of care and provided 7,794 medical and dental first aid services as of June 2019.
2. GP in humanitarian aid: this is complementary to emergency aid and provides support for food, clothing, lodging, and listening to migrants. These are temporary measures since it is assumed that the next step would be to offer more solid responses that would grant, for example, a residence or work permit, family reunification processes, or any others that would allow these people essential projection.
3. Pedagogical GP: many of the migrants are unaware of their rights and the routes they should follow to obtain institutional support. Such support includes creating care guidelines and clear and safe information outlines, care routes, and contact channels using different communication channels as well as providing information points along the integration route for these people, with an approach that considers diversity and difference. Furthermore, it satisfies the needs raised in [Objective 3 of the PMM](#) (“provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration”). In Argentina, the capital promoted the [Buenos Aires Lives Together program](#), with the goal of “reflecting on the practices of coexistence that occur in different areas of the city from a multicultural perspective, ensuring equal treatment and respect.”
4. GP of reception actions: their objective is to guarantee human rights and offer dignified reception at borders, respectful of the rights of persons and with a differential approach to give priority attention to pregnant women, unaccompanied children (many parents often die in the process), the elderly, those who need special attention, the disabled, refugees, and returnees. The ease with which such access to information is provided will depend to a large extent on the language used to

be documented, and that seek to facilitate or promote access to the rights of foreigners.”

In 2017, the UN stated that GPs can be deployed domestically by each country but must always be in accordance with obligations under international human rights treaties.

Therefore, the researchers studied the actions based on two aspects: the first was to see who did what since in the absence of clear regulations, both the State and civil society can carry out actions. The State can perform actions already included in the country’s legal

communicate the information. Here, law enforcement, public officials, and competent authorities are essential in providing timely and adequate care to the most vulnerable groups.

5. GP for social integration with guaranteed rights: this is the most important point in which Colombia is currently immersed. While the Santos administration was in charge of deploying humanitarian action, Duque's administration took on the registration of migrants, and now, Petro's administration will have to address inclusion in society, the integration. To achieve this full social inclusion, it is essential to support educational actions that help fight against discriminatory and xenophobic processes. Emphasis should also be placed on identifying occupational profiles, enabling and encouraging access to work (perhaps through co-operatives and entrepreneurship actions), as stated in Objective 6 of the PMM. Some examples of these are the [dialogues between immigrants and the local population](#) promoted by the North Santander Governor's Office Department of Borders, an action that was part of the "[Connecting Paths for Rights](#)" program, in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Human Rights, always at the center of the debate

Every country faces its own reality. Immigration is an international problem, as stated in the Global Compact. By 2020, the number of [migrants will reach 281 million](#), 3.6 percent of the world's population, and only by acting together will countries be able to meet the needs of migrants and take advantage of the positive impact of these flows.

Professor Palacios comments that "in Colombia, we also have internal displacement, another modality of human mobilization, which we have not yet resolved in terms of humanitarian assistance, return or socioeconomic stabilization of people displaced by the armed conflict. Despite the Victims Law, the Displaced Persons Law, and all the other laws and rulings of the Constitutional Court, despite having all the tools at our disposal, we still have not been able to solve this terrible problem."

The expert continues with a forceful reflection: "When Venezuelans started to leave their country in large numbers, we were not prepared to receive them despite the fact that we had been alerted to the problem and that those flows already existed, although not to that magnitude. Therefore, the State had to take action on this situation, and in this context, these actions had a common characteristic: they were designed for the short term, as if immigration were going to last for a short time. And this did not happen even with the pandemic because, although many people went back to their countries, after the economic opening in September 2020, they left again—known as [remigration](#)—and in many cases, they brought their families with them."

Measures with a medium- and long-term impact were taken later, in 2021, such as the ETPV and the definition, principles, and guidelines for the regulation and orientation of the Comprehensive Migration Policy (PIM) of the State of Colombia. It is great progress, "but for now, the issue of rights continues to be resolved through the constitutional judge. It is the



legal protection that tells citizens where the right is because, although the rights remain indelible in the national Constitution, there is no clear and easy regulation that tells public officials what migrants are entitled to," the expert points out.

The pandemic brought a halt to the actions that were being taken. Restrictive measures, compulsory isolation, and halted economic activity caused a rebound in the flow of migrants. As a result, fewer people left Venezuela and many returned to their homes when the worst happened. The report indicates that, according to

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, the flow of Venezuelan citizens decreased in March and April 2022 compared to the same months in



2021, showing an apparent slowdown in the migration flow. Therefore, the report warns that the conditions of these migrants are far from being stable and solid, and that the vulnerability of people continues to exist.

Meanwhile, each country took its own measures. For example, [Colombia closed](#) river and land border crossings with Venezuela in March 2020. Peru also closed its borders and sought to provide health coverage to all those in the country, regardless of their nationality or migratory status. Ecuador implemented the [COVID-19 Ecuador Humanitarian Response Plan](#), which prioritized measures to assist vulnerable populations in the country's interior. And Argentina also closed borders and extended expiration dates "of temporary, transitional, and uncertain residences," as well as suspended the terms of validity of the residences granted.

Challenges proposed by the report

The "Integration Challenge: Migration management challenges and opportunities in Colombia 2022-2026" was carried out by the Observatory of Venezuela at the Universidad del Rosario and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), and coordinated by Professor Ronald F. Rodríguez. In addition, in order to provide an overview of the migration issue, the report offers 12 challenges and 57 recommendations to manage and integrate migrants, written by Observatory researchers Francesca Ramos Pismataro (director) and María Clara Robayo Leon, together with journalist Txomin Las Heras Leizaola. These are the challenges:

- 1 Strengthen the institutional framework and migration management from an integration approach.
- 2 Continue the implementation of the Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelan Migrants (ETPV).
- 3 Strengthen and expand public policies with a gender approach.
- 4 Establish a comprehensive policy for returning Colombians.
- 5 Strengthen the protection system for refugees.
- 6 Strengthen health care for the migrant population.
- 7 Guarantee access, continuity, and promotion of migrant children and adolescents in the educational system.
- 8 Prioritize care for migrant children and adolescents.
- 9 Achieve the socioeconomic and productive integration of migrants.
- 10 Strengthen territories and local governance of migration.
- 11 Address xenophobia and citizen security from a rights-based, non-discriminatory approach.
- 12 Strengthen the migration issue on the Colombian foreign policy agenda.

Responses were also diverse in controlling migration in these countries. "They were only done on a medium and small scale," explains the professor. "The Iván Duque administration, with Carlos Holmes at the head, claimed that the [Lima Group](#) (a multilateral agency dedicated to solving the Venezuelan crisis)

will work to generate something like a ‘regional governance’ of the migration issue. But it was nothing more than a diplomatic order; there was no impact in terms of joint measures,” he notes.

The challenge facing Colombia and all other countries in the region is to enable the integration of migrants into the country’s social fabric. UNHCR representative Schwartz Delgado recently stated at the Venezuela Observatory event that “so far there are approximately 1.5 million people who have received temporary protection, so it is necessary to continue to make progress, make them visible, and allow them to contribute to the host community.”

During the presentation of the *The challenge of integration report. Challenges and opportunities of migration management in Colombia 2022-2026*, the representative of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Colombia, Stefan Reith, stated that “Colombia has made a very generous decision with the temporary protection statute. Now we have to achieve local recognition, so that the public, companies, and society know about it and know that the people who benefit from it can work and become integrated.” That is the great challenge of the Petro administration.

The official also pointed out that it is necessary to coordinate regional policies with those of the central government, so that there is a better information flow among migrant communities, and thus open the doors to opportunities for education, employment, and access to health care.

What the work of these researchers seeks to do is to provide a basis for a minimum exchange that will make it possible to generate a standardized public policy at the international level. “It does not have to be the same, but in terms of rights and access to this policy, it is necessary to identify and collect them to improve all public policies. The next aspect is that the practices could be shared to generate more humanized processes in migration matters,” says Palacios.

What we all need to do together is to consider migration as a humanitarian need. In other parts of the world, where migration processes are older and more established, migration is promoted as a basis of service or a profitable opportunity. Germany, for example, created the [Immigration of Skilled Workers Act](#) in early 2020 to cover their needs in the fields in which they lack professionals, technicians, or technologists.



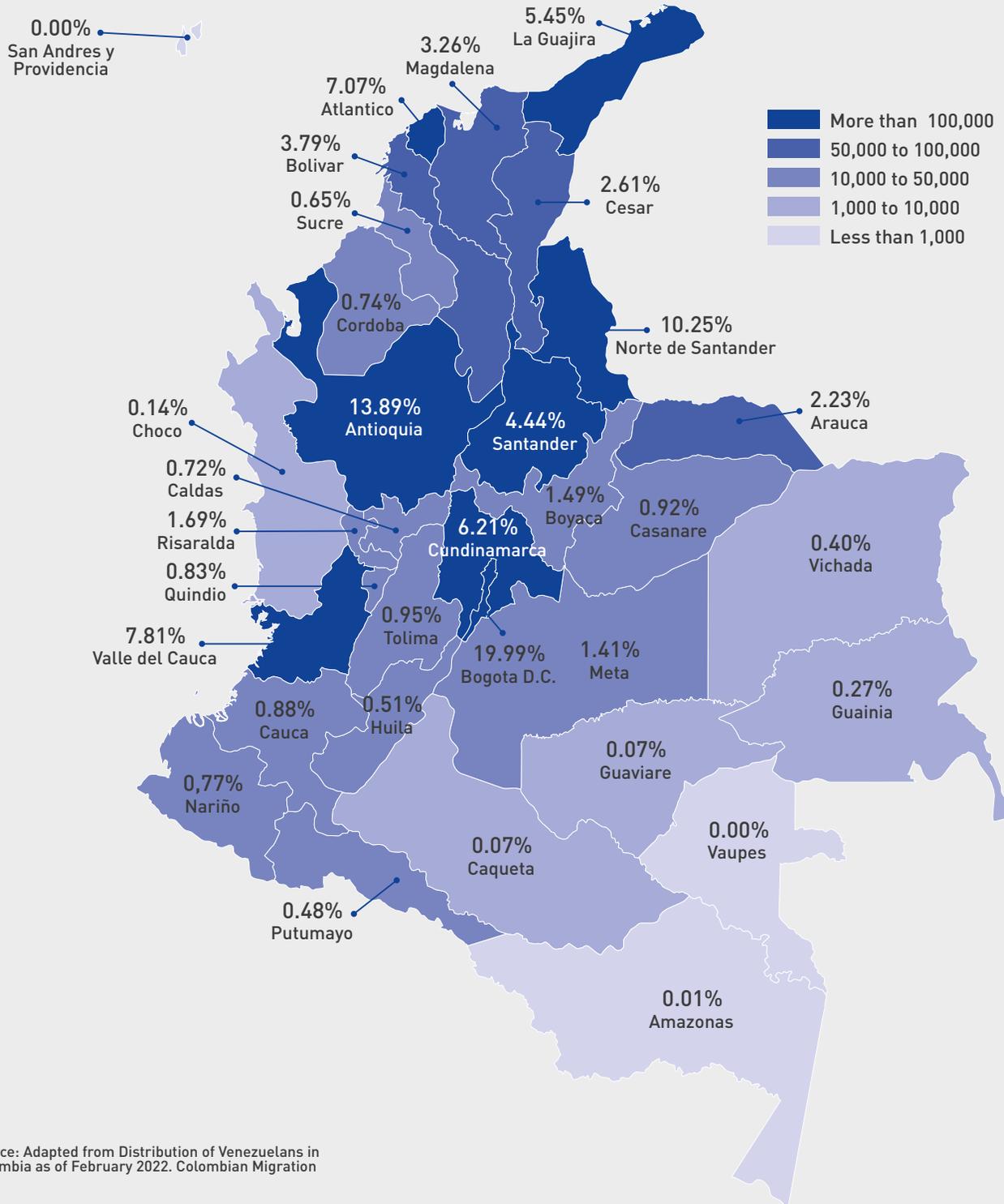
“Despite the Victims Law, the Displaced Persons Law, and all the other laws and rulings of the Constitutional Court; despite having all the apparatus, with all this, we have not been able to solve this terrible problem,” explains María Teresa Palacios, professor at the Faculty of Law at UROSARIO.

On another scale of values, and as another example, for several years, we have been able to observe the link between migrants’ involvement in construction projects for the infrastructures of the World Cup in Qatar 2022.

“It is important that we have a broad characterization of migrants to identify the profiles that can help the country with certain activities. Such characterization should be valid and lawful and should help us create good policies. But that is only one way of understanding migration as an opportunity. I believe that this should not be the State’s sole objective; we cannot see migrants from a purely utilitarian point of view. That is why it is necessary to put their rights at the center of the decisions that are made.” concludes Professor Palacios. ■

Distribution of Venezuelans in Colombia by Department

Distribution of Venezuelan migration by department. Data taken from Migración Colombia as of February 2022, by the authors of the Report of the Venezuela Observatory of the Universidad del Rosario and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.



Source: Adapted from Distribution of Venezuelans in Colombia as of February 2022. Colombian Migration

Migrating for the good of the country: Social remittances

Economic remittances comprise invaluable income for developing economies. But there is another type of remittance that generates a deeper and longer-term impact: social ones. Researcher Julia Seither explains its importance.

By Juan Manuel Sarasua Suárez

Photos 123RF

DOI https://doi.org/10.12804/dvcn_10336.37646_num6

The development of all human civilizations has had migration as a key protagonist. They have been the reason—and also the cause—for the birth of many societies and have always profoundly shaped and influenced politics and world order. They now impact people's economies and participate in global geopolitical decisions.

But these macro-level transformations generated by the flow of people across borders originate at the individual level, from the person who decides to leave their country to seek a better future in another, to the family that completely abandons what was once their home because of a violent conflict. The reasons are endless and each one is unique, specific to each reality. As a result, the impact of this displacement is observed both in the new place of destination and in the place of departure: the destination is part of the migrant's present and future, and the origin is part of their past. However, thanks to

migrants, these two spaces coexist, interact, nourish, and, of course, transform each other.

"I was always interested in knowing what was happening in the place of origin of the people who migrated. They always talk about the migrant's experience since they leave their house or home, but I didn't know what was happening with the place they left." These are the words of [Julia Seither](#), a professor at the Faculty of Economics at the Universidad del Rosario. Among other topics, Seither studies the effects of migration on the development of social regulations and their impact on economies.

In recent years, she has published two important papers on this topic, in which she analyzes the behavioral dynamics of





the migrant population of Cape Verde and Mozambique, both countries with deep migratory traditions. Both are characterized by a different type of migrant, with specific motives. Still, they can shed light on migratory behavior in other parts of the world and, in particular, on the impact of these migrations on the countries of origin.

“I began to study how migrants can become actors in the development not only of small groups, but also of entire countries, and not only from the economic aspect, but also from aspects of idiosyncrasy such as political attitudes or decisions about fertility and education among the family group,” Seither explains.

From an economic point of view, the impact is easy to see. One of the driving forces

behind migration is the need to achieve a better financial status. According to the World Bank, migrants’ incomes increase three to six times when they move from low-income countries to high-income countries. And those gains also impact the migrant’s countries of origin.

Let’s look at the example of Colombia. 2020 data [from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) teaches that the number of Colombians abroad is close to 5.5 million. In other words, almost 10% of Colombians live outside the country. In 2021, the remittances that these people sent to the country totaled 8.597 billion dollars, 24.4 percent more than in 2020, [in accordance with the data compiled by the Bank of the Republic](#). This corresponds to 2.5 percent of the country’s total GDP for that year. By 2022, it is expected to reach 10 billion dollars.

But migrants do not only produce monetary or material remittances; they also transfer new knowledge, practices, and civil norms to their countries of origin, known in the special-

ized literature as “social remittances” of various kinds: a greater appreciation for education and health, a greater demand for political responsibility, an exchange of information that modifies conceptions, trends or decisions about fertility (how many children they have per family group, or whether or not they decide to have children), and better organizational and entrepreneurial skills.

From homes to governments

“Contact through both virtual and physical social networks enables the exchange of ideas, leading to significant transformations in the country of origin. For example, suppose people go to countries with stronger political institutions or more complex social structures that work. In that case, the people who live this reality value them and pass them on to their places of origin,” Seither continues. In fact, [migration can affect the strengthening of democratic institutions in various ways](#), particularly, in improving governance and promoting political participation.

In 2019, Seither, together with [Catia Batista](#) and [Peter C. Vincente](#) from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal), published the study [Do migrants’ social networks shape the political attitudes and behaviors in the home?](#) (World Development, 2019), which analyzed surveys conducted in 1,766 households in Mozambique around the time of the 2009 national elections. Migrants from this country move mainly to South African mines and farms, and it has one of the lowest rates of political participation in the southern part of the continent. It ranks 178th out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index (Colombia ranked 83rd in 2019) and for its development, the country has historically been dependent on international aid. In 2013, economic remittances to the country rose to [1.5 percent](#) of its GDP, which was 16.7 billion dollars that year, [according to the World Bank](#)).

Mozambique’s migrants are mostly young men in search of better income-earning jobs, and the preferred destination for 86 percent of them is neighboring South Africa, a typical example of South-South migration. “The men go for nine-month periods to work in the mines; perhaps they return for a month and leave again,” suggests the researcher, who adds that “they usually live together with migrants from other countries in the same town or camp, and this frequent exchange allows them to discuss ideas and talk about political participation, among other issues.”

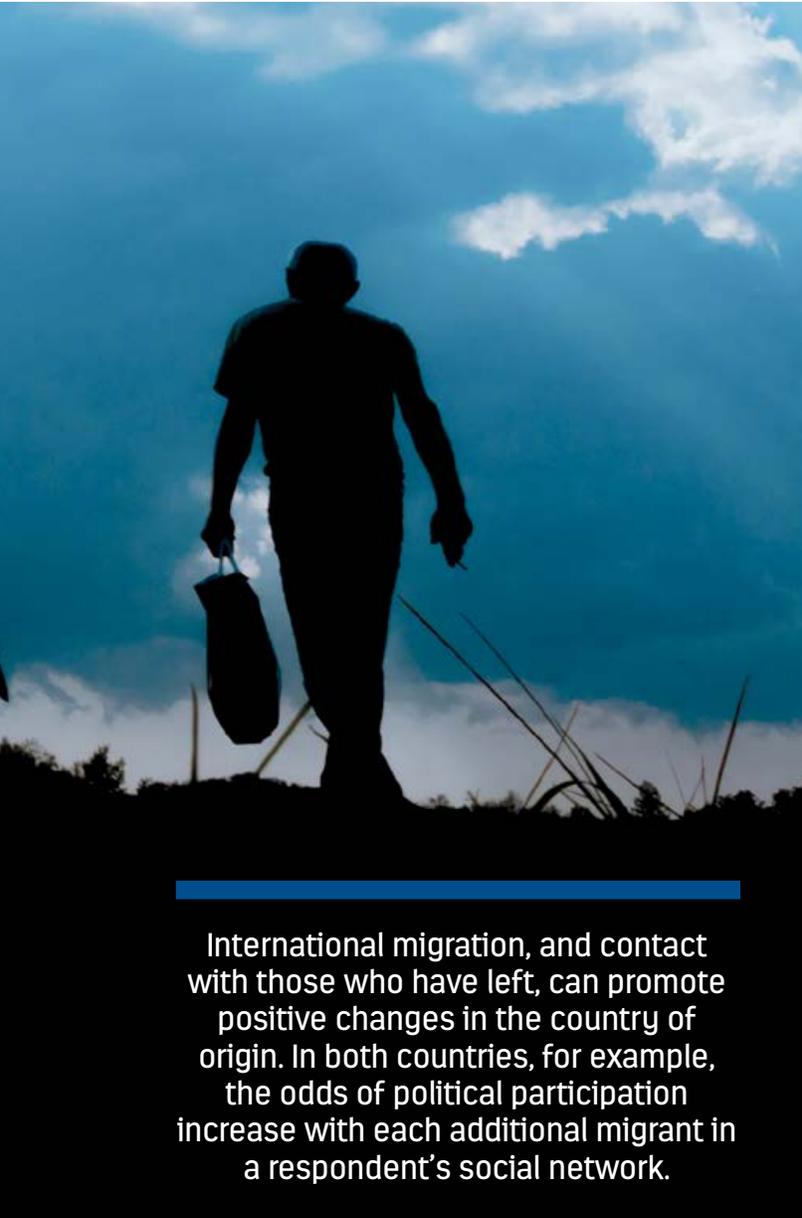
The results of the study suggest that political attitudes and behaviors may be learned and valued more at home by people who are



in contact with the migrants. “We found that family is important, but contact with immigrants through informal discussions, such as those with friends, has a greater impact on political decision-making and influences political participation,” he explains.

Who has more influence, the migrant abroad or the returnee?

One of the ideas that comes to mind when we talk about emigration is that the country loses something when its nationals leave. The concept of “brain drain” is often cited and is often thought to be detrimental to the country if those who leave are, at the same time, the most capable, the most educated, and the most experienced. This fact can also regulate investments in the country because if people emigrate, they will certainly not invest in their territory or participate in demo-



International migration, and contact with those who have left, can promote positive changes in the country of origin. In both countries, for example, the odds of political participation increase with each additional migrant in a respondent's social network.

cratic institutions. In this sense, emigration is harmful to the country.

However, international migration can promote institutional improvements by creating positive supply-side effects through return migration and communication between migrants and their contact groups at home. Cell phones and social networks have played an immense role in this aspect, allowing intense and constant contact between people, which has created an effect of dilution of borders and reducing distances. Therefore, thanks to continuous contact from abroad and returning migrants, migration is good for the country.

Based on these reflections, the researchers wondered whether returning migrants were

as efficient in transmitting new values as those who remain abroad. They compared the effects of international migration between the political institutions of Cape Verde and Mozambique.

The results were published in the book [Economic Globalization and Governance \(2021\)](#).

Cape Verde, an Atlantic archipelago of nine islands to the west of Mauritania, is also a former Portuguese colony like Mozambique. Although, its population does not exceed 600,000, there may be [twice as many](#) Cape Verdeans living abroad, with approximately 260,000 in the United States and some 100,000 in Portugal. The country ranks 126th on the Human Development Index, and remittances exceed any other foreign investment.

The researchers analyzed 6,145 surveys conducted between 2005 and 2006 in Cape Verde and 5,354 in 2009 in Mozambique. A high proportion of Cape Verdean migrants (62.4 percent) had studied up to primary school, while in Mozambique, it was only up to literacy (31 percent).

“Emigration from Cape Verde is characterized by a relatively skilled exodus to Portugal and other countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), while emigration from Mozambique is mainly due to unskilled labor flows to South Africa,” the authors explain. They add that “the results we analyzed show that international migration substantially increases political participation in both scenarios.”

On the one hand, foreign migrants are more effective in transmitting ideas and promoting political and social changes in the countries of origin because they still live their day-to-day lives in that “different world,” with the constant influence of “those different institutions.” However and despite the ease of communication that now exists, the geographic distance between the two countries still weighs heavily, and this factor dilutes the influence of migrants.

On the other hand, returning migrants have in their favor a closer contact with the locals, and a more significant opportunity for physical encounters and face-to-face dialogue. But with each passing day, the political institutions of the country where they lived become blurred or weakened, and their impact on that person is less and less.

In Cape Verde, in particular, the conclusions of the study reveal that the impact of returnees on political institutions is greater. They are, therefore, more effective in fulfilling this purpose than those who remain abroad.

But in Mozambique, this was different. Instead, the greatest impact was through the exchange and direct contact between those who migrate and those in the country of origin.

In both countries, the likelihood of political participation increases with each additional migrant in a respondent's social network.

“Our results show that the more an individual is exposed to better social norms regarding political participation, the more likely they are to act as a result. We have seen that small differences in the governance structures of these countries are relevant to promoting democracy and migration. Even if it occurs within the African continent, it can go a long way toward achieving it,” concludes Professor Julia Seither. ■