



Amalia and Maye, Venezuelan immigrants and members of Las Reinas Pepiadas, an integration project in Ecuador.
Photo: Alexandra Maldonado.

YES, BUT NOT HERE

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

More than 4.4 million people¹ have left Venezuela as a consequence of a prolonged economic, political and social crisis; 2.8 million of them have migrated to other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. Meanwhile, more than 7 million people who have remained in the country are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.²

Between February and July 2019, Oxfam undertook a study³ that provides an insight into the perceptions, emotions and attitudes of people in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru in relation to Venezuelan migration and the existence of xenophobic, patriarchal and stereotypical narratives towards migrants from Venezuela.

In particular, this report analyses and reveals the perceptions and fears that feed xenophobic, sexist and discriminatory stances towards migration, while also encouraging responsible, proactive and human communications and public policies based on evidence and fundamental rights in relation to the migration flows in the region.

1 INTRODUCTION

The process of moving from one place to another is inherently human: seeking new fertile land for crops or pasture, the drive to explore new territories and landscapes, engaging in trade and bartering, or relocating due to conflicts, wars or famine have been some of the historical realities of humanity on the move.

Human mobility has also been one of the factors that has forged cultures, customs, the development of instruments and technologies for navigation, travel and the territorial domination that preceded the existence of State borders and regulations by thousands of years, and the discovery and adoption of countless habits and tastes through to the present day.

Migration features prominently in the history of Latin America and the Caribbean; the region's colonial history is directly linked to large movements of people, in many cases forced and very violent (such as large-scale slave trafficking), or driven by waves of migration from Asia and Europe. Until well into the 20th century, countries like Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela developed as nations as a result of flows of immigrants from those continents, who were welcomed with a sense of solidarity.⁴

Although migration has been a constant feature of human history, the current flow of people in the region has characteristics that require special attention, given that 'it is the largest displacement of people in such a short period of time in the history of Latin America'.⁵ In addition, the degree of vulnerability that these people face is very high, which requires governments and institutions to effectively manage those flows and meet the needs of people in search of more favourable living conditions.

It is estimated that, as of August 2019, more than 4.4 million people⁶ had left Venezuela⁷ as a result of the economic, political and social crisis that the country is going through, while more than 7 million still in Venezuela require humanitarian assistance and protection due to the lack of medicines, the collapse or absence of public services and food shortages.⁸

In parallel, there are other migration and mobility flows, such as from Central America and the Caribbean towards the north of the continent, from Nicaragua to Costa Rica and from Haiti to various parts of the region. These processes are signs of political instability and change in the region, and are reconfiguring relations between the region's states and societies.

This report, however, will focus on analysing perceptions of the migration of people from Venezuela to three neighbouring countries: Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

How are migrants from Venezuela being received in the host countries?

Between February and July 2019, Oxfam carried out a quantitative and qualitative study that provides an insight into the attitudes and perceptions of a representative sample of people in the main destination countries of Venezuelan migration:

Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. In addition, the ideas that influence people's views of migration were analysed, as were the ways in which frequently xenophobic, patriarchal and discriminatory narratives are expressed and reproduced.

The objective of this report is to contribute to the analysis and understanding of the perceptions and fears that feed xenophobic, sexist and discriminatory stances towards migration, while also encouraging responsible, proactive and human communications and public policies based on evidence and fundamental rights in relation to the migration flows in the region.

Overall, the study confirms that in the three countries observed, many people have changing, ambivalent and even contradictory opinions about migration. Some people feel empathy and a desire to welcome migrants, while also harbouring fears and concerns; this makes them feel wary and adopt a more distrustful stance. For example, more than 80% of people in Ecuador, Colombia and Peru say that they understand the circumstances that are forcing millions to migrate and empathize with the situation of the people coming from Venezuela, although around 70% clearly state that they would like stricter border policies to be enforced.

One striking and worrying aspect of the study is the prevalence of sexism among the populations, which translates into certain stereotypes about migrant women. Close to half of the people consulted in the three countries think that migrant women will end up engaging in prostitution; at the same time, sexist roles are being reproduced, leaving women overburdened with care responsibilities, which increases the likelihood of their rights being infringed.

Another notable aspect that emerged was the perceived threat posed by migration to job security, the 'collapse of services' and insufficient access to social security, and the association of migration with the idea of insecurity and crime.

However, many of the concerns expressed by the societies of the host countries are situations that existed before the arrival of the migrants. Migration from Venezuela has exposed pre-existing shortcomings and weaknesses and should be treated by the governments as an opportunity to address them with more decisive action.

In a globalized world characterized by continuous communication impacts, we note that the profusion of information from social networks and the mass media hugely influences the construction of people's perceptions in relation to migration. In this way, xenophobic behaviours and actions are easily triggered.

This report contains recommendations about the shared responsibility of addressing and dealing with the narratives that are heightening xenophobic and discriminatory feelings among ambivalent groups. While migration is not the cause of the problems that are being attributed to it, it must be correctly managed and communicated so that, as has occurred so many times in our history, it contributes to the economy, enriches cultures, generates employment and continues fostering diverse societies that can live and prosper together.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study is focused on analysing perceptions and narratives about migration through the frames constructed by groups in the three countries that have received the most Venezuelan migrants: Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

This 'framing'⁹ consists of pre-established ideas that condition people to interpret what they observe in a given way. Becoming aware of this framing enables us to better understand how people interpret their environment and define their positions based on learning, knowledge, experience, the values that have been instilled in them and those they have developed during their lives.

Using a metaphor, framing consists of the lenses that lead two people to perceive the same event differently, make a different ethical and moral assessment about the same circumstance and, consequently, act or think differently.¹⁰

The report focuses on the perceptions and ideas of the ambivalent population (which is most changeable) given that it represents the majority of people in the three countries (60% on average); there are greater possibilities for directing more proactive and assertive communication about migration towards that population.

The study methodology and the conceptual framework are in keeping with other Oxfam studies on perceptions and narratives, such as the study of migration from Syria to Europe.¹¹ This methodological correlation enables us to compare certain findings, and extract and extrapolate lessons learned.

The study included a quantitative phase during which data was gathered in the three countries indicated above, based on the survey used in Europe and adapted to the particularities and characteristics of the situation in South America.

Later, a series of focus groups were held in the three countries of the study to contrast findings from the quantitative phase and explore more deeply the frames underpinning the perceptions and narratives about people from Venezuela who have migrated to or are passing through those three countries.

Chart 1. Technical data of the quantitative and qualitative study

Agency: Atrevia

Quantitative methodology:

- People aged between **18 and 64 years** who are resident in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.
- **400 interviews per country**, which gives a margin of error of $\pm 4.9\%$ and a confidence level of 95.5 % under the least favourable conditions ($p=q=0.5$) for the overall data from the sample: 1,200 surveys in total.
- CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) self-administered survey sent to an online survey panel.
- Sample proportional to the study population in terms of gender, age and Nielsen area.

Qualitative methodology:

- Three focus groups in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, with semi-structure questionnaires and further inquiry into the main findings of the quantitative study.

3 HUMAN MOBILITY IN THE WORLD AND THE REGION¹²

In recent decades, the absolute number of international migrants has grown substantially: whereas in 2000 there were 173 million people living outside of their country of origin, by 2017 that figure had risen to 258 million.¹³ However, this increase has been proportional to global demographic growth; the number of migrants as a percentage of the world's population has only increased slightly and is still proportionately very low (2.8% in 2000 and 3.4% in 2017).¹⁴ Thus, remaining in one's country of origin continues to be the norm for the vast majority of people¹⁵.

Internal migration, that is, movement within a country's borders, remains predominant, 'the most recent global estimate indicating that more than 740 million people had migrated within their own country of birth'.¹⁶

The contemporary phenomenon of 'human mobility'¹⁷ is accompanied by major changes in migratory trends, involving new migration routes, destinations and profiles.¹⁸ The most significant is the increase in migration to economically less developed regions.¹⁹

Asia is the most significant region in the migration context: 110 million emigrants come from this region, which also has 80 million immigrants (2017); it is followed by Europe and North America. Migration figures in Latin America and the Caribbean are much lower, with 10 million immigrants and 39 million emigrants in 2017²⁰; it is also the region of the world with the lowest percentage of migrants in relation to its population (1.5% in 2017)²¹.

Despite the predominance of emigration in Latin America, in recent years the immigration rate has been higher than the global average; it is estimated that between 2010 and 2015 international migration on the American continent grew by 5% annually and by 11% in the region.²²

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), these migratory trends will continue to rise due to two main factors: the increasing global interconnectivity and critical economic and political events.²³

The concerns that emerge in the current migration context, which is characterized by so-called 'mixed flows',²⁴ mainly concern the crisis conditions that could prompt more people to move, the challenges of migration governance and the high vulnerability of migrants.

IOM has identified a significant increase in displacements caused by 'conflict, persecution, environmental degradation and change, and a profound lack of human security and opportunity'.²⁵ According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2017, the number of forced displaced persons (due to conflicts, persecution and violence) worldwide **reached 68.5 million**, and this year alone a further 16.2 million people were displaced.²⁶

A second factor that heightens this vulnerability is inadequate migration policies, which contribute to keeping large numbers of people in an irregular situation (which has an impact on their wellbeing, rights and security) and forcing people to use extremely unsafe migration corridors. For 2017, IOM estimated that there were 58 million irregular migrants, while the Missing Migrants Project documented the deaths of more than 6,000 people during migratory journeys that year alone.²⁷

Finally, the worrying question of human trafficking and smuggling is central in the new global and regional migration context. Although it is impossible to measure this problem with exact figures, it is obvious that migration conditions influence the risk of exploitation: according to International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates,

approximately 74% of sexual exploitation and 19% of labour exploitation involves cross-border movements.²⁸

When considering the contributions that migration makes, the focus tends to be on the economy. The main benefit of immigration for the host countries is the increased supply of labour, which boosts productivity and gross domestic product (GDP).²⁹ It is estimated that in 2015, migrants contributed USD 6.7 billion (9.4%) to global GDP.³⁰ Thus, migration can have a major positive impact on individual economic conditions and the dynamism of certain economic sectors in the host countries and in communities that receive remittances.

Similarly, migrants make a significant contribution to the host societies when their integration is facilitated and when migration is normalized and managed with appropriate public policies. As will be seen in the following sections, migration also brings cultural diversity, new techniques and knowledge, an injection of innovation and effort in a wide range of activities, and can even constitute a resilience and adaptation strategy in the face of climate change.³¹

4 INEQUALITY AND PRECARIOUSNESS IN AMBIVALENT SOCIETIES

Migration is a dynamic historic phenomenon that is ingrained in the region's cultures and identities. Moreover, there will likely be increasing numbers of people moving between the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in the years to come.³²

Moving – changing residence or country, seeking new opportunities or environments – should be normalized in contemporary societies. Migration *per se* is not a problem; the problem lies in the causes that lead to involuntary or forced migration, which occur where there are rights violations and risks: persistent inequalities, precariousness and vulnerabilities.

The current flow of people from Venezuela – as well as from Central America and the Caribbean – could continue over the coming years if more people feel obliged to move, even if it involves passing through or relocating to places where there are also shortages and precarity in terms of public services, employment or social security, environmental risks and inadequate migration policies. In an interview about Venezuelan migrants, Germán Casas, President of Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders in Latin America, stated:

*We should understand that people don't migrate just because they feel like it but because they don't want to die in their country. People who decide to flee are sad, angry, annoyed. The first thing is to tell them that, ideally, they should plan this process, which is painful and difficult. They should think about the best options for the migration process, inform themselves and understand it, to look for the least traumatic and least risky way of doing it.*³³

People who see migrants arriving in their countries and communities also understand this. There is a general understanding that the majority of migrants leave Venezuela out of necessity, forced by the situation.

The societies of the countries covered by the study are characterized by their ambivalence to the flow of people from Venezuela. They oscillate between understanding, solidarity and concern about racism and xenophobia, on the one hand, and associating immigrants with insecurity, the collapse of social services and a widespread desire for the immigrants to leave the country as soon as possible, on the other. Positive and negative perceptions about the effects of immigration live side by side in the collective imaginations in the three countries.

This study began with an analysis of three recurrent fears related to migration that help explain the anti-immigration discourse: fear of competition for economic resources, fear of physical insecurity and fear of losing one's national or cultural identity.

One finding of the study is that in these countries the first two fears predominate, while the third fear regarding identity is less present, in contrast to Europe for example.³⁴

This section sheds light on the perceptions of these ambivalent or changeable societies that, without being malicious, aggressive or necessarily xenophobic *per se*, live with precarity on a daily basis, and have fears and concerns about unresolved lacks linked to employment, public safety or social protection.

These fears and concerns are being amplified by certain media outlets and political and electoral interests, which also take advantage of online social networks channels to further expand negative and incendiary perceptions of migration.

Responsible communication based on evidence and rights is necessary to avoid migration becoming the target of blame and dissatisfaction that are not actually attributable to it, but rather are the result of pre-existing shortcomings and inequalities that have not been adequately addressed. As well as exacerbating xenophobia and polarization, this diverts attention from the real causes of these situations and, therefore, their possible solutions, thus perpetuating the inattention and injustice.

A 'race to the bottom' in terms of jobs and salaries

The idea that migration 'takes jobs' and 'pushes down salaries' exerts a strong influence. According to the survey conducted, seven in 10 people in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia (with very similar percentages between them) consider that immigration lowers salaries and worsens working conditions.

José,³⁵ a 65-year-old Colombian trader and former labourer who has lived in Bogotá for more than 40 years, said: 'My greatest fear is that it will generate a major conflict as there are lots of Venezuelans but a real shortage of jobs. It's affected me as, because of my age, no one will give me work.'

Adding to that, Luz Ángela, a 36-year-old self-employed worker in Colombia, pointed out that 'there is a fear of potentially unfair competition because they [people from Venezuela] can do the same work for a lower salary and because the idea is that the economy should operate like a circuit but what they are doing is sending the majority of what they earn here back to Venezuela'.

In contrast, 41-year-old Alberto, from Colombia, stated: 'In my case, the arrival of Venezuelans into the country has been really beneficial. I'm a consultant for call centres and in my company we do remote working. I have a lot of Venezuelans working from home; they're an asset.'

Ivan, a 28-year-old Ecuadorian, expressed his concern about an environment where rights are absent, saying that 'a law should be created to regulate salaries, because Ecuadorians often exploit immigrants for their needs'.

These examples illustrate the perceptions about competition for jobs and economic resources, rooted in the idea of having to fight for work opportunities and spaces, even though there are no accurate data that demonstrate that migration generates more unemployment.

These ideas wrongly pit people against each other in competition for jobs or work opportunities and divert attention away from the real determining factor: it is the obligation of states to guarantee the right to work and social benefits, while the private sector is obliged to comply with employment regulations and standards, regardless of the nationality or origin of the workers.

However, this narrative of ‘competition for resources’ does not appear to take into account the prior, structural situation of the labour markets of the host countries, characterized by high job insecurity and informality (particularly in Peru and Ecuador), nor does it analyse who benefits from this ‘race to the bottom’. In many cases, it is employers who benefit from it, taking advantage of people’s needs, paying less for the same work, maximizing their profits, but failing to comply with labour regulations on salaries, working conditions and benefits; this undermines all workers’ lives, be they nationals or immigrants.

Public services

The data from the study confirms the overwhelming perception that public social services (especially those related to health and, to some extent, education) are saturated. Even people who have a favourable view of migration, who for the purposes of this study are referred to as the ‘pro’ segment,³⁶ believe that ‘public services have collapsed’ in their country.

In the three countries (with a greater emphasis in Colombia), the saturation or weakening of public services, especially healthcare and access to public schools, is explicitly associated with the arrival of people from Venezuela. For example, eight in 10 of the Colombian respondents openly said that social services are collapsing due to the presence of migrants; in Peru and Ecuador, seven in 10 people hold this perception.

Fermín, a 50-year-old Ecuadorian, said in the focus group in his country: ‘People who come from outside, like here, use the health system and [it] becomes saturated, as does any other public service. There’s no policy in place; we don’t have the resources to look after all the people who are coming.’

News coverage and the circulation of content on social media regarding specific incidents at border points, or isolated cases, may be reinforcing this perception of ‘collapse’ and fuelling fears and distrust between host communities and migrants.

Similarly, the notion of the ‘collapse of services’ reinforces a false sense of competition for scarce resources, as it overlooks the pre-existence of public services that were already lacking and insufficient before the arrival of the migrants. It also stirs up questions about why some people are able to access benefits or services while others are not, which detracts from the debate about the duty to guarantee rights for everyone, regardless of their origin or immigration status.

Nonetheless, some people’s position explicitly acknowledges the shortage and low quality of public services prior to the arrival of migrants in the host countries.

For instance, Candelaria, a 25-year-old professional from Ecuador, observed: ‘[members of] my family have migrated to Spain, which is much more developed. It can’t be compared with other countries, because there are work opportunities and [better quality] health services’. Meanwhile, Roberto, a 50-year-old Colombian, said: ‘the big countries plan for the arrival of migrants in their economies. That’s why they have bigger and more developed health systems and as a result they have the capacity. We’re very small; this has taken us by surprise.’

The contribution of migration

The study has revealed that the host populations do not readily see the positive contributions made by migrants. Although it is acknowledged that people from Venezuela have diversified popular tastes or contributed in some areas, such as with 'salsa bands', these are almost cosmetic perceptions rather than demonstrating a real understanding and assimilation of migrants' contributions.

For example, according to the study, there is a strong perception in the three countries that migration does not benefit the national economy. One figure reveals that 64.3% of the population of Peru believes that migrants take much more than they put in; this perception is also widely held in Ecuador (48%) and Colombia (56%).

In contrast to this perception, another study in Peru³⁷ demonstrates how the formal and informal economic activities of migrants from Venezuela have contributed more than USD 600 million to Peru's GDP, accounting for 0.3% of Peruvian GDP in 2019, which has helped invigorate the economy and maintain levels of growth in the country.

The same study underlines a particular characteristic of Venezuelan migrants in Peru (which can be extrapolated to Chile, Argentina and other countries): in many cases, they have technical and vocational training, a command of foreign languages and other skills that contribute to the quality, competitiveness and innovation of industries and services. With adequate access to labour supply and guaranteed salaries and rights, Venezuelan migrants could make a tangible and visible contribution to the host communities and societies.

In addition, initiatives like Cenderos in Costa Rica, for migrants from Nicaragua, demonstrate how a holistic community- and rights-based approach, called 'inclusive communities', can lead to the integration of migrants and generate benefits at the local level in the host countries, promoting their presence in areas where there are opportunities and demand for labour, in productive projects that boost the region, which improves services, reduces violence and guarantees the exercise of rights.³⁸

5 EVER-PRESENT SEXISM

The study provides conclusive results that reveal how deeply ingrained chauvinistic views are in the societies of the three countries. The arrival of Venezuelan migrants in these societies has served as an excuse to exacerbate the pre-existing sexism, which is fed by stereotypes about Venezuelan women.

However, it is difficult to demonstrate a direct link between this deep-rooted sexist perception in the societies of the host countries and the violence to which migrant women are subjected. Indeed, as pointed out by the Gender-Based Violence Working Group of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), cases of gender-based violence are under-reported due to the irregular situation of migrant women and girls, and the fears associated with reporting, as well as the lack of data disaggregated by sex, age, place of origin, immigration status, etc.³⁹

The quantitative study revealed that almost half of respondents in the three countries considered that the majority of immigrant women would end up engaging in prostitution.

Given how widespread this perception was, it was explored in greater depth in the qualitative study. A particular framing was identified with regard to women from Venezuela, based on a conflating of economic insecurity, women and sexualization. It is explicitly acknowledged that migrants from Venezuela face insecurity and vulnerability, in the face of which – the interviewees assume – prostitution and sex work offer a ‘way out’.

Alberto, 41, a call centre consultant in Colombia, considered that it was ‘much more feasible for a migrant man to find a decent job than [...] a migrant woman with a child. If that child is hungry and asking for food, she will go to great lengths for her child. Whereas a man, even if he has a child, has a much harder heart.’

Luz Ángela, a self-employed 36-year-old Colombian, added: ‘of course, as they come to Colombia and don’t have work opportunities, and they have their children, it [prostitution] is their only option’.

Meanwhile, 36-year-old Josefina, a trader from Peru, offers a more nuanced perspective: ‘I think [women from Venezuela] take advantage of their looks to get ahead, but they’re also hard workers. There are Venezuelan women who engage in prostitution out of necessity. But there are others who put on their hats and shoes and go out to work.’

Luz Ángela, from Colombia, also added: ‘I’ve seen that there’s a big difference between men and women. As well as having to deal with poverty and the difficult times, they have to deal with harassment and those types of [sexual] comments because men find them attractive.’

The people interviewed acknowledge that there is an explicit relationship between Venezuelan women’s appearance, the prevalent sexism in the societies studied, the precarious conditions under which they migrate and the real threat of being captured by human trafficking, smuggling and sexual exploitation networks.

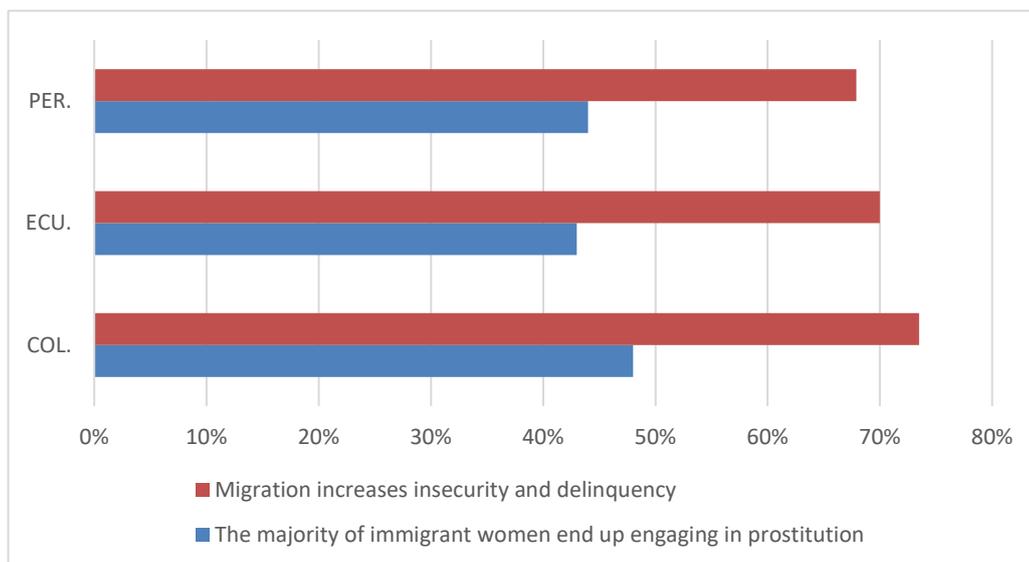
At the same time, reinforcing an ambivalent factor, the majority of the people surveyed consider that women should be given more help because they face greater problems when they migrate: 62.0% in Colombia, 63.7% in Ecuador and 51.5% in Peru.

In this respect, there are arguments that reinforce patriarchal stereotypes and 'naturalized' care roles for women. Talking about the employment of Venezuelan women in domestic work in his country, 30-year-old Javier, an Ecuadorian employee, said: 'I think that, because women are weaker, they're calmer'. Reacting immediately, 33-year-old Lucía, a self-employed professional from Ecuador, added: 'as women, there's always that mentality as [they are also] homemakers and won't destroy the property, they'll keep it clean.'

Thus, the constructed image of migrant women from Venezuela exposes them to greater risks of abuse, patriarchal exploitation and violence, job insecurity and the reproduction of stereotypes that view them in reproductive and care roles or, as has already been seen, subjected to sexual exploitation.⁴⁰

Reflecting the patriarchal and sexist views in these societies, roughly seven in 10 of the people consulted in the three countries associate crime with migration (73.5% in Colombia, 67.9% in Ecuador and 70.0% in Peru consider that immigration 'increases crime and insecurity') and identify crime as being a characteristic of migrant men in particular.

Figure 1. Perception of prostitution and delinquency associated with migration



Source: data from the study. Prepared by the authors.

The study conclusively reveals the existence of an environment that fosters violence and sexist notions and highlights the fact that care must be taken to not hypersexualize Venezuelan women and girls, and not condescend them by imposing sexist roles and stereotypes on them.

Moreover, special attention should be given to analysing norms, policies and perceptions about the role of migrant women in the care economy, which is marked by job insecurity, risk and disregard for their rights and potential. It is important to seek assertive angles to communicate about the transformational leadership of migrant women, sharing stories of empowerment and triumph.

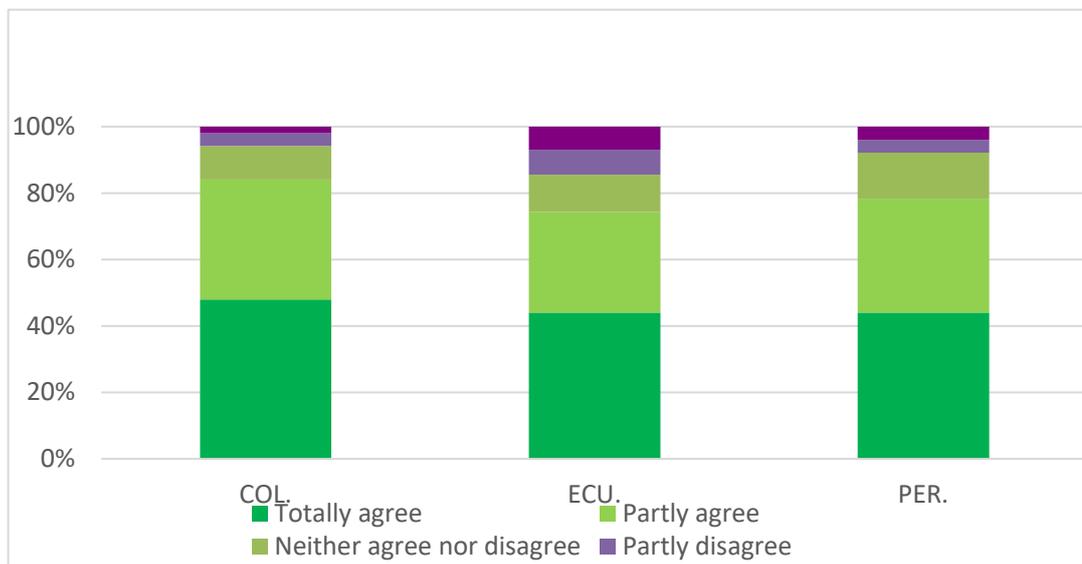
6 DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND INTEGRATION

The characteristics of ambivalent people including having changing or even contradictory opinions about a given issue. For example, they believe in people's power to demand and achieve social change (eight in 10 of the people consulted), although the majority do not actively participate in those changes (on average 71% of the respondents do not engage in those types of actions).

Another feature that characterizes the profile of ambivalent people in the three countries is their perception of their own level of racism compared with how they perceive racism among the population as a whole. Although most of the people interviewed do not view themselves as racist — only one or two in 10 (extremely racist) —, they generally consider the rest of society to be racist (around five or six in 10). Furthermore, there is a high level of concern around racism and xenophobia (around 80%).

The study also shows that there is genuine concern among people in the host countries — who recognize the danger that migrants face as they are sometimes blamed for things unfairly or based on rumours and misinformation — who at the same time acknowledge that migrants should be helped and that there should be greater tolerance towards them.

Figure 2. I would like to be more tolerant of migrants



Source: data from the study. Prepared by the authors .

Many people in the three countries have direct experiences of migration, especially emigration and internal mobility (or displacement): Peru, in the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia, as a result of the long armed conflict and the ongoing violence, and Ecuador, in the 1990s (to Spain, for example), have all experienced situations of mass emigration.

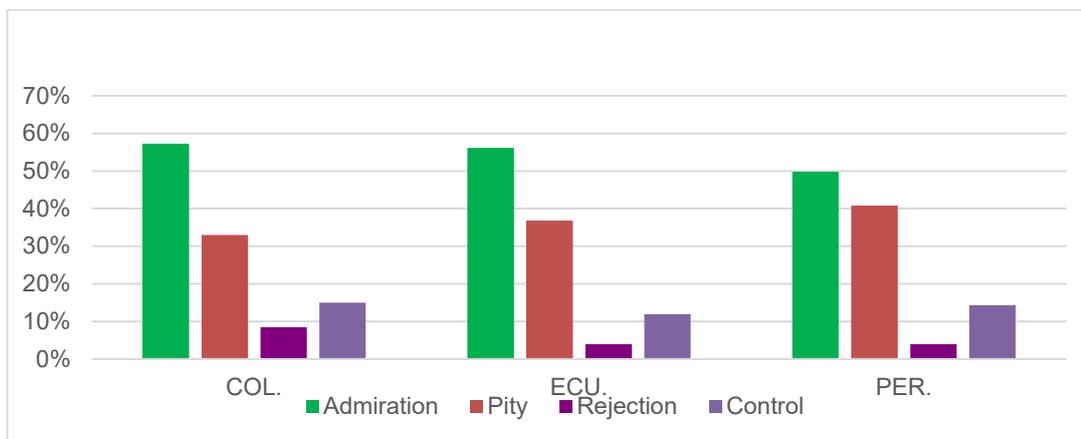
A significant proportion of ambivalent respondents said they had some type of relationship with a foreigner in their day-to-day lives, while seven in 10 people in Peru and Ecuador, and six in 10 in Colombia feel that the majority of immigrants

make an effort to integrate into the societies of those countries. However, only 30% of respondents in Colombia, 35% in Peru and 38% in Ecuador consider that ‘the impact of migration is positive for the country on a cultural level’.

Most people in the three countries think that migrants should return to their place of origin ‘as soon as the situation improves’. However, if the current situation in these three South American countries is compared with mobility processes elsewhere in the world, the reality indicates that we are seeing an initial stage of slow and progressive demographic change in the region and that it is not a short-term or passing phenomenon.

Therefore, it is necessary to highlight the human experiences behind the migration; not focus on the statistics but rather on the individual stories and the circumstances that prompted those people to migrate, describing the fears and emotions that drove them to leave their country and journey through the region with the aim of meeting basic needs denied in their country of origin.

Figure 3. The word ‘immigrant’ makes me feel...



Source: data from the study. Prepared by the authors.

Another aspect explored by the study is spontaneous reactions to the word ‘migrant’. In all three countries, the majority of the population feels ‘admiration’ for migrants, although the words ‘pity’ and ‘control’ were also fairly common responses. While ‘pity’ generates momentary empathy, it ultimately paralyzes people and does not stimulate action or social demands, while the reference to ‘control’ – or, worse still, ‘rejection’ – indicates a negative attitude towards integration.

According to other surveys,⁴¹ there is a rising feeling of rejection, which strengthens stances calling for greater control and political measures designed to curb the migration flow. If these narratives and policies take root, the ambivalent population may be pushed further towards frustration (and anger against migration), increasing social tensions.

7 PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY AND BORDERS

‘Creating borders is pointless’, it does not curb the flow of people and results in more irregular migration, crime and rights violations.⁴² However, the majority of the people interviewed in the three countries believe that the immigration laws governing entry and residence are very permissive, and that ‘the borders should be more tightly controlled’ to restrict the inflow of more migrants.

The belief that ‘migration leads to more migration’ is widely held: only one in 10 Colombians do not believe in the ‘pull effect’ of migration, and between one and two in 10 in Peru and Ecuador.

These fears about the pull and becoming overwhelmed by migrants, crossed with other data from the study, such as the absence of concrete references about the contributions made by migration in the host countries, end up reinforcing the perception that ‘immigration is negative for the country’.

During the focus group in Peru, Irene, a 36-year-old woman, recounted: ‘my friends called me and said: ‘In Venezuela, it’s safe to walk about now because there are no longer any thieves there; they’ve all come to our country’. Why? Because there are no border controls, so they’ve been let through, [...] The lax border controls have allowed all sorts of people to come into the country.’

As mentioned above, there is a direct association between migration and crime, which may clash with the governments’ limited capacity to control the flow at the borders.⁴³

South America’s borders are characterized by being ‘porous’, saturated crossing points with populations in constant movement and full-scale cross-border trade. There are thousands of miles of borders with only an intermittent presence of law enforcement or immigration officers, large economic zones with various activities, including illegal activities and instability, the presence of paramilitary and parastatal forces, and so on⁴⁴.

The most obvious effect is that public pressure could rise, whipped up by certain media outlets and opinion formers, for governments to close or restrict border crossings. That would lead to an increase in flows via irregular ‘green routes’ and greater risks of extortion, violence, exploitation, smuggling and trafficking. In short, there would be a rise in violations of the rights of people on the move and increased precariousness of conditions.

Another effect would be heightened discontent in public opinion, as it is known that closing or restricting official border crossings does not reduce migration flows, but simply makes them more precarious. This feeling of frustration and discontent could be fuelled by politicization and exploitation of the issue by anti-immigration policy-makers and/or civil society groups.

In view of this, maintaining and deepening responsible border policies aimed at facilitating legal and safe routes, based on respect for international human rights law and migration flow plans in the host countries are more effective measures that

enable less chaotic management and defuse the media sensationalism (which is amplified in social networks) about the 'saturation and collapse' of borders, while also reducing political discourses based on 'border control' narratives.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study reveal that anti-immigration narratives are starting to exploit pre-existing fears, which is increasingly leading people who were previously undecided to adopt an anti-immigration stance and is heightening xenophobic and discriminatory feelings.

The rise in xenophobia, discrimination and gender-based violence against Venezuelan migrants in the host countries needs to be addressed with greater care and attention.

The increase in xenophobic and discriminatory feelings is widening the social divide in the host countries; moreover, it is intensifying the risks and vulnerabilities faced by migrants, especially women and girls.

Responsible communication based on evidence and rights is necessary to avoid migration becoming the target of blame and dissatisfaction that are not actually attributable to it, but rather are the result of pre-existing shortcomings and inequalities that have not been adequately addressed. As well as exacerbating xenophobia and discrimination, this diverts attention from the real causes of these situations and, therefore, their possible solutions, thus perpetuating the inattention and injustice.

Assertive, responsible, rights-based communication also saves lives.

Recommendations to avoid heightening xenophobia and discrimination through the media and public communications

- Media and public influencers should use approaches that humanize and explore the causes that are forcing hundreds of thousands of people to leave their country.
- Reports and other news pieces should correctly contextualize the information so as not to generate unfounded fears⁴⁵ and avoid migration being used as a scapegoat for pre-existing problems. Care should be taken to avoid unnecessarily or disproportionately associating migration with ideas that spark or heighten fears ('collapse', borders 'out of control', prostitution, crisis, etc.) and blame migrants for pre-existing problems (insecurity, violence, precarious employment, lack of public services), be it through language or images.
- Using investigative journalism and statistics, stories should be promoted that demonstrate the contributions that migrants make to the host and home societies, based on the evidence available.
- Messages that use differentiating terms that fuel an 'us and them' discourse should be avoided, opting instead for stories that convey universal emotions and allow people to identify with the situation of the migrants.⁴⁶
- It is recommended to use images and words that are not associated with the fears on which the anti-immigration discourse is constructed, such as invasion, threat or insecurity. Instead, it is recommended to use images and words that humanize, dignify and highlight the value of each person.

- In particular, information pieces that encourage sexual violence against women, and perpetuate the hyper-sexualization of their appearance and the roles imposed on migrant women and girls in the host societies should be avoided. Communication angles should be sought that do not reinforce sexualized or sexist profiles.

General recommendations for addressing migration in host countries

- International migration is a complex phenomenon that must be effectively managed for the good of the individuals and communities in the countries of origin, transit and destination, fully guaranteeing fundamental rights.
- Governments and multilateral organizations should share responsibility for meeting people's humanitarian need, including those resulting from population displacements. In this regard, it should be remembered that 4.4 million people have left Venezuela, while more than 7 million still in the country require humanitarian assistance and protection.
- All countries should implement a responsible, evidence-based migration policy that incorporates human mobility and migrants and refugees in development plans. This involves:
 - Ensuring appropriate and responsible management of borders, in accordance with international human rights law, guaranteeing the right to seek asylum and respect for the principle of non-refoulement.
 - Tackling sexism and gender-based violence against migrant women and girls through public policies in the transit and host countries, that address their differentiated needs and ensure effective protection and guarantees for a life free of violence.
 - Guaranteeing access to quality basic services for migrants and the local populations, applying the principle of non-discrimination based on immigration status, as well as social cohesion and inclusion.
 - Enforcing specific public policies and legislation to prevent and punish the labour exploitation of migrants.⁴⁷
 - Promoting a responsible, evidence-based public discourse that puts the migration debate back in the field of facts and values, fighting xenophobia, misinformation and hate speech against migrants.
 - Offering tools to citizens (information, training, media and social network literacy) that increase their capacity to identify and neutralize misinformation and xenophobic and sexist hate speech.

NOTES

- ¹ Figures as of October 2019. Monitoring of estimated figures for the flow of migrants from Venezuela can be seen at: <https://r4v.info/es/situations/platform#> (last accessed: 15/10/2019).
- ² Venezuela Humanitarian Response Plan of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Humanitarian programme cycle July-December 2019. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20190814%20HRP_VENEZUELA.pdf (last accessed: 09/09/2019).
- ³ This qualitative and quantitative study focuses on analysing perceptions and narratives regarding the migration of people from Venezuela through the frames constructed by the populations in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. See section 2, Methodology, page 4.
- ⁴ J Martínez Pizarro (ed.) (2008). *América Latina y el Caribe: migración internacional, derechos humanos y desarrollo*. Santiago de Chile: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- ⁵ D Acosta, C Blouin, C and L Feline Freier. (2019). *La emigración venezolana: respuestas latinoamericanas*. Working Paper Series, Fundación Carolina, 3/2019 (2da época). Available at https://www.fundacioncarolina.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/DT_FC_03.pdf (updated, 08/05/2019).
- ⁶ Figures available as of October 2019. Monitoring of estimated figures for the flow of migrants from Venezuela can be seen at: <https://r4v.info/es/situations/platform#> (last accessed: 15/10/2019).
- ⁷ Statement by Eduardo Stein, Joint UNHCR-IOM Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, 29 August 2019. Available at <https://www.iom.int/es/news/la-situacion-de-las-personas-refugiadas-y-migrantes-venezolanas-necesita-una-mayor-atencion> (last accessed: 09/09/2019).
- ⁸ Venezuela Humanitarian Response Plan of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Humanitarian programme cycle July-December 2019. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20190814%20HRP_VENEZUELA.pdf (last accessed: 09/09/2019).
- ⁹ This report includes a conceptual annex where the conceptual focus and discussion about important definitions in the study are developed in greater detail and depth.
- ¹⁰ E Garzón and C Santamaría (2018). Communicating About Migration. Guide by Oxfam Intermón (Spain). Available at <https://www.oxfamintermon.org/sites/default/files/documentos/documentos/guia-comunicacion-migraciones.pdf> (last accessed: 10/09/2019).
- ¹¹ J Ramajo (2018). '¿Por qué cala más el discurso anti-migratorio? Pistas para desterrar 'avalancha' y otros conceptos negativos' in Eldiario.es, 11 July 2018. Available at: https://www.eldiario.es/andalucia/anti-migratorio-Pistas-desterrar-avalancha-conceptos_0_791621153.html (last accessed: 16/09/2019).
- ¹² The work team is grateful for the collaboration of Christian Ferreyra, a member of Oxfam's Regional Platform in Latin America and the Caribbean, in the gathering of data and the drafting of this section of the report.
- ¹³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Monitoring Global Population Trends) <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.asp>
- ¹⁴ Contexto mundial sobre Inmigración y sus consecuencias, Diego Beltrand, IOM 2018 http://parlAmericas.org/uploads/documents/Diego_Beltrand_S3_SPA.pdf
- ¹⁵ IOM (2018). World Migration Report 2018.
- ¹⁶ IOM (2018). World Migration Report 2018, page 13.
- ¹⁷ 'Human mobility' is a broad concept that has different uses and interpretations. Human migration is complex and results from various circumstances. The term human mobility is used to refer to people migrating across borders, regardless of their nationality or the time period, which may be of their own free will (with no external pressure) or due to forced situations such as coercion, including threats to their lives or livelihoods, resulting from either natural or human causes. This concept is further elaborated in the Conceptual Focus annex. See more in IOM (2019). Conceptos generales sobre la migración. Available at <http://www.oim.org.co/node/13> (last accessed: 11/09/2019).
- ¹⁸ https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/43947/1/S1800526_es.pdf
- ¹⁹ Between 1990 and 2010, the growth rate of the migrant population in the 'most developed regions' was 2.3%, falling considerably to 1.4% between 2010 and 2015. By contrast, the 'least developed regions', which in 1990 had a negative growth rate, saw an increase of 3.7% in the five-year period from 2010 to 2015. In 2017, both types of regions had a similar rate of 2.0%. Data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 revision (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2017). https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/data/UN_MigrantStockTotal_2017.xlsx (last accessed: 09/09/2019).
- ²⁰ Global Migration Indicators (2018). Insights from the Global Migration Data Portal: www.migrationdataportal.org
- ²¹ IOM (2018). *World Migration Report 2018*. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2018_en.pdf
- ²² OAS (2017). *International Migration in the Americas. Fourth Report of the Continuous Reporting System on International Migration in the Americas (SICREMI)* <https://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/SICREMI-2017-English-web-FINAL.pdf>
- ²³ IOM (2018). *World Migration Report 2018*.
- ²⁴ 'Mixed flows' is a term that is still under discussion and contains different nuances depending on the definition adopted. Taking the definition of the Mixed Migration Centre, we understand mixed flows as 'cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have different legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey.' An overview of the concept through the lenses of different organizations is presented here: <http://www.mixedmigrationhub.org/member->

- [agencies/what-mixed-migration-is/](#) (last accessed: 16/08/2019).
- ²⁵ IOM (2018). *World Migration Report 2018*.
- ²⁶ Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017, UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf%20>
- ²⁷ Global Migration Indicators 2018. Insights from the Global Migration Data Portal: www.migrationdataportal.org
- ²⁸ Global Migration Indicators 2018. Insights from the Global Migration Data Portal: www.migrationdataportal.org
- ²⁹ IOM (2018). *World Migration Report 2018*.
- ³⁰ 'Migrants contributed 6.7 trillion US dollars to global GDP in 2015 – a share of 9.4% of the total global GDP that year'. Global Migration Indicators 2018. Insights from the Global Migration: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/global_migration_indicators_2018.pdf (last accessed: 11/09/2019).
- ³¹ I Leonardelli and G Lathrop (2017). 'La migración como estrategia de adaptación al cambio climático' in En Movimiento, blog of the IOM Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean. Available at: <https://rosanjoese.iom.int/site/es/blog/la-migraci-n-como-estrategia-de-adaptaci-n-al-cambio-clim-tico> (last accessed: 09/09/2019).
- ³² P Galeana (Coordinator). *Historia comparada de las migraciones en las Américas*. Mexico City: National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Available at https://comisiones.ipgh.org/HISTORIA/assets/historia_comparada_de_las_migraciones_en_las_am%c3%a9ricas_tomo-4.pdf (last accessed: 18/10/2019).
- ³³ N Marín Navas (30 June 2019). 'La gente no migra porque se le da la gana', *President of Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders in Latin America*, interview with Germán Casas. *El Espectador*. Available at <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/el-mundo/la-gente-no-migra-porque-se-le-da-la-gana-director-para-latinoamerica-de-medicos-sin-fronteras-articulo-868363> (last accessed: 26/08/2019).
- ³⁴ E Garzón and C Santamaría (2018). *Communicating About Migration*. Oxfam Intermón. Available at <https://www.oxfamintermon.org/sites/default/files/documentos/documentos/guia-comunicacion-migraciones.pdf> (last accessed: 20/08/2019).
- ³⁵ All the names used are fictitious, in accordance with the collaboration agreement during the focus groups of the qualitative study carried out in the three countries between June and July 2019.
- ³⁶ The 'pro' population is considered to be those people who are clearly in favour of immigration back up by well-defined reasons, with arguments, data and feelings that support their position.
- ³⁷ A Mendoza (2019). [*En tierra no tan hermana, oportunidades y desafíos de la migración venezolana al Perú*]. Paper not yet published.
- ³⁸ The Centre for the Social Rights of Migrants (Cenderos) is a long-term project in Costa Rica, which works with migrants from Nicaragua at the community level with a rights approach. For this report, the director of Cenderos, Marisol Amador, was interviewed. See more at <https://cenderos.org/> (last accessed: 16/09/2019).
- ³⁹ R4V (2019). *Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela*. January-December 2019. Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. Available at <https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/download/67282> (last accessed: 23/09/2019).
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- ⁴³ See the press release of the Joint UNHCR-IOM Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Eduardo Stein, who mentions the risk of border closures or restrictions, pointing out that the direct effect is to 'force them into making irregular journeys, leading to trafficking and smuggling, and exacerbating their vulnerabilities'. UNHCR (2019), press release: 'Situation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants needs greater global attention'. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/8/5d67c6e94/situation-venezuelan-refugees-migrants-needs-greater-global-attention.html> (last accessed: 03/09/2019).
- ⁴⁴ E Sanchez de Rojas (2016). *Las fronteras 'porosas' de Sudamérica: ¿líneas divisorias o áreas de cooperación?* Analysis Document, 39/2016. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE). Available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2016/DIEEEA39-2016_Fronteras_Porosas_Sudamerica_ESRD.pdf (last accessed: 03/09/2019).
- ⁴⁵ Oxfam has prepared and published a *Guide for Communicating about Migration* which is intended for journalists, communications officers of public and private institutions, academics and other actors to communicate about migration in a more effective and human way. Free download: <https://www.oxfamintermon.org/sites/default/files/documentos/documentos/guia-comunicacion-migraciones.pdf> (last accessed: 02/09/2019).
- ⁴⁶ V Carvajal, L Rodríguez-Alarcón and V Velasco (2019). *Siete puntos clave para crear nuevas narrativas sobre los movimientos de las personas en el mundo*. porCausa Narrativas. Available at https://porcausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/porCausa_Nuevas_Narrativas_8_mayo_2019-1.pdf
- ⁴⁷ A Mendoza (2019). *Ibid.*

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