



Elements to understand the challenges of migration

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Migration in Colombia and Public Policy Responses

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Abstract

After almost two hundred years in which there was very little migration to Colombia, 2016 saw exponential growth in the arrival of migrants from Venezuela. There was also an increase in migrants in transit from the Caribbean, especially Haiti, who pass through Colombia to other destinations. This change is posing major public policy challenges at both the national and local levels. The State needs to make a significant effort to regularize the legal status of the migrant population and provide them with opportunities for work, education and health services, among other things.

This paper describes the dynamics of migration to Colombia in the last 20 years, focusing on recent waves of migration. It also describes the socio-economic profiles and main needs of the Venezuelan migrant population intending to remain in the country and examines the public policies and regularization mechanisms adopted by the last two Governments to address these needs. The paper also looks at the emergence of transit migration through Colombia of people travelling to the United States and other destinations. Finally, the paper reviews studies that analyse the circumstances of the migrant population in Colombia and their impact on labour markets, security and other areas. It also discusses the main challenges and opportunities that migration will bring in the coming years and puts forward policy recommendations to continue providing responses to the challenges posed by migration.

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1. Introduction

Following the two years of the COVID pandemic, the number of migrants that have settled in Colombia has climbed back above the historic high point. Furthermore, the country is once again a transit route for thousands of people heading to other destinations. Colombia continues to be the world's largest recipient of migrants fleeing the economic collapse, insecurity and lack of opportunities in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: there are now almost 2.5 million Venezuelan migrants seeking to remain in the country.² In 2021, around 95,000 migrants from Haiti and other countries once again began the long, dangerous journey along Colombia's Caribbean coast and through the Darién Gap and Panama in the hope of reaching the United States.³

After implementing two positive initiatives to regularize the migrant population (the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants in 2018 and the Special Stay Permit between 2017 and 2020), the Colombian Government carried out the largest regularization initiative in the country's history in 2021 and 2022: the Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants. Through the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants, the Government sought to register and identify the entire Venezuelan migrant population residing in Colombia, including those whose migration status was irregular, in order to understand their sociodemographic profiles and needs. Both central and local government authorities deem this information to be essential to being able to design better migration-related public policies. The Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants is a mechanism through which the Government can grant people who have registered with the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants an identity document that allows them to work, attend educational establishments, participate in social programmes, access the financial system and join the health and pension systems on equal terms with the local population. The Special Stay Permit, which is described in detail in section 6.4, is valid for ten years and allows those who meet certain requirements to apply for a residence visa to stay in Colombia indefinitely.

Regularization ushered in a new stage in the response to the current wave of migration. The current approach should enable better connections between humanitarian and emergency aid, on the one hand, and stabilization and development, on the other, through initiatives to further the social and economic integration of the migrant, refugee and returnee population, allowing them to access Colombia's social protection system through contributory or subsidized mechanisms. However, questions remain as to where the resources will come from to help local authorities cover the tax burdens associated with the migrant population's access to health, education, social programmes and other protection services.

In 2018, the Santos Administration (2010–2018) launched a large-scale, two-year regularization process that reached more than 400,000 people. The Duque Administration (2018–2022) extended the regularization process to include a population six times larger over a ten-year period. While this initiative is extremely valuable when it comes to furthering the social inclusion of the migrant population in the country, it has prompted the need to include the regularized population in the formal labour market, the health and pension system, and social programmes targeting the most vulnerable sectors of the population. The Colombian Government is also facing major challenges, namely: i) improving and coordinating sector-specific public policies to assist the migrant population; ii) ensuring that the data systems of state agencies contain information that is complete and integrated; and iii) fully guaranteeing the rights and protection of the migrant population, especially the most vulnerable members.

² According to official figures from Migración Colombia (2022), there were 2,477,588 Venezuelan migrants in Colombia in February 2022, 295,038 of whom had irregular migration statuses.

³ According to estimates by Panamanian authorities cited by the New York Times (2021), more than 95,000 migrants crossed the Colombian side of the Darién Gap in the first nine months of 2021, and thousands more remained on the Colombian side of the border.

In Colombia, there is a broad consensus among the main political sectors, academic establishments, civil society organizations and the Colombian State on the need to support the migrant population, recognize their rights, improve public policies targeting migrants, facilitate their inclusion in society and the labour market, and take advantage of the enormous benefits that migration could bring to the country. However, more than half of the local population⁴ and the Colombian business community⁵ distrust the migrant population, and a large proportion of the national population is unwilling to participate in programmes seeking to further migrant inclusion.

This paper describes the circumstances of the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia, including both irregular and regular migrants. The irregular migrant population are those residing in Colombia who are not legally authorized to remain in the country. The regular migrant population is made up of individuals who have been authorized to remain in Colombian territory legally as a result of regularization programmes, and who thus have access to formal employment and social services. By examining large-scale regularization programmes, this paper discusses the transition from irregular to regular migration status and analyses pending challenges in this regard. It also looks at the situation of migrants in transit who are nationals of countries other than Venezuela, who do not have access to regularization programmes and therefore receive a very different response from the State, which is limited to providing these foreigners with protection while they are in the country and support when they travel onward to Panama and other destinations. It should be clarified that this document does not refer to the more than 2 million Venezuelan migrants residing in Colombia as “refugees”, as this is not the term that the State uses to identify them. Colombia does not grant refugee status to those who migrate for economic reasons or in search of better opportunities. Instead, the term “refugee” is used to describe those fleeing political, ethnic or religious persecution or armed conflict, and is also used to refer to those who would be at risk of torture or cruel punishment if they returned to their countries of origin (Decree 1067 of 2015).

This paper is organized as follows: section 2, which follows this introduction, analyses the data available in different information systems to characterize migration in Colombia over the last ten years. Section 3 describes the main migration flows in the country, section 4 focuses on Venezuelan migration, and section 5 looks at the migrant population in transit to other destinations. Section 6 examines the main national and local public policies implemented to assist the migrant population, section 7 analyses the social and economic effects of migration, and section 8 discusses the challenges and opportunities associated with migration and puts forward specific public policy recommendations to address these. Finally, the paper ends with a brief conclusion section.

2. Available data on migration in Colombia

The data sources available on migration in Colombia are very good, comparatively speaking. Migration Colombia, the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) and the National Planning Department (DNP) continually collect data and conduct regular surveys that acquire data on the migrant population much more effectively than in most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

For example, in 2021, the DANE published the results of the Pulse of Migration Survey, conducted with support from the World Bank and the University of Rosario. This survey takes a subsample of the Major Integrated Household Survey to collect data on the permanent migrant population. During the first round, some 4,000 households in 23 cities were surveyed. The target population was Venezuelan migrants aged 15 years or older residing in Colombian

⁴ According to an Invamer survey in April 2021, 64 percent of the Colombian population distrust Venezuelans residing in Colombia.

⁵ According to data from a recent study by the Ideas for Peace Foundation and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation discussed later in this paper (Fundación Ideas para la Paz and Fundación Konrad Adenauer, 2021).

territory with the intention of remaining in the country. The survey was repeated every two months until four rounds had been completed. This paper draws on the results of the first and fourth rounds, conducted in July and August 2021 and March and April 2022, respectively.⁶

The Survey on the Quality of Life and Integration of Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia (hereafter referred to in this paper as the Quality of Life Survey) was conducted by *Semana* magazine's Venezuela Migration Project to understand the living conditions of the Venezuelan migrant population, measure progress on their inclusion in society and estimate how they were impacted by the COVID crisis. The survey collected data from 1,604 households comprising 7,119 persons. Each household was contacted by telephone. The sample included households benefiting from the Coalition for Venezuela and the Emergency Response programme in Arauca, which covers 99 municipalities, including Bogotá.⁷ Given that the survey is based on the records of programmes that are currently in operation, the sample is biased: it does not cover the population that is not covered by such programmes either individually or as a household.

Likewise, the best data source on the Venezuelan migrant population in 2022 will be the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants, part of the Temporary Protection Statute regularization process. It is based on direct records of more than 2 million migrants and will allow both local and national authorities to identify migrants' main assistance-related needs more easily. The registry will be the first comprehensive analysis of the Venezuelan migrant population based on a large-scale data collection process covering almost the entire Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia.

The existing surveys complement each other by functioning as snapshots taken at different times to capture data on the profiles and well-being of the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia. However, as these surveys used different methodologies and were conducted at different times, they may present different data for similar indicators. They should thus be viewed as estimates and not as precise measurements.

The state agencies that deal with the migrant population also collect information on the assistance they are provided in different areas, such as education (through the Integrated Enrolment System and the Ministry of National Education's National Information System on Higher Education, as well as through the National Apprenticeship Service); health (through the Ministry of Health and Social Protection's Integrated Information System on Social Protection) and labour (through the Single Registry of Foreign Workers in Colombia and the data system of the Employment Service at the Ministry of Labour). They also collect data on the Colombian population that has returned to the country (through the Single Registry of Returnees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs); people born in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela who are entitled to Colombian nationality (through the National Civil Registry Office); visas and special residence permits granted to Venezuelan nationals in Colombia (through the Migration Colombia Special Administrative Unit) and the assistance provided to children, adolescents, young people and their families (through the Cuéntame information system run by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute).

Other organizations also regularly collect data and publish reports on different aspects of migration in Colombia. The Inter-Agency Group on Mixed Migration Flows was created in 2016 and is led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. It has ties to 77 UN agencies, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Red Cross and continually publishes reports on the situation of the migrant population and their needs in 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since 2019, it has been developing the Regional

⁶ For a full description of the Pulse of Migration Survey, see Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (2021b).

⁷ A complete description of the Survey on the Quality of Life and Integration of Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia is included in Proyecto Migración Venezuela (2021).

Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants, which is an outcome of the joint work carried out by the organizations listed above to identify the needs of the migrant population and create programmes to respond to these.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the IOM and UNHCR are among the international agencies that constantly monitor the situation in Colombia and the region and publish studies and reports. Various Colombian and international government organizations and NGOs, research centres and universities also monitor the rights of the migrant population and the assistance that they are provided and assess how the local population views the migrant population. This paper draws on several of these sources.

As can be seen, various data sources in Colombia provide snapshots or overviews of the migrant population at specific points in time (i.e. the times at which data is collected). All the same, there is a need for a permanent system for collecting and systematizing data that allows trends to be traced over time using a standard methodology.

In 2022, the biggest data-related challenge regarding the migrant population in Colombia will no longer be the lack of initial data but rather the ongoing process of updating and expanding existing data and connecting and integrating the available information among the various agencies that provide services to the migrant population. At present, multiple state agencies collect data and engage in an enormous amount of work to achieve this, which often leads to a certain reluctance to share data, harmonize data collection criteria or accept other agencies taking a leadership role. Through a document of the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES), the Government of Colombia officially stated that there is a need to harmonize and integrate migration statistics. It made the DANE responsible for coordinating this process, which is still under way (CONPES 3950). Likewise, an interoperable data system needs to be established to connect local and national government in a way that effectively uses data from the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants for decision-making and policy design. This system should also enable monitoring of the immigrant population's individual access to integration services and their progress towards becoming less vulnerable.

While the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants will be a valuable source of information on migration, DANE will have to continue its efforts to include regular, ongoing measurements of the situation of the migrant population in household surveys and other instruments to keep the relevant information up-to-date. Some instruments of this sort already exist, such as the Pulse of Migration Survey, along with others that form part of the Social Pulse Survey (such as a study on gender and violence). Given that the permanent migrant population will continue to be a priority in the near future, these need to be systematized. One positive initiative in this direction is the recent creation of the Colombian Observatory on Migration from Venezuela, which reports to the DNP. This observatory brings together data produced by various agencies, produces reports and publishes a migration dashboard. However, it currently functions as a data repository and as a tool for monitoring the provision of social services. Instruments still need to be developed to allow for regular data collection.

3. Migration flows in Colombia

The first waves of emigration from Colombia took place in the 20th Century and involved Colombians leaving their country in search of better opportunities abroad. The first wave took place in the 1960s, while the second began in the mid-1980s and lasted until economic and security conditions improved in Colombia in the late 2000s. In 1985, DANE estimated that 3,378,345 Colombians had emigrated from Colombia, mainly to the United States, Spain and Venezuela. The Colombian migrant population that moved to these and other destinations created communities and support networks that welcomed new waves of migrants for several decades.

According to figures on the entry and exit of Colombians through migration checkpoints collected by the Administrative Department of Security, an average of 200,000 Colombians left the country each year between 1996 and 2005 and did not return. It is estimated that in 2012, a total of 4.7 million Colombians were living abroad, according to data from the Colombia Nos Une [Colombia Brings Us Together] programme.⁸ This figure is similar to the total number of Venezuelans currently living in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

According to UNHCR, 397,600 Colombians residing abroad in 2013 were refugees or in a similar situation, 200,000 of whom were in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela due to the armed conflict in Colombia (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2014).

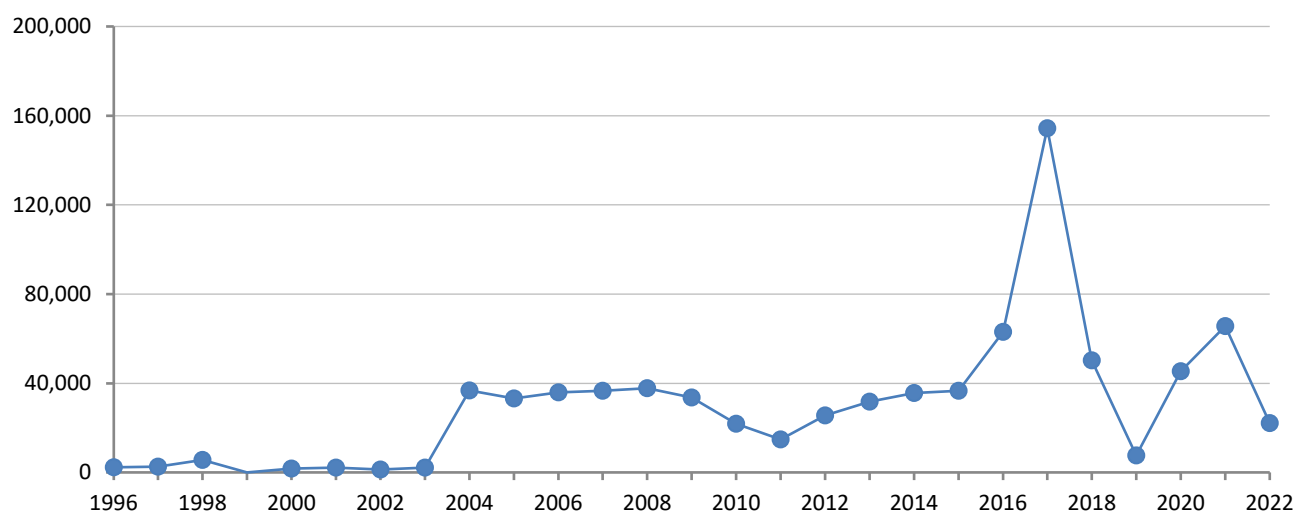
Migration to Colombia was relatively low until 2017 (Aya Smitmans, Carvajal Hernández and Téllez Iregui, 2010). Apart from the immigrants who arrived when the Ottoman Empire fell apart in the first half of the 20th Century, Colombia did not receive migration from Europe and Asia on a similar scale to other South American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru. In contrast, Colombia kept a low profile and was relatively isolated. The situation of the foreign population living in Colombia was made even more difficult by the multiple obstacles that the country imposed on those seeking to settle and work there. The aims of the new migration law, which is discussed below, include making the conditions for migrating legally to Colombia more flexible and taking greater advantage of the benefits of migration.

There is little historical data on the migrant population in Colombia. The 2005 General Census recorded only 109,971 foreigners residing in Colombia out of a total population of 41,468,384 people, meaning that there were fewer than 27 foreigners for every 10,000 people living in the country. A report by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) notes that the cumulative number of migrants in Colombia did not vary significantly between 1990 and 2010 (United Nations, 2009). According to figures from this report, the total number of foreigners residing in Colombia stood at 104,277 in 1990, 109,267 in 1995, 109,609 in 2000, 109,953 in 2005 and 110,297 in 2010 (United Nations, 2009).

As figure 1 shows, according to data on the entry and exit of foreigners via official border checkpoints in 1996–2022, there was a constant positive net balance (more inflows than outflows) in that period, with the exception of 1999. Between 1996 and 2003, the migration balance was low, with a maximum of 5,555 people in 1998 and a minimum of -7 people in 1999. Between 2004 and 2015, the average migration balance was 31,680 foreigners—in other words, during that period, an average of 31,680 foreigners entered Colombia each year, and did not leave the country. After peaking at almost 160,000 people in 2017, these figures dropped again to 50,265 in 2018 and 7,632 in 2019.

⁸ Colombia Nos Une is run by the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme aims to connect the Colombian population living abroad and provide them services, while also encouraging them to return to Colombia. Among other services, the programme helps people who need to open bank accounts in Colombia, helps get academic qualifications officially recognized and offers advice on how to make better use of remittances.

Figure 1. Balance of exits and entries of the foreign population in Colombia, 1996–2022 (number of people)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Migration Colombia, the Administrative Security Department and the National Administrative Department of Statistics.

Note: The data is based on records from official migration checkpoints.

Based on figures from Migration Colombia, between 2012 and 2021, an estimated 1,984,569 Colombians who left the country did not return. In the opposite direction, some 436,540 foreigners who entered through regular migration points did not leave the country. According to these figures, which are only approximate and based on official data on entries and exits, the number of Colombians who emigrated from Colombia in the nearly ten years between 2012 and 2021 is almost on par with the number of Venezuelans who allegedly entered the country in the two years between 2017 and 2019. According to projections by the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), it is estimated that in 2021, almost 1 million Colombians returned to Colombia from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

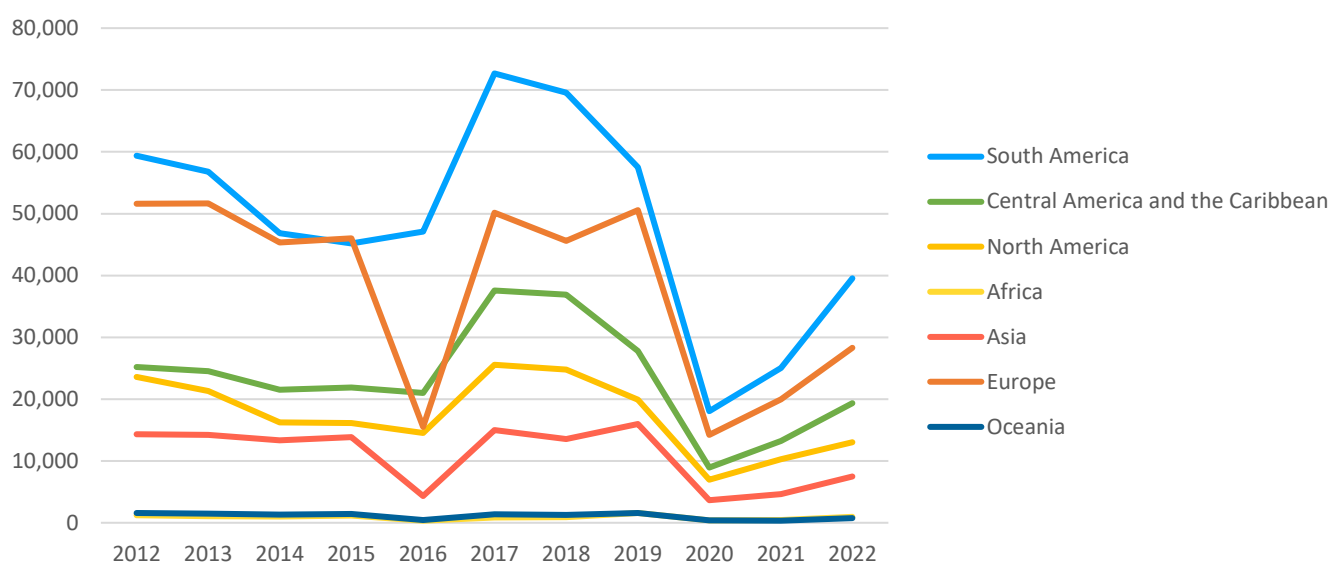
The large numbers of Venezuelan migrants arriving in Colombia are not recorded in the figures shown in figure 1, as these migration flows do not necessarily pass through the country’s official entry and exit points (see section 4).

Venezuelan migration aside, according to official figures, the number of foreigners who obtained work, study, residence and investment visas grew from 387,175 in 2012 to 520,923 in 2019. The largest group of people migrating for these reasons came from South America, followed by Central America (including Mexico), North America and Europe.

Although the scale of these flows are not comparable to the huge numbers of migrants that arrived from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 2017 onwards, the number of foreigners granted study, work, residence and investment visas grew steadily from 2014 until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic⁹ (see figure 2).

⁹ Data collected by DANE in the yearbooks on the international movements of tourists cover 2012–2019. However, more recent data presented by Migration Colombia suggest that the number of foreigners arriving with study, work, residence and investment visas decreased in 2020, probably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the agency notes that has been trending upward again from 2021 onward, as it did from 2014 until the Covid outbreak.

Figure 2. Entries of foreigners to study, work or settle in Colombia by region of origin, 2012–2022 (number of people)

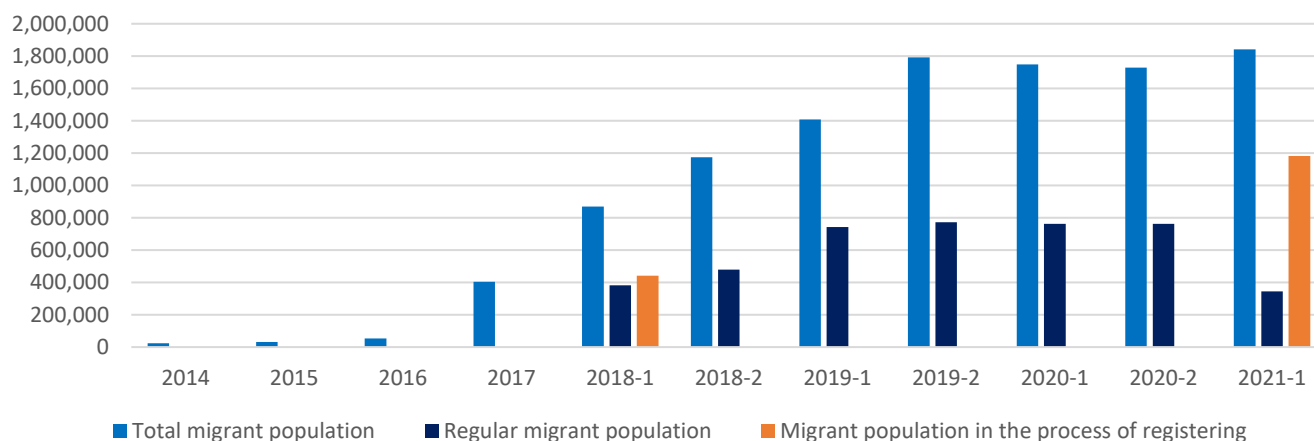


Source: Author based on data from the annual reports on the international movement of people published by the National Administrative Department of Statistics for 2012–2022.

4. Venezuelan migration in Colombia

In 2014, there were only 23,573 Venezuelans living in Colombia, a number that was tiny in comparison to the local population (around 47 million people). As figure 3 shows, according to data from Migration Colombia, Venezuelan migration remained relatively low until 2016, when it reached a total of 53,747 people. In 2017, the number of Venezuelan migrants arriving in the country began to increase dramatically, rising to 403,702 people that year, 1,174,743 in 2018, 1,771,237 in 2019 and 1,825,687 in February 2020, just before Colombia adopted restrictive measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis. According to figures from the 2018 National Population and Housing Census, the total Venezuelan population residing in Colombia grew to represent almost 4 percent of the total population in the national territory that year. In June 2020, the number of Venezuelans in Colombia decreased slightly (to 1,748,716 people) as many migrants returned to their country of origin during the pandemic. However, the number of Venezuelans living in Colombia has increased again since January 2021. It is now estimated that as of mid-2022, just over 2,386,000 Venezuelans have registered with the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants. This represents slightly more than 4 percent of Colombia's total population. The migrant population is likely to continue to grow following the adoption of the Temporary Protection Statute: this allows Venezuelans who enter Colombia via regular means through March 2023 to stay in the country legally and access a work permit and various social programmes. Economic and labour conditions in Colombia are returning to where they were before COVID, which favours migration to the country.

Figure 3. Venezuelan migrant population by migration status in Colombia, 2014-2021 (number of people)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Migration Colombia.

Note: Regular migrants are those who entered Colombia through official migration checkpoints and carry entry permits, visas or other documents accepted by Migration Colombia, or those who have regularized their migration status in the country through regularization programmes. The irregular migrant population include those who did not enter through authorized checkpoints or who stayed on in Colombia longer than they were authorized to stay for and have not benefited from regularization programmes.

Migration Colombia's figures are lower than DANE estimates based on data from the Major Integrated Household Survey,¹⁰ according to which there were already more than 2 million Venezuelans in Colombia by February 2020. According to this survey, this figure dropped to 1,747,327 in June 2020 and remained below 2 million for some time, but then grew rapidly from March 2021, reaching 2,476,701 in June of that year, according to calculations from the Venezuela Migration Project Observatory.

Furthermore, according to projections by the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, in 2021, there were 2,080,000 migrants in Colombia who intended to remain in the country, 162,000 migrants in transit, 1,870,000 circular migrants and 980,000 Colombians who had returned from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Due to normal variations between these measurements, the figure that is generally used is the Migration Colombia estimate, according to which there were 2,477,588 Venezuelan migrants in Colombia in February 2022.

4.1. Profile of the Venezuelan migrant population

This section profiles the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia and their needs for assistance. The economic circumstances of the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia make them highly vulnerable, as does the fact that, until 2021, a large proportion of this population (around 1,500,000 people, according to Migration Colombia figures) were in Colombia irregularly or were in the process of regularizing their migration status, which implies that they do not have access to state services and assistance. The number of migrants with unsatisfied basic needs was estimated at 1,640,000 in 2021 (Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, 2021), or approximately three-quarters of the total migrant population.

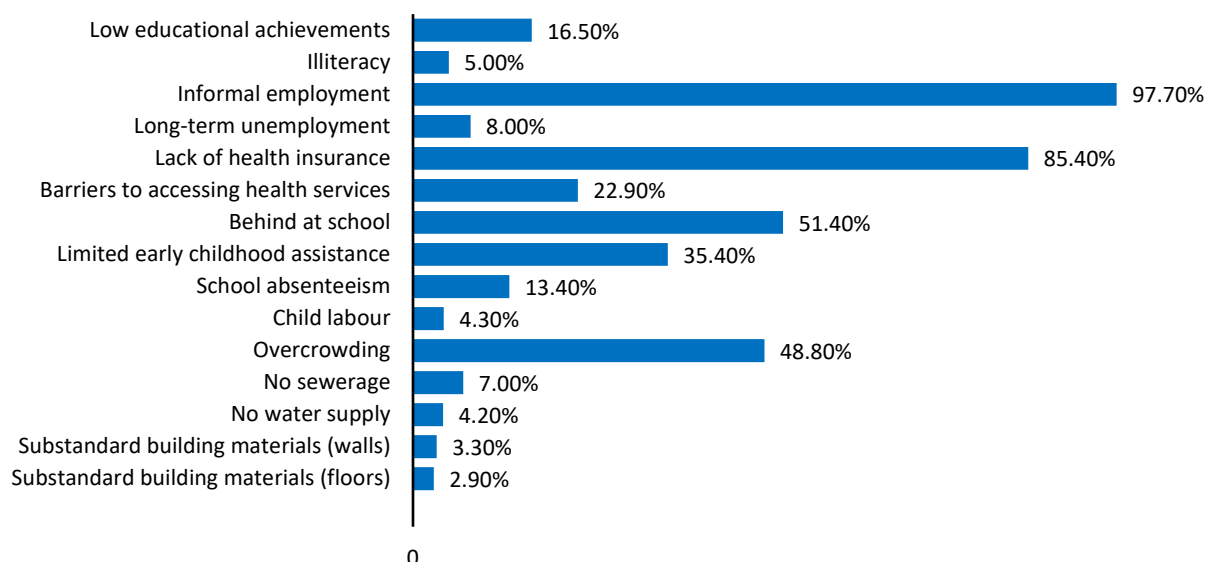
¹⁰ The discrepancies between these figures are due to the different methodologies used to count migrants. Migration Colombia's figures are based on records and estimates of the number of entries and exits from the country, while the Major Integrated Household Survey projects a population total based on a statistical sample of people in Colombian territory.

The main reason that Venezuelan migrants settle in Colombia is to improve their precarious economic circumstances—in other words, they already had unmet needs at the time they entered Colombia. According to the Pulse of Migration Survey, 92 percent of migrants cite this as a major reason for moving to Colombia. Other important reasons include insecurity in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (19 percent), the intention to reunite with family members (15.8 percent), political reasons (10.7 percent) and health reasons (8.4 percent). While slightly more than half of the Venezuelan migrant population claims to have better living conditions in Colombia than they had in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 82.9 percent deem their current situation to be fair, bad or very bad, according to data from the Quality of Life Survey conducted in 2020 by the Venezuela Migration Project.

According to DANE’s 2021 report on monetary poverty, the migrant population experiences much higher poverty levels than the local population. In 2021, 63.4 percent of the migrant population lived in monetary poverty, compared to 39.3 percent of the Colombian population. Likewise, 24.1 percent of the Venezuelan migrant population lived in extreme poverty, as compared to 12.2 percent of Colombians. The effect of poverty on Venezuelan migrant women is particularly worrying: of the total Venezuelan migrant population, 65.9 percent of women and 60.8 percent of men live in poverty.

Figure 4 shows the frequency of the main indicators of multidimensional poverty¹¹ among the Venezuelan migrant population in 2020.¹² Specifically, the multidimensional poverty rate was 44.2 percent in 2020, compared to 18.1 percent among the Colombian population.

Figure 4. Frequency of various indicators of multidimensional poverty among the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia, 2020 (percentages)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the 2020 Survey on Venezuelan Migrants’ Quality of Life and Inclusion.

¹¹ The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a measurement based on indicators of the unmet needs of Colombian households, and includes five categories: i) education; ii) conditions among children and young people; iii) work; iv) health; and v) living conditions and access to public services. The variables included in the MPI are defined in Angulo Salazar, Díaz Cuervo and Pardo (2011).

¹² Other relevant statistics, including more data disaggregated by gender and age group, can be found in the Pulse of Migration Survey 2021 (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, 2021b).

There are limitations in terms of formal employment and health insurance, largely because the migration status of almost the entire migrant population was irregular in 2020. These issues should be at least partly addressed by the Temporary Protection Statute described below. Because the sample data for the Quality of Life Survey was collected before the start of the regularization process implemented through the Temporary Protection Statute, almost all households that included Venezuelan migrants had at least one member who was informally employed, while this was only true for 74.2 percent of all Colombian households. This measure does not reflect the total number of informal workers but rather the percentage of households in Colombia with at least one informal worker. According to figures from the System for Identifying Potential Beneficiaries of Social Programmes (Sisbén), in 2021, the percentage of informal Venezuelan migrant workers in the labour force (i.e. the percentage of people working without a contract and without access to the benefits established by law) was 78.8 percent, far higher than the percentage of Colombian workers in informal employment at the end of 2021 (46.8 percent).¹³ Up-to-date data from the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants is not yet available. It is expected that the regularization of the majority of the Venezuelan migrant population will help bring down informal employment rates and close the gap between migrants and the local population in this regard.

In terms of the migrant population's income, according to the Pulse of Migration Survey, 38.8 percent of the migrant population did not receive any income in the month prior to the survey, while only 51.6 percent received income from work. Some 3.6 percent received money from the Programa de Alimentación Escolar [School Meals Programme]¹⁴ and 3.6 percent did so from Ingreso Solidario [the Income Solidarity Programme].¹⁵ Only 0.2 percent received money from Familias en Acción [Families in Action],¹⁶ 0.5 percent from Colombia Mayor [Older Colombia],¹⁷ and 0.1 percent from Jóvenes en Acción [Young People in Action].¹⁸ Some 48.3 percent of migrant women and 50.5 percent of young migrants did not receive any income. These figures reflect the migrant population's experience at one of the toughest points in the pandemic—their circumstances are expected to improve significantly as the economy recovers and restrictions end.

According to data from the Venezuela Migration Project's Quality of Life Survey, most Venezuelans have access to water and sewerage systems. However, it is worrying that in the country's Caribbean region, 17.8 percent of the migrant population does not.

People who migrate often do so to reunite with family members. Some 67.9 percent of those who migrated from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Colombia did so in the company of other family members, while 26.9 percent migrated alone. Some 96 percent of migrants with a Venezuelan partner have been able to reunite with that partner, either because they migrated together (41.4 percent) or because the partner migrated before them (25.7 percent) or after them (28.8 percent). Some 38.5 percent of all migrant women with a partner of Venezuelan origin migrated after their partner, and 13.2 percent migrated before.

¹³ According to DANE figures based on records from 13 major cities.

¹⁴ The Ministry of Education's School Meals Programme complements children's and adolescents' nutrition with the objective of keeping them in the education system and improving their dietary conditions.

¹⁵ The Colombian Government's Income Solidarity Programme provides financial support to those most in need to mitigate the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on households.

¹⁶ Families in Action is a conditional cash transfer programme that targets the most vulnerable households. As a condition for taking part in the programme, children and adolescents are required to attend school and have check-ups in the health system.

¹⁷ The Older Adult Social Protection System provides an economic subsidy to older people who do not receive a pension or other support or who live in extreme poverty.

¹⁸ Young People in Action is a conditional cash transfer programme that provides support for young people's vocational, technical or technological education.

Likewise, 60 percent of female migrants with children migrated with them, while 25.3 percent joined their children in Colombia. In contrast, just 29.9 percent of men migrated with their children, although those that did not were nearly all joined by their children eventually.

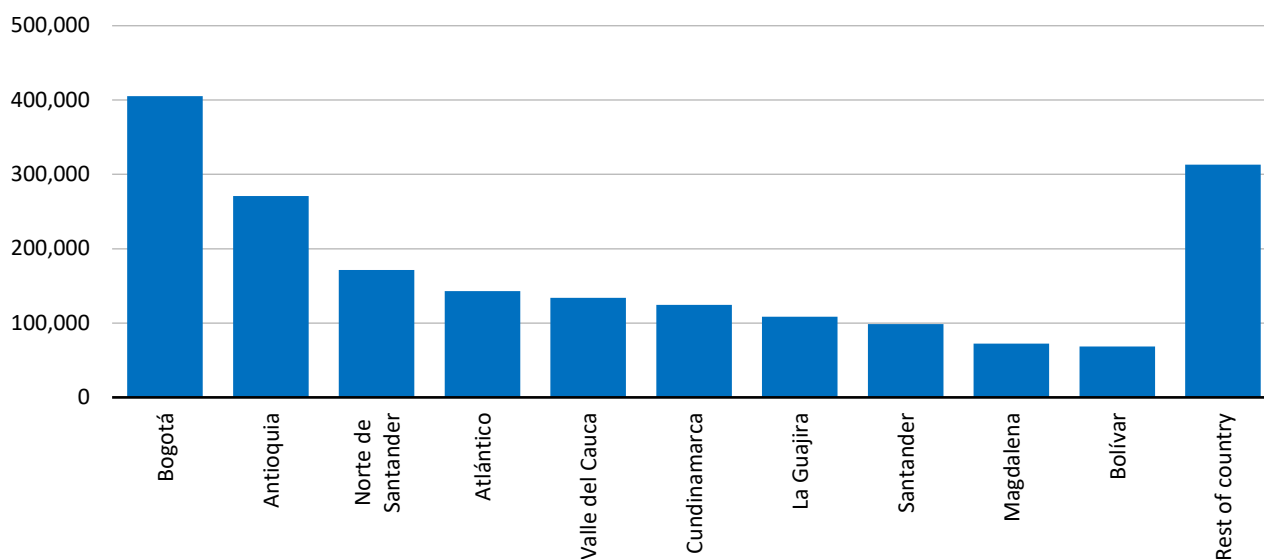
The Venezuelan migrant population is mainly made up of young people. According to the Quality of Life Survey, about 84 percent of the migrant population is under 40, and about 10 percent is between 40 and 50. Children and adolescents aged 0-17 account for 42.6 percent of male migrants and 36.2 percent of female migrants, while these figures are 22.3 percent and 24.9 percent, respectively, for young people aged 18-29.

The majority of the Venezuelan nationals who intend to remain in Colombia entered the country between 2017 and 2019. However, permanent migration decreased significantly in 2020 and 2021 due to restrictions implemented to address the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Pulse of Migration Survey. Some 80.6 percent of the migrant population already had contacts living in Colombia, 30 percent of this total had family members of Colombian origin, and 60.8 percent had family members of Venezuelan origin residing in Colombia. Some 72 percent of the Venezuelans living in Colombia did not have a Venezuelan passport, a situation that was even more marked among young people aged 15–24 (more than 85 percent of whom did not hold a Venezuelan passport). Among those who did have a passport, this had already expired in 69 percent of cases.

4.1.1. Location in Colombia

As figure 5 shows, in June 2022, the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia was mainly distributed between Bogotá (21.22 percent), Antioquia (14.18 percent), Norte de Santander (8.97 percent), Atlántico (7.49 percent) and Valle del Cauca (7.02 percent). Migrants are mainly concentrated in Bogotá and other departments with large cities, such as Medellín, Cúcuta, Barranquilla and Cali. However, after five years of dramatic growth in migration from Venezuela, there are migrant populations in every department in Colombia.

Figure 5. Distribution of the Venezuelan migrant population by department in Colombia, 2022 (number of people)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Migration Colombia.

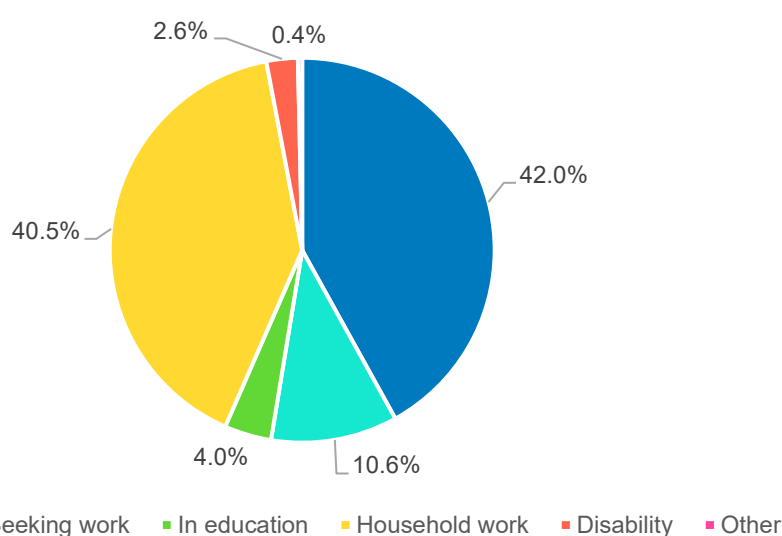
With the exception of migrants in transit to other countries, the geographic mobility of the migrant population in Colombia is relatively low once they have settled in a municipality. According to the Pulse of Migration Survey, 82.2 percent of migrants have lived permanently in the same municipality since settling in Colombia. Some 94.2 percent of the migrant population lives in households whose members have not returned to their place of residence in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela since moving to Colombia. The main reasons that those who returned did so was to visit relatives (64.4 percent) or to check the state of a property (22.7 percent), while only 3.1 percent returned as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1.2. Labour market participation

According to data from the Pulse of Migration Survey, 1,447,220 Venezuelan migrants were working in Colombia in 2021. According to figures from DANE, between May 2021 and April 2022, the unemployment rate for the Venezuelan migrant population was 12.7 percent among those who had been living in Colombia for more than one year and 23.2 percent among those who had arrived in the country less than 12 months earlier. These figures are significantly higher than Colombia’s overall unemployment rate of 11.5 percent.

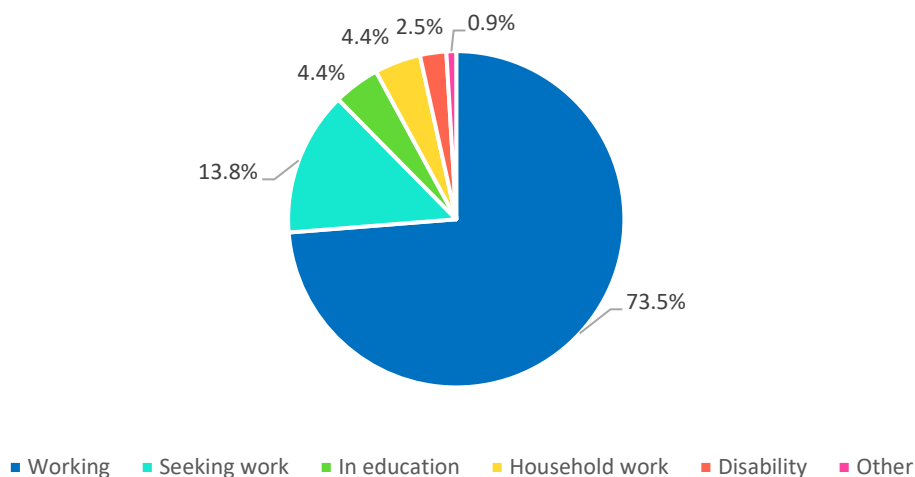
The migrant population unemployment rate is much higher for women than for men. Specifically, among migrants who have settled in Colombia, the unemployment rate is 16.3 percent for women and 10.2 percent for men. Among new arrivals, these rates increase to 32.8 percent for women and 17.3 percent for men. As can be seen in figures 6 and 7, the gender gap between the percentages of the employed migrant population is striking: while 73.5 percent of male migrants were working in 2021, this was only true of 42.0 percent of women. Turning to household labour, only 4.7 percent of men were mainly engaged in this, as compared to 40.5 percent of women. The share of people seeking work was highest among the young population (those aged 15-24)—13.2 percent.

Figure 6. Distribution of Venezuelan migrant women by occupation in Colombia, 2022 (percentages)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the July 2022 Pulse of Migration Survey.

Figure 7. Distribution of Venezuelan migrant men by occupation in Colombia, 2022 (percentages)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the June 2022 Pulse of Migration Survey.

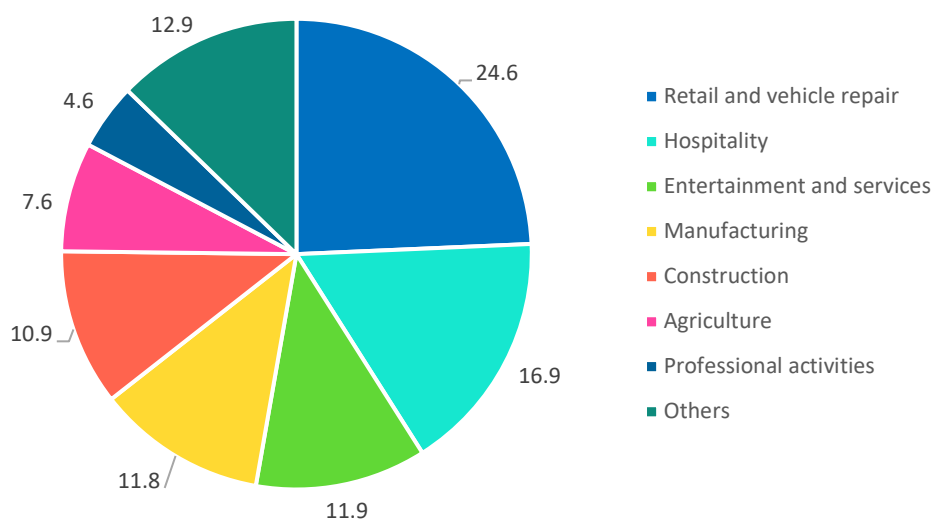
According to data from DANE and the Major Integrated Household Survey and calculations by CUSO Internacional (2020), Venezuelan migrant women work 42.5 hours per week on average, 5.5 hours more than Colombian women. However, despite working more hours on average, migrant women’s average monthly income is 50 percent lower than that of Colombian women, at around just 785,814 Colombian pesos.

According to the Pulse of Migration Survey, 40.2 percent of migrants reported no difficulties in finding work in Colombia. However, the bulk of the migrant population aged 18–29 group have had problems finding employment, and the vast majority of migrants only find work in the informal sector, where working conditions and job stability are less than optimal. According to data from the Major Integrated Household Survey, the informality rate among migrants dropped from almost 90 percent in 2019 to 77 percent in 2020, but still remains high. When these figures are disaggregated by sex, they are very similar for male and female migrants.

Among migrants who reported experiencing difficulties getting work, the main obstacle was not having the documents they needed to do so (68.9 percent), which should be largely solved if the Temporary Protection Statute is properly implemented. Furthermore, 23.4 percent of Venezuelans stated that they were at a disadvantage in the labour market as a result of discrimination based on their nationality. Likewise, 21.6 percent stated that their working conditions or remuneration were unsatisfactory.

Half of the migrant population working in Colombia were independent workers or freelancers—that is, they do not have a formal contract or work under an employer. Some 40 percent are employees or labourers, the vast majority of whom are informally employed. Likewise, 40 percent of the migrant population work more than 48 hours per week. Figure 8 shows the most representative labour sectors among the migrant population in 2021.

Figure 8. Distribution of the working Venezuelan migrant population by sector in Colombia, 2021 (in percentages)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the 2021 Pulse of Migration Survey, 2021.

According to the Pulse of Migration Survey, 1.9 percent of the Venezuelan migrants in Colombia work for online delivery platforms such as Rappi, iFood and InDriver. About half of migrant workers work in shops, offices or factories, while 7.7 percent work on construction sites. Some 17.7 percent work in public spaces such as the street and other outdoor areas or move around; 7.6 percent work from home and 2.2 percent work mainly working driving a vehicle.

The study on employer perceptions conducted by the Ideas for Peace Foundation and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Fundación Ideas para la Paz and Fundación Konrad Adenauer, 2021) notes that the greatest obstacle to hiring migrants is the lack of the necessary documentation (47 percent), followed by difficulties in proving that they have work experience (35 percent) and the lack of information on the steps that need to be followed when hiring a migrant worker (14 percent).

The unemployment rate is partly explained by the migrant population's lower income and lower reservation wage (Tribín, 2020, p. 13). Another explanation is that the migrant population has fewer savings and support networks, which makes their need to find work more pressing and leads them to take difficult, low-paid hours jobs with long working hours, in conditions that the local population would not easily agree to. The wage gap between migrants and the local population is particularly wide in the informal sector.

These disparities might be expected to decrease, at least partially, as a result of the migrant regularization process being implemented as part of the Temporary Protection Statute and the fact that many migrants have already been in Colombia long enough to have built up some savings and establish social networks.

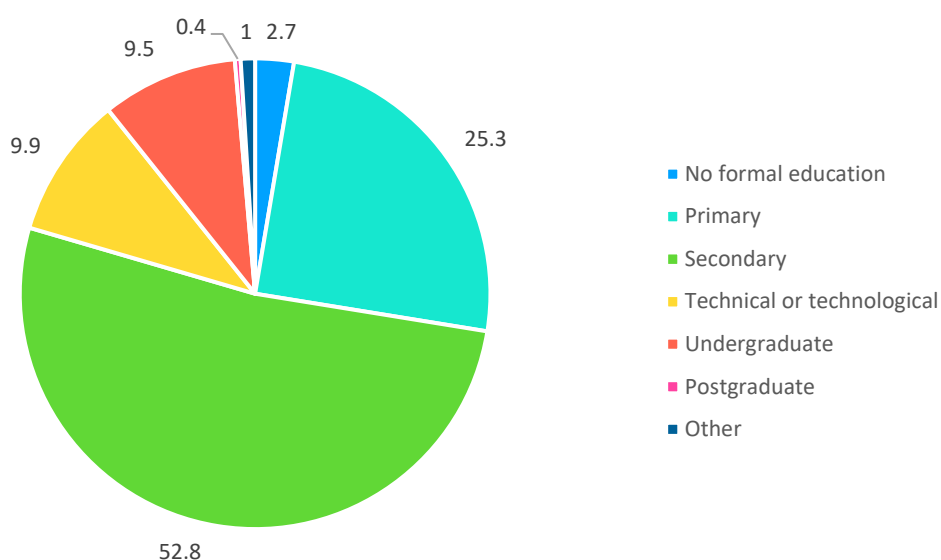
4.1.3. Remittances

The remittances that Venezuelans sent home from Colombia decreased between 2011 and 2020 but rose to unprecedented levels in 2021. According to figures from the Banco de la República, remittances to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela fell from \$630,000 in 2011 to \$140,000 in 2014, increasing slightly and then dropping to an all-time low of \$60,000 in 2018. By 2020, this figure was back up to \$120,000, then soared to \$2.56 million in 2021. The reason for this massive increase is not entirely clear. Possible causes include the regularization of Venezuelan workers in Colombia, the more flexible use of dollars in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and, possibly, the inflow of remittances to Colombia from other countries to Venezuelans, who then transfer them to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Morales Soler, 2022).

4.1.4. Education

According to the Pulse of Migration Survey, more than half of the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia holds an undergraduate degree, 25.3 percent have only finished primary education, 17.8 percent have a technical, technological or university degree and 0.4 percent have a postgraduate degree. Although no differences are observed in almost any of the categories when the data is disaggregated by sex, the share of men is higher among those who have only completed primary education. At the same time, women account for a larger share of those who have finished university.¹⁹ Only 7.1 percent of those with a professional degree have been able to get their qualifications recognized in Colombia. This is mainly because the migrant population are unaware of the procedures they need to follow, do not have the complete documentation they need or do not have enough money to carry out the procedure.

Figure 9. Education level of the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia, 2021 (in percentages)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the 2021 Pulse of Migration Survey, 2021.

¹⁹ More data from the Pulse of Migration Survey is available in Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (2021b).

According to official figures, in 2019, a total of 211,437 Venezuelan students were registered as attending preschool, primary and secondary education establishments in Colombia, and the migrant student body increased by 84 percent between 2018 and 2019. At the same time, in 2019, 1,408 Venezuelan students were enrolled in higher education establishments. Between 2017 and May 2021, a total of 4,691 people were certified by the National Apprenticeship Service (Observatorio de Migración, 2021, pp. 8 and 18).

For the migrant population between the ages of 5 and 17, the main barriers to access to education are the lack of documents (such as the Special Stay Permit) and the lack of places at school, according to the Quality of Life Survey. The education crisis and the deschooling unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic also had a negative impact on school attendance among Venezuelan students. Some 10 percent of school-age migrant population stopped going to school during the pandemic because they could not access online or distance learning, because the educational establishment they attended was closed or because of a lack of means during the pandemic. Access to daycare for children under 5 was also reduced to 2.1 percent, down from 13.5 percent before the pandemic.

4.1.5. Health

Between 2017 and 2021, more than 12 million health care services were provided to more than 1.3 million Venezuelans living in Colombia, the majority of which were for women (73.9 percent). Of the total, the vast majority were provided to people without health insurance (74 percent); 10 percent were provided people insured under the subsidized scheme; 9.3 percent to people insured under the contributory scheme; while 6.6 percent paid for their services privately.

The Colombian health system has been providing emergency care to the migrant population since the beginning of the current wave of migration, especially in the area of reproductive health (2,142,141 consultations were recorded between 2017 and 2021, according to figures from the Migration Observatory), maternal health and childbirth services (249,190 consultations), and preventive children's health care and nutrition. The regularization of a large proportion of the migrant population through the Special Stay Permit programme gave them access to the Colombian health insurance system. This provides full coverage of diagnostic consultations, laboratory tests, visits to medical personnel, medicines and operations. In other words, it gives migrants access to the services that are available to the Colombian population covered by the system. Those who have registered with the system can access health services many times a year. When they are affiliated with the contributory scheme, they sustain this system. Inclusion in the system is facilitated by the Special Stay Permit, the numbers of which rose from just under 50,000 in 2019 to almost 120,000 in 2020. It is expected that more than 2 million Venezuelans will have been granted the new Temporary Stay Permit by the end of 2022.

According to estimates from the Major Integrated Household Survey, in June 2021, 24 percent of the migrant population was registered with the health system, while the Pulse of Migration Survey put this figure at 33.4 percent. Among the young population, this coverage only reaches 23.3 percent. According to the Major Integrated Household Survey, 40 percent of the migrant population that are affiliated with the health system are in the contributory scheme, 59.4 percent are in the subsidized scheme and 0.3 percent are in the special scheme.

4.1.6. Protection of children, adolescents and families

According to figures from the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, between 2015 and 2020, 294,177 children, adolescents, young people and their families were registered as beneficiaries of preventive care. Of this total, 81,929 were migrants aged 0–4 (Observatorio de Migración, 2021, p. 25). The Colombian Family Welfare Institute admitted 7,301 people, almost all of whom were between 0 and 17 years of age, as part of administrative processes for the restoration of rights. The rights of these children and adolescents had been violated mainly through omission or negligence, sexual abuse, or the permanent or temporary absence of their caregivers (Observatorio de Migración, 2021, p. 26).

5. Transit migration

In 2016, just 32,000 Venezuelans left Colombia through the migration checkpoint at Rumichaca on the Colombia-Ecuador border. By 2017, this figure had risen to 231,000 people, indicating a massive increase in the number of Venezuelans crossing Colombia to reach other destinations in South America. According to Migration Colombia figures that contemplate departures by land and air, 60 percent of all Venezuelans who left Colombia did so to go on to other destinations rather than to return to their country (Migración Colombia, 2018a, p. 4).

In 2017, more than 436,000 Venezuelans crossed Colombia in transit to other countries, including the more than 232,000 departures that were recorded at the border with Ecuador. In 2018, more than 600,000 Venezuelan migrants crossed Colombia to other countries, of which more than 438,000 went to Ecuador through the border checkpoint at Rumichaca.

Venezuelans in transit to Ecuador and other destinations mainly cross Colombia in one of two ways: overland transport or, in the case of those with less financial means, by walking for 10–15 days. The first route starts near Cúcuta on the border with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, crosses Bucaramanga and Puerto Boyacá towards Colombia's coffee-growing region and Valle del Cauca, and ends in Nariño on the border with Ecuador. The second route connects Cúcuta with Bogotá in the centre of the country and then continues either towards Rumichaca in Nariño or towards the San Miguel pass in Putumayo. The main destinations for Venezuelan migrants in transit through Colombia are Argentina, Chile, Ecuador and Peru.

Each year, thousands of migrants also enter Colombia informally with the intention of taking the dangerous route through the Darién jungle and Central America to reach the United States. These migrants include large numbers of Haitians and people from other Caribbean countries, in addition to others from Africa and other parts of the world (Turkewitz, Kitroeff and Villamil, 2021).

Like most global migration flows, migrant movements through Colombia slowed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but picked up again in 2021 (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). At the height of COVID-related mobility restrictions, thousands of people were trapped in small Colombian coastal towns such as Necoclí, where in mid-2021 some 16,000 people waited for transport services to resume and entry routes to Panama to reopen to be able to continue their journey to the United States (Esquivel, 2021). The vast majority of these people were from Haiti. Other countries of origin included Brazil, Chile, Venezuela and African countries such as Congo, New Guinea and Senegal (CNN en Español, 2021).

Once migrants have arrived in Necoclí and other towns in Colombia, they seek to cross the Gulf of Urabá in boats and dinghies and then walk some 60 kilometres through the jungle of the Darién Gap, where they will eventually try to enter Panama and continue north through Costa Rica and Central America to Mexico and the United States (CNN en Español, 2021).

One of the countries of origin of the migrants who were trapped in Colombia in 2021 was Chile (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021); nationals of Haiti, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and other countries moved on from the country after having settled there in previous years, motivated by the hope that asylum policies for migrants would be more favourable in the United States following the change of government in January 2021. However, upon reaching the United States in October 2021, many of these migrants were detained during border control operations that were widely criticized, immediately expelled and sent back to Haiti (Solomon, 2021).

In August 2021, the governments of Colombia and Panama agreed to allow the formal transit of migrants from Colombia to Panama to resume, with a limit of 650 people per day, after the Colombian foreign minister met with her Panamanian counterpart and described the situation as a “humanitarian tragedy”. The two countries reopened the border between them, allowing migrants stranded in Necoclí at the time to travel along a single designated route. The migrant population was transported in vehicles organized by the Colombian authorities to take them to a single point of entry into Panama, with the aim of preventing them from scattering through the Darién jungle or leaving the country illegally. The foreign minister insisted that Colombia’s treatment of these migrants should include the provision of aid and protection and that countries of origin, transit and destination must act in a coordinated fashion and accept their responsibility towards the migrant population to prevent humanitarian crises along the way (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Migration Colombia registers migrants to allow them to transit through the country towards the border with Panama, where their passports are checked, their entry into the country is recorded, and criminal records are checked (CNN en Español, 2021). The Colombian police force monitor the migrant population en route, especially in towns and ports, and have identified human trafficking and organized crime networks seeking to profit from the movement of migrants. In August 2021, Foreign Minister Marta Lucía Ramírez announced that she would be implementing a response plan to tackle these criminal networks that would include the Police Community of the Americas (AMERIPOL), INTERPOL, the Colombian intelligence service and judicial authorities. She also announced that she would ask the United States to extradite those responsible for trafficking migrants from Colombia to the United States (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2021).

6. Migrant assistance policies

The timeline for the main policies to assist Venezuelan migrants is closely tied to the major political and economic developments in their country of origin. The crisis in Venezuela began in 2015 with the closure of the border with Colombia and the expulsion of the Colombian population from Venezuelan border towns. This section covers the main policies implemented by Colombia to assist the migrant population from Venezuela during the main stages in recent migration. It then describes other major policies, such as efforts to integrate data and information systems, inter-institutional coordination, new migration legislation and the development of local policies.

6.1. Border integration, 2011–2014

In 2011, the Government of Colombia and the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela established a border integration zone that allowed the free transit of citizens of both countries to border cities and municipalities. Formal migration procedures were only mandatory if a person sought to move beyond the border zone or was entering either of the countries for commercial or work purposes.

Between 2011 and 2014, five border checkpoints were formally established between the two countries: Paraguachón (La Guajira), the Simón Bolívar International Bridge (Norte de Santander), the José Antonio Páez Bridge (Arauca), Puerto Carreño (Vichada) and Puerto Inírida (Guanía). In 2016, two additional posts were set up, one on the Francisco de Paula Santander International Bridge and one in Puerto Santander.

6.2 Deteriorating conditions in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and expulsion of the Colombian population, 2015

Migration-related tensions between Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela first came to a head in 2015, when the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela unilaterally closed the border between the two countries, expelled more than 1,950 Colombians and prompted the return of a further 22,342, according to figures from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. These included many families with children or Venezuelan spouses and partners. As part of a security initiative known as the Operation to Liberate the People, the Venezuelan authorities launched operations to fight crime and the alleged presence of armed Colombians in the border area, arguing that this was the cause of the shortages that were already on the rise in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

This operation was widely criticized for having led to “serious human rights violations and excessive use of force towards the Colombian population in the border area”, as well as “an escalation in the levels of discrimination and xenophobia towards Colombian people living in the border areas” (CNMH, 2018, p. 225). It was described by the Red Cross as a “humanitarian disaster”. The Venezuelan authorities demolished the homes of Colombian families living in the border area and fuelled hate speech that blamed Colombians for the economic and social problems in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The Colombian authorities faced enormous challenges in dealing with the expelled population. Large groups of extremely vulnerable people arrived in Colombia en masse. They brought with them the few belongings they had been able to carry themselves on a journey that involved crossing the Táchira river. The Colombian police helped some of these people to cross the river and carry their belongings. Returning Colombians continued to enter the country for at least two weeks (Caracol Radio, 2016). The Colombian Government set up a unified checkpoint to register the returning population, set up shelters and provided health care services during the emergency.

6.3. First responses, 2016–2017

As the political, economic and social situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela began to deteriorate, some 50,000 Venezuelans began crossing the border daily in 2016 (the vast majority doing so only temporarily). In the first week of August 2016 alone, after the border reopened, some 110,000 Venezuelans entered Colombia in search of medicines, food and basic consumer goods before returning to their country the same day (Migración Colombia, 2018b). From then on, many Venezuelans began visiting Villa del Rosario, Cúcuta and other Colombian municipalities to stock up and return, and thus qualify as circular migrants.²⁰

On 13 August 2016, Migration Colombia implemented the Border Mobility Card to identify the Venezuelan population entering Colombia but returning to their country. In the final four months of 2016, Migration Colombia recorded 7,133,167 Venezuelans who entered Colombia and 6,987,013 who left, indicating that almost all of the entries were people who had no intention of staying in Colombia. In 2017, the pre-registration process for the Border Mobility Card was launched, and more than 1,300,000 Venezuelans made recourse to the mechanism, mainly as short-term visitors in the border area or as circular migrants.

The year 2017 saw a critical rise in the number of Venezuelans seeking temporary jobs in Colombia and eventually migrating permanently through both regular and irregular means. In 2017, an average of 37,000 entries and 35,000 exits per day were recorded using the Border Mobility Card, suggesting that the vast majority were circular migrants. However, there was also an increase in the number of migrants who did not return to Venezuela (about 2,000 people per day). The number of people travelling through Colombia to other countries (mainly Ecuador) also rose.

According to figures from Migration Colombia, some 698,000 Venezuelans entered the country regularly in 2017 using their passports, and 57,000 had a Colombian-issued foreigner's identity card. That same year, 69,000 Venezuelans who entered the country regularly obtained a Special Stay Permit, and the number of irregular Venezuelan migrants in Colombia was estimated at 374,000.

6.4. Mass migration, regularization and permanent migration, 2017–2021

In 2017, during the Santos Administration, the Colombian Government created the Special Stay Permit for regular Venezuelan migrants. This scheme enabled this population to prove their identity within the national territory, work legally and access social services, and also be included in the Sisbén. Those in certain categories could also participate in the subsidy and transfer programmes offered to the Colombian population, such as Families in Action and Income Solidarity (Observatorio de Familia, 2021).

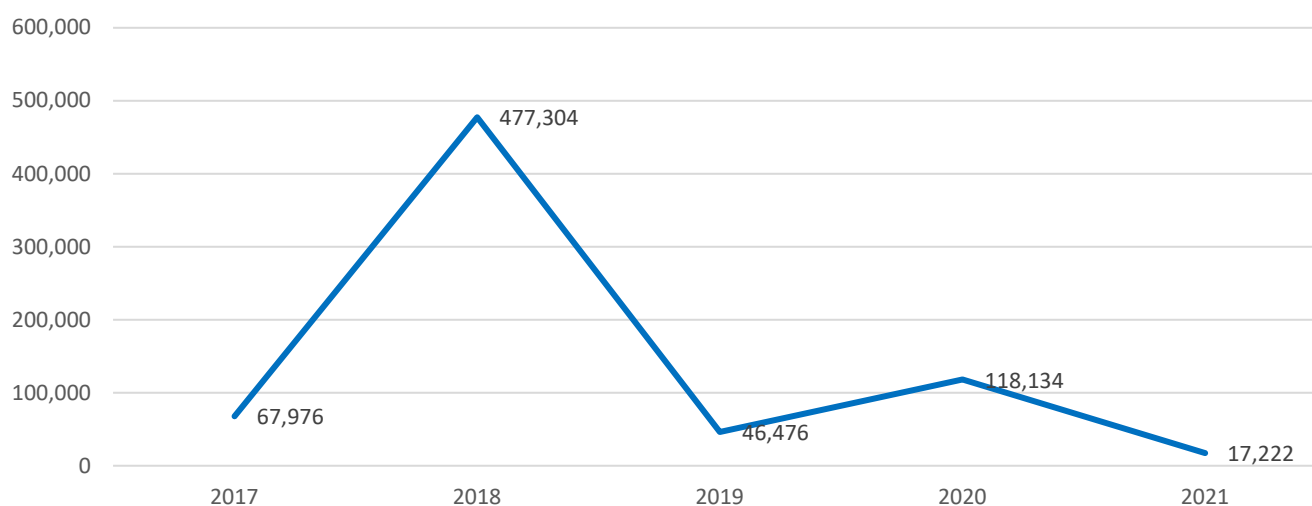
The Special Stay Permit was granted for 90 days, could be automatically extended for up to two years and required beneficiaries to leave the country when it expired. This stay did not count towards the minimum time residing in the country required to apply for a regular residence visa.

²⁰ Although the focus of the assistance provided to the migrant population has now shifted to those who have settled in Colombia or are in transit to other countries, circular migration rates between the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Colombia remain high, totalling 1.87 million people in 2021 (Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, 2021).

Between 2017 and 2021, the Special Stay Permit was only available for Venezuelans who had entered Colombia regularly through an authorized border checkpoint and who were in Colombia before 31 August 2020. Another massive regularization programme was implemented in 2018, granting Special Stay Permits to irregular migrants in Colombia.

As figure 10 shows, according to data from the Special Administrative Unit at Migration Colombia, 727,112 special residence permits were issued to the Venezuelan population in Colombia between 1 January 2017 and 22 July 2021. This represents 40 percent of the migrant population seeking to stay on in the country.

Figure 10. Number of Special Stay Permits granted to the Venezuelan population in Colombia, 2017–2021



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Migration Colombia.

On the matter of whether the Special Stay Permit was effective, according to the 2021 Pulse of Migration Survey, 74 percent of migrants were unable to access the mechanism. Those who did obtain the permit sought to do so for work-related reasons, to access health services, to regularize their migration status and, to a lesser extent, to access the education system and obtain an identification document. Of those who were granted a Special Stay Permit, 52 percent stated that it helped them to find work, 49 percent were able to access the health system, 13.1 percent obtained a higher income from their job and 8.1 percent were able to access the education system.

In February 2018, the issuing of new Border Mobility Cards was suspended, at a time when more than 1.6 million Venezuelans were already using them. The same month saw the launch of a second stage in the issuing of special stay permits (the Special Stay Permit II) for Venezuelan migrants who had entered Colombia regularly, leading to the issuing of more than 112,000 new permits. In 2018, more than 825,000 Venezuelans entered Colombia via regular means using their passport and were thus eligible for the Special Stay Permit.

In April 2018, the Santos Administration made the identification of the irregular migrant population in Colombia a public policy priority. To achieve this objective, the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants was created for Venezuelan citizens whose migration status in Colombia was irregular. The registry was implemented between April and June 2018 in border municipalities and cities where large numbers of migrants had already been identified.

The process was spearheaded by the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management with support from the Ombud's Office, mayors' offices, governors' offices and other agencies, under the auspices of the IOM and UNHCR.

A total of 442,464 irregular migrants registered with the Administrative Registry for Venezuelan Migrants. Although initially the objective of the initiative was only to carry out a census of the irregular migrant population, at the end of his mandate, President Santos announced a path towards the regularization of all people who had registered, around 64 percent of whom successfully regularized their status (Ibáñez et al., 2021). To complete the regularization process, Special Stay Permits for migrants who had registered with the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants began to be issued in August that same year, granting bearers the same benefits that were previously only available to regular migrants.

This initial effort to identify, register and regularize the irregular Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia was highly successful in terms of the number of people it included. Of an estimated irregular population of around 500,000 people, 90 percent began the regularization process, according to figures from Migration Colombia. In June 2018, two months after the launch of the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants, 442,462 Venezuelans had begun to regularize their migration status and only 45,896 were estimated to still have irregular statuses. A total of 381,735 regular Venezuelan migrants were in the country. According to data from the 2021 Pulse of Migration Survey, the main reason that part of the migrant population in Colombia did not register with the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants in 2018 was that they were unaware of its existence.

The issuing of Special Stay Permits was also moderately successful in 2018: more than 470,000 permits were issued, a figure that accounted for 40 percent of the Venezuelans residing in Colombia in December of that year. However, at that time, integrated approaches to assisting the migrant population did not yet include mass registration with the Sisbén, access to social programmes or mass participation in the health care and pension systems.

A team comprised of representatives from the IDB, the University of Southern California and the University of the Andes presented preliminary results of an impact evaluation assessing how the 2018 regularization programme (the Administrative Registry of Venezuelan Migrants and Special Stay Permit) had affected the lives of the migrant population in Colombia (Ibáñez et al., 2021). The study noted that the regularization programme helped increase the overall well-being of the migrant population included in the initiatives, contributed partially to labour formalization and better working conditions, expanded access to state services and improved the migrant population's perception of their inclusion in Colombian society.

The study concluded that the well-being of the migrant population increased in different areas. One of the most significant impacts of the scheme, according to the research team, was that it cut depression or anxiety rates to less than half. Likewise, becoming legally recognized inhabitants increased beneficiaries' peace of mind when dealing with the Colombian authorities.

The increase in labour formalization was positive but limited, as this indicator went from 0 percent among the irregular migrant population to 10 percent in the beneficiary group. However, this rate is significantly lower than among Colombian workers. However, even if they were not able to access formal employment, many beneficiaries of the Special Stay Permit were able to negotiate better working conditions and obtain pay rises. The researchers also found evidence to support the well-established idea that many Venezuelans intend to remain in Colombia. It was also observed that certain problems in implementing the scheme limited the potential of the Special Stay Permit to generate even greater results (Bahar, Ibáñez and Rozo, 2021).

As stated in the study cited in the previous paragraph, the mass regularization that took place in 2018 and was repeated on a much larger scale in 2021 is positive not only for the migrant population but also for Colombia itself, as it enables the country to take much better advantage of the positive effects of migration. Regularization allows the migrant population to cover many of their expenses with their own income, contribute to the health or pension system, pay taxes or access the banking system to build up their savings, which could contribute to the country's development.

In 2020, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs jointly launched the Special Stay Permit to Promote Formal Employment with the aim of facilitating the formal employment of Venezuelan workers in Colombia. This permit specifically targeted those who had entered the country irregularly and had job offers in Colombia for a minimum of two months and a maximum of two years. It enabled any Venezuelan to work in Colombia whenever an employer requested this. The scheme included people who did not have a passport or whose Venezuelan identity card had expired. However, the Special Stay Permit to Promote Formal Employment did not cover workers' families. Some 8,960 permits were issued in 2020, most for jobs in hairdressing, restaurants, vehicle repair and maintenance and construction (Observatorio de Migración, 2021, p. 25).

The Special Stay Permit and the Special Stay Permit to Promote Formal Employment were replaced in 2021 by the Temporary Protection Statute, so beneficiaries will have to adapt to the new regulations.

In March 2021, under the Duque Administration, the Colombian Government issued the ten-year Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan migrants, with the aim of identifying and regularizing the migrant population already in Colombia, around 56 percent of whom still had irregular migration statuses. Through this statute, the Government is seeking to register Venezuelans residing in Colombia, issue temporary residence permits, acquire data on the migrant population, identify their needs and enable them to enter the formal labour market and access social programmes. The hope is that by registering migrants, the State will be able to acquire better information for designing public policies to assist them and further their social inclusion (Cancillería de Colombia, 2021).

In contrast to the Special Stay Permit scheme, the new statute allows time spent in the country as a beneficiary to count towards the total time that applicants are required to have lived in the country to apply for a residence visa. In other words, the migrant population will have 10 years to comply with the requirements that are currently in force for obtaining permanent residency, which include demonstrating sufficient means.

This scheme covers the entire migrant population that already had a Special Stay Permit and those that have applied for refugee status, those who have applied for a Colombian visa, and irregular migrants who can prove that they were in Colombia before 31 January 2021. It also covers those who enter the country regularly during the first two years that the statute is valid (Cancillería de Colombia, 2021, p. 3).

The first component of the Temporary Protection Statute is the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants, which had registered more than 2 million people by 2022, almost the entire Venezuelan population in Colombia. Once they have registered, Venezuelans can obtain Temporary Protection Permits, which function as an identity document and enable them to work legally, register with the Sisbén and take part in social assistance programmes in Colombia. The registration process includes a survey to acquire data on the migrant population and collect biometric data.

The Temporary Protection Permit is not available to people with criminal records or deportation orders, and can be taken away if beneficiaries commit a crime or are absent from Colombia for longer than 180 days, or if the Colombian authorities deem that the person's stay is not desirable.

The success of the Temporary Protection Statute may be limited by the fact that the Colombian population and companies are largely unaware of it. According to the survey of business leaders conducted between June and August 2021 by the Ideas for Peace Foundation and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Fundación Ideas para la Paz y Fundación Konrad Adenauer, 2021), only 7 percent of respondents knew of the programme, despite the fact that this was when the statute was most frequently mentioned in the headlines. If businesses are not provided with sufficient information on the programme, it is inevitable that many will continue to opt not to hire migrants, even if their migration status is regular, for fear of the legal consequences they perceive this will have.

Conditions for the migrant population in Colombia deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to data from the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, the number of migrant households that received income fell to 60 percent during the first few months of COVID-related restrictions, after having reached 86 percent before they were implemented. Some 60 percent of those surveyed only ate two meals a day, while 9 percent ate just one and 42 percent of households had to beg for money on the street. It is also estimated that 1 in 4 migrant households have become homeless due to their inability to pay rent (Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, 2021, p. 113).

One positive finding is that 64.2 percent of migrants received some form of help or assistance during the pandemic. Almost half of this assistance came from the Government, and a quarter was provided by NGOs, according to the Quality of Life Survey.

A study conducted by Columbia University and the School of Government of the University of the Andes assessed the impact of the pandemic on the use of medical services among the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombia. It found that while both the Colombian and migrant populations made fewer consultations during the pandemic, there was no reduction in emergency care or hospitalizations of Venezuelan residents in Colombia during the pandemic (Columbia University, 2021).

6.5. Institutional inclusion

When the numbers of Venezuelan migrants began to increase between 2016 and 2017, the national Government entrusted migrant assistance and the coordination of actions and services with other state agencies to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through Migration Colombia, and the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management. Despite these agencies' hard work, the needs of the migrant population and the sheer scale of these quickly overwhelmed institutional capacity for action, and their limitations when it came to coordinating the responses of other ministries and state agencies became evident.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was able to respond to the most serious health problems and was particularly active in guaranteeing care for pregnant women and minors, including in cases of malnutrition and vaccination programmes. It also promoted access to basic education for Venezuelan children. In addition, the first Special Stay Permits were issued to people who entered Colombia regularly.

To address the shortfalls in the capacity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to respond to the migration crisis, the Santos Administration created the Border Management Office as part of the Office of the President. This new agency, which was formalized during the Duque Administration, had a mandate to coordinate the work of different ministries and state agencies, with the added benefit of reporting directly to the president. When he took office, President Duque kept the management of the migration crisis within the purview of the Office of the President and kept several of the key people working on the issue in their positions, which allowed for continuity in the response to the crisis.

The Duque Administration sought to create stronger horizontal coordination between ministries and state agencies, which led to the drafting of CONPES document 3950 during the new Government's first few months in office, when the Office of the President and various ministries and state agencies defined a strategy for a coordinated response to the crisis. One of the most important initiatives was the inclusion of the Ministry of Finance in the policy. This ministry is responsible for public spending in Colombia and had to provide the resources to move from a short-term, local approach to crisis management to a permanent state response to be implemented over several years.

In addition to coordinating between ministries and central government agencies, the Border Management Office also sought to work with multilateral organizations working on migration and eventually proposed that local authorities in departments, major cities and municipalities also be included.

The World Bank conducted a study on the scale of the crisis and its impact on migrant-receiving municipalities. This warned of the likelihood of the crisis escalating in the coming months. The study identified short-term negative effects and medium- and long-term opportunities and benefits and argued that a coordinated response was urgently needed (Banco Mundial, 2018).

The new foreign minister asked the United Nations to appoint a person to address the migration crisis. In response, Eduardo Stein was selected as the Joint Special Representative for UNHCR and the IOM for Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Under Stein's leadership, the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (Response for Venezuela or R4V) was created to coordinate the work of international agencies and their national partners in responding to the crisis and mobilizing resources to Colombia and other countries.

According to CONPES document 3950, one of the main challenges in understanding and responding to migration to Colombia is the lack of data on the issue and the lack of coordination of the information available to different state agencies. CONPES recognized that the public policies needed to address the crisis would not be effective due to the lack of data, the fragmentation of the data that was available and the fact that different agencies used different criteria to estimate migrant numbers and identify migrants' needs. This problem is addressed in the next section.

6.6. New legislation and the Comprehensive Migration Policy

From 2018 on, new migration and border laws were debated in Congress and then passed in 2021. The Border Act (Act 2135 of 2021) established a special legal regime for border departments and municipalities by creating border zones that would receive special coordinated assistance from state agencies. This legislation stipulated that strategic plans for border development and integration would be created for these zones, to be implemented by various ministries and coordinated by the Intersectoral Commission for Border Development and Integration, within the framework of its integration and development policy.

Colombia's border infrastructure is still precarious and is based largely on a logic of limited integration and exchange of information. In 2021, the political context (particularly the lack of dialogue between the Colombian Government and Nicolás Maduro's regime) prevented further integration, including the full reopening of the border. In September 2022, cargo transport between the two countries was re-established following the recognition of Nicolás Maduro's Government by Colombia's new president, Gustavo Petro, and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. The Tienditas international bridge, the largest roadway between Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, remained closed to vehicles in September 2022, six years after construction was completed.

The Border Act also created a special economic regime for border areas and asked the Government to consider creating a special customs regime, improve cross-border trade conditions, increase fuel supplies at the borders, strengthen the presence of state institutions in these areas and acquire demographic and socio-economic data on the border population through DANE and the DNP.

This law also enables mayors' offices or the national Government to request the declaration of "special border intervention zones" to facilitate state intervention during emergencies like the ones that triggered the migration crisis on the border with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, such as currency devaluations in neighbouring countries, increased migration to Colombia or shortages.

The Migration Act (Act 2136 of 2021) defined the general guidelines for the country's new Comprehensive Migration Policy. One of the main objectives of the Comprehensive Migration Policy is to coordinate the work of state agencies beyond the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including at the central, departmental and municipal levels, and that of international agencies. Another fundamental aspect of the law is the collection and coordination of data on migrants, including people migrating to Colombia and Colombians living abroad. Although migration to and from Colombia was extremely limited in the first 200 years of the country's history, its new Comprehensive Migration Policy promotes orderly immigration and recognizes the positive effects of migration. In addition, one of the objects of the new Comprehensive Migration Policy is the inclusion of the migrant population into Colombian society, taking a differential approach in terms of gender, age, sexual orientation and disability.

The guidelines that this law establishes for the new Comprehensive Migration Policy are only general and must be developed and implemented by the national Government. However, the law points towards the construction of a country that is more open to migration and international integration, including through better inter-institutional coordination to assist the foreign migrant population in Colombia and Colombians living abroad. Colombia still finds it hard to attract migrants to work in the country, even in the most qualified sectors of the economy. The new legislation establishes guidelines to facilitate a more structural approach to the reception and inclusion of the migrant population, one that reaches beyond the Venezuelan migration emergency.

In July 2022, CONPES document 4100 established the social inclusion of the Venezuelan migrant population over the next 10 years as its main objective, as part of a strategy based on building a single path of action to guarantee the provision of assistance to the migrant population and their access to state services and the labour and financial market. This strategy also contemplates strengthening the governance of migrant assistance. This CONPES document also established that the collection of data and evidence is key to the success of migration-related public policies.

6.7. Free movement of Andean Community, MERCOSUR and Chilean nationals

Despite remaining relatively closed to economic immigration beyond the Venezuelan crisis, Colombia has undergone a significant change in terms of its openness to new migrants from other South American countries. Together with the new Comprehensive Migration Policy, this could change the migration landscape in the coming years. In August 2021, the Andean Community adopted the Andean Migration Statute, which enables the free movement of people to reside, work and attend educational establishments in the four countries that make up the bloc: the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Colombia also signed the Residence Agreement for Nationals of MERCOSUR States Parties, Bolivia and Chile, which allows citizens of MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay), Bolivia and Chile to obtain TP-15 visas to exercise any occupation in Colombia for two years, after which they may apply for a residence visa.

6.8. Local policies

The year 2018 saw the launch of the migration roundtables, which coordinated the responses to the migration crisis provided by the national Government and local authorities in different parts of Colombia. These roundtables were also known as Unified Border Command Posts in the country's border departments. They were coordinated by the Border Development and Integration Authority at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office for the Assistance and Socio-Economic Inclusion of the Migrant Population (Border Management Agency) at the Office of the President of the Republic, and the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management. The roundtables were an initial attempt to coordinate central government agencies (such as ministries or the Colombian Family Welfare Institute), the National Police Force, border control agencies and local authorities. By 2020, 19 department roundtables, 4 subregional border roundtables and 5 municipal roundtables had been established (Gobierno de Colombia, 2020, p. 116).

In the last two years, the national Government engaged department and municipal authorities in discussions to better integrate assistance for the migrant population into local development plans, with support from the IOM and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Some 19 mayors' offices and 9 departments included a migration component in their territorial development plans. Including migration in development plans acknowledges that the current state of affairs affects municipalities and departments, not just the central Government, and provides resources to develop public policies to address migration.

The strategy to incorporate the migration component involved the Border Management Agency, the National Federation of Departments, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, the DNP and the USAID and ACDI/VOCA Regional Governance Programme (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones, 2021). In its 2020 local planning kits, the DNP included documents describing detailed strategies that municipalities could adopt in their development plans.

The IOM also provided training for 162 local government officials based on the logical framework methodology put forward by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the Migration Governance Framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In 2021, the Border Management Agency worked with USAID to create a tool to monitor local public policies on migration based on the commitments established in local development plans. Likewise, the National Ombud's Office created a tool for monitoring public policy on migration at the local level to evaluate progress on local policies to guarantee the rights of migrants (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones, 2021).

Some of the good local migrant assistance practices described in the Libro Blanco de Migración [White Book on Migration] (Government of Colombia, 2020) were presented at border municipalities and migrant reception centres. These include:

- (i) Relocation plan for migrants suffering overcrowding in Villa del Rosario (Norte de Santander)
- (ii) Rapid response to the need for accommodation following the pandemic in Ipiales (Nariño)
- (iii) Support centre in Paraguachón (La Guajira) to provide primary care to the newly arrived migrant and refugee population
- iv) Local Integration Centre to provide guidance and information for migrants in Barranquilla (Atlántico), instigated by the Mayor's Office with services from different secretariats

The following subsections provide examples of some of the policies adopted in several major cities in Colombia (the list is not exhaustive).

6.8.1. Bogotá

In Bogotá, an initial migrant assistance policy was developed during Enrique Peñalosa's term as mayor (2016–2019). In September 2018, an action plan for migrant assistance was announced, which included the creation of a social registry to enable migrants to access services provided by local institutions. A special administrative unit was also created to coordinate and assign responsibilities to the district's secretariats. Assistance from these secretariats was added to the public services provided at the SuperCADE office in the bus terminal where many migrants arrive in Bogotá. A temporary shelter was opened to provide accommodation and food to the most vulnerable new arrivals for up to three days.

In December 2018, the Mayor's Office of Bogotá opened the first Comprehensive Migrant Attention Centre to provide legal orientation, psychological care and social assistance services. The public services offered by the district included medical care during childbirth and care for children and pregnant women, in addition to other services such as those provided by Enlace Social, community kitchens, family police stations and the programme for the elderly. In addition, the Mayor's Office issued a directive for the migrant population to be provided basic health services and emergency care regardless of their migration status, prioritizing care for pregnant women and young children and the provision of vaccination plans. In the first half of 2018 alone, the Secretariat of Health responded to 64,764 cases and allocated more than COP4.42 billion from district resources for migrant health care (Secretaría de Integración Social de la Alcaldía de Bogotá, 2018).

During her time in office, Mayor Claudia López continued with the overall policy guidelines and established a working group that held one or two monthly meetings to coordinate public policy on migration, especially with regard to health care, education and social integration.

In response to the COVID emergency, the Mayor's Office extended cash transfers and support to the migrant population on the same terms as the local population.

As was the case for the national Government, the main public policy challenge faced by the Bogotá Mayor's Office in 2020 and 2021 was the lack of data on the population requiring assistance, their needs and social profiles. At the same time, the lack of records on migrants made it harder to prosecute or deport those arrested in connection with crimes in the city.

For this reason, the city offered to quadruple the migrant registration capacity of the Temporary Protection Statute. To this end, it created 90 regularization positions to collect data for the profiling survey, established a route for obtaining Temporary Stay Permits and strengthened services in the city (Acero, 2021). The Mayor's Office ordered that any migrant who was arrested and had not registered with the system be required to do so. Those who refused could be prosecuted or deported (El Espectador, 2021a).

By the end of 2021, there were just under 400,000 Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá who intended to stay on in the city, accounting for approximately 5 percent of the city's total population. Although the proportion of migrants who commit crimes is very small in relation to the total migrant population, the percentage of migrants in total arrests has increased, mainly in connection with theft. This is the main security concern facing the Bogotá Mayor's Office. According to figures from the Mayor's Office itself, only 6 percent of all arrests in 2018 included Venezuelan migrants, while that share had increased to 12 percent by 2019 and 15 percent by 2020. The number of Venezuelans accused of homicide in the city rose from 5 in 2018 to 29 in 2019 and 38 in 2020. The Mayor's Office is also concerned about migrants' connections with drug micro-trafficking networks in the city (Acero, 2021).

There was also an increase in crimes against the migrant population in Bogotá between 2018 and 2021. According to figures from the Mayor's Office, the number of homicides of migrants in the city rose from 16 in 2018 to 83 in 2020, while homicides against the local population have steadily decreased. Thefts from migrants have also increased, while reports of intrafamily violence rose from 28 in 2018 to 497 in 2020. Regularization schemes may have helped migrants encounter fewer obstacles to reporting such cases.

In August 2021, the mayor of Bogotá had to reconsider a crime prevention strategy that included launching a command group in tandem with the National Police Force to address crimes linked to migrants. This measure, which was announced in response to the alleged involvement of a migrant in the murder of a police officer, received harsh criticism from civil society organizations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which deemed it to be stigmatizing. The Xenophobia Barometer, which monitors hate messages against the migrant population, detected an alarming increase in the number of these following the incident (El Espectador, 2021b).

6.8.2. Barranquilla

In 2020, migrants accounted for 8 percent of Barranquilla's total population, making it the non-border city with the second-largest number of migrants after Bogotá (Fajardo Chams, 2020). The main migrant assistance policies implemented in the city included prioritizing the vaccination of the migrant population, providing basic health care, guaranteeing children's access to education, and preventing violations of the rights of children and adolescents in the care of the Colombian Family Welfare Institute.

With support from the IOM, Barranquilla began to implement the DTM (Displacement Tracker Matrix) survey and a human mobility monitoring matrix whose objective was to identify children living on the streets. Through this survey, it was established that more than half of the migrant population who intended to remain in the city were in Commune 5 South East, which will allow the city government to target this area for its public policy actions. The DTM also provided socio-economic data on the migrant population in terms of their schooling, health, security and housing, and other dimensions (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones, 2020). In April 2021, the Todos Somos Barranquilla [We Are All Baranquilla] programme was started to create job training opportunities for 100 migrants residing in the city. In addition, the city also opened the Local Integration Centre for Migrants, which provides the migrant population with guidance on the health and education services and opportunities that the city offers.

6.8.3. Medellín

In 2021, Medellín set up a digital platform for the registration of migrants with a Special Stay Permit in order to expand the coverage of the health system to include them. According to data from the Mayor's Office, of the estimated 78,000 migrants residing in the city, only 12,000 had accessed the system, and very few complied with the requirement to update their data every four months. In 2021, Medellín organized sexual health care days for migrant women at its Gender Equality Centres, with support from the IOM and local organizations.

6.8.4. Cali

The Mayor's Office of Cali, Migration Colombia and 24 organizations that are part of the Inter-Agency Group on Mixed Migration Flows opened a community space to provide comprehensive support to the refugee and migrant population. This is located in the Cali bus terminal and aims to provide timely information on the public services available for vulnerable migrants. It also seeks to provide the Venezuelan migrant and refugee population with information and guidance on the health, social welfare and education services that Cali offers, as a way of guaranteeing the migrant population's human rights (Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali, 2021).

6.8.5. Cúcuta

Cúcuta, Villa del Rosario and other municipalities in Norte de Santander have become some of the main entry points into Colombia for the Venezuelan migrant population. Cúcuta is the largest city in the border area. Since 2016, when large-scale migration to Colombia began, its initiatives have focused on locating migrants and attending to their basic food and health needs.

Through a programme implemented in partnership with the International Rescue Committee, the irregular migrant population in Cúcuta can access health services without having to register with the Colombian health system. Through this service, the migrant population also has free access to sexual and reproductive health resources and the voluntary interruption of pregnancy.

The reception centres for the Venezuelan migrant population bring together the work of department and local authorities, NGOs and the Inter-Agency Group on Mixed Migration Flows. They are the first stop for the migrant population in need of emergency accommodation and care on arriving in Colombia.

7. The social and economic effects of migration

In countries receiving large waves of migrants, especially those receiving vulnerable people fleeing complex economic and political situations, it is common for the main concerns of the local population to revolve around insecurity and unemployment. However, the global academic literature has not established a significant link between migration and violent crime. In fact, studies such as Knight and Tribín (2020), Franco Mora (2020) and others conclude that there is no strong evidence of a relationship between these two factors. They also point out that when crime rates increase, migrants may also be victims. Furthermore, it is not possible to clearly establish whether it is migrants or the native-born population who commit crimes.

Knight and Tribín (2020) analysed migration and violent crime on the border between Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The authors set out to determine whether the increase in Venezuelan migration has led to a rise in the number of crimes committed in Colombia and to ascertain who commits these crimes and whether they affect Colombians or migrants themselves. The study found that the murder rate increased with the wave of migration that followed the reopening of the border, but the main victims were migrants rather than Colombians. It was thus migrants rather than the Colombian population who suffered the risks of increased migration. These crimes against the migrant population were not investigated appropriately, and no increase in arrests was observed in the area analysed in the study. Other factors that may explain the increase in the number of homicides are the multiple conditions of insecurity on the border, competition among migrants themselves for opportunities or xenophobia among the local population (Knight and Tribín, 2020).

In line with the results presented by Knight and Tribín, another study by the Ideas for Peace Foundation (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2018) points out that no significant relationship could be found between migration and crime, although victimization rates increased among the migrant population. Franco Mora (2020) analysed the causal effect of the dramatic increase in migration on theft and violent crime in Colombia. It concludes that in the short term, the increase in migration had a small effect on theft from people and businesses and that the regularization of migrants implemented in 2018 led to a reduction in theft from businesses in the following months. In line with the findings presented by Knight and Tribín (2020), the study also notes that it is not possible to use the available data to demonstrate whether the increase in crime is due to the Venezuelan migrant population or the local population.

The data on arrests and imprisonment in Colombia show that while complaints involving Venezuelan migrants and arrests of them have increased, they are low compared to the total population. Only 1.3 percent of the people who are arrested in Colombia are Venezuelan migrants, while the migrant population represented almost 4 percent of Colombia's total population in 2021 (Weintraub, 2021).

Bahar, Dooley and Selee (2020) provide further support for these findings: their study concludes that Venezuelan migrants commit substantially less crime than the local population in Colombia, Peru and Chile, considering the share of the population that they represent.

Regarding the effect of migration on the employment of Colombians, a study by Bahar, Ibáñez and Rozo (2021) analysed the effect of the Special Stay Permit on employment among the local population. The study found that the permit—which at the time of writing had enabled almost half a million Venezuelan migrants to access formal employment—had only minimal negative effects on the employment rates for formally employed Colombian workers, specifically affecting women and the highly educated.

A study coordinated by Tribín-Urbe (2020) for the Bank of the Republic of Colombia found that Venezuelans mainly consume basic goods and find it hard to spend on items such as health insurance or education. The migrant population also tends to be more willing than locals to save, as this is a way for them to guarantee having the means to return to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela or to cover future economic needs. The study also argues that migration has an effect on labour participation and total employment rates, not because it leads to an increase in total unemployment, but because it makes locals less willing to participate in the labour market. However, the arrival of new waves of migrants is not observed to increase unemployment among migrants who are already in the country, especially in the informal sector.

The same study indicates that in 2017–2019, the Venezuelan migrant population contributed some COP800,957 million to state revenues through value-added tax (VAT) alone, while spending on health, education and early childhood services reached COP 1,312,727 million in the same period (Tribín-Urbe, 2020, p. 58). These figures may change significantly after the regularization of almost the entire migrant population in Colombia that the national Government hopes to achieve. This would allow the migrant population to contribute massively to the country's economy not only through VAT but also through contributions to the health and pension system, other taxes, savings in the banking system and other mechanisms.

Finally, the study coordinated by Tribín-Urbe (2020) argues that Venezuelan migration may have a positive effect on GDP growth in the short term, but this disappears in the long term.

According to a recent estimate by the Ministry of Finance included in the 2021 Medium-Term Fiscal Framework, the effects of migration on labour force growth and private consumption, which will be facilitated by the Temporary Protection Statute, will be key to Colombia's medium-term economic recovery. The positive effect of migration on the Colombian economy may particularly increase as a result of the migration of skilled individuals who represent proportionally more of the migrant population than the local population (Ministerio de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 2021, p. 230). All this will depend on whether the Temporary Protection Statute is implemented successfully in the coming years.

In line with the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit, Mutis et al. (2021) noted that Venezuelan migration has a positive short-term effect on labour productivity in Colombia and recommend taking this factor into account when formulating new migration policies.

8. Challenges, opportunities and recommendations

8.1. Xenophobia

Negative perceptions of the Venezuelan migrant population have increased in Colombia in recent years. During the 2019 social protests, for example, unfounded rumours circulated about crimes committed by migrants, leading to increased but unfounded perceptions of insecurity and stigmatization (Knight and Tribín, 2020). These negative perceptions increased even more during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ramírez Bolívar and Arroyave Velásquez, 2021). Despite the overall benefits of Venezuelan migration in Colombia, there are unfounded but widespread perceptions that Venezuelan migration has led to a decline in security in the country.

According to the most recent Invamer survey, which was conducted in April 2021, the number of Colombians who have an unfavourable opinion of the Venezuelan migrant population rose from 49.4 percent in 2017 to 64.1

percent in 2019. The majority of the Colombian population (62.6 percent) disagree with the Government taking in the migrant population, and 68.9 percent would prefer border crossings to remain closed to prevent the entry of Venezuelans (Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 2021b). Furthermore, according to the Quality of Life Survey, in 2020, 53.6 percent of the migrant population claimed to have been discriminated against or ill-treated because of being Venezuelan.

According to a recent study by the Ideas for Peace Foundation and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 74 percent of Colombian businesspeople deem migrant inclusion policies to be very important, but only 47 percent of those surveyed would participate in such inclusion programmes through their company, and only 15 percent would be willing to include Venezuelan-led companies in their value chain. Some 52 percent of the business community stated that they had little or no trust in the migrant population. Only 28 percent of the 1,200 businessmen and businesswomen who participated in the study had hired Venezuelans, although one positive finding is that 84 percent of those who had done so stated that they would do so again (Fundación Ideas para la Paz y Fundación Konrad Adenauer, 2021).

Messages about Venezuelan migrants on social media increase sharply in response to news coverage about migration. In August 2021, for example, hate messages towards Venezuelans increased by 610 percent compared to the average for the month after the media reported that a Venezuelan migrant may have been responsible for the death of a Colombian policeman. In contrast, positive messages in favour of migrant inclusion and speaking out against xenophobia increased by 2,000 percent in the same month that it was reported that the Mayor's Office of Bogotá had plans to establish a joint security force command unit to target crimes committed by migrants (Barómetro de Xenofobia, September 2021).

The latest surveys on perceptions of the migrant population in Colombia are alarming. Although there is no evidence that the local population's employment or security conditions have deteriorated, nor are there reasons not to trust the migrant population to perform well at work when hired by a local company, the Colombian population's perceptions of Venezuelan migrants are already largely unfavourable. Not only are Colombians against migrants, they actively oppose government measures targeting the migrant population and reject programmes to regularize their migration status, which were widely adopted by Colombia's last two administrations. According to reports by the Xenophobia Barometer, negative perceptions of the migrant population seem to increase when there is news coverage of criminal behaviour that underlines the fact that the alleged perpetrator is a migrant. However, there is still not enough evidence on the structural causes for the growth in negative perceptions of the migrant population in Colombia.

Recommendations. The growth in xenophobia in Colombia is extremely concerning and may lead to an increase in violence against the migrant population or to the local population being against their inclusion in society. These attitudes jeopardize the success of the Temporary Protection Statute and prevent the country from taking full advantage of the opportunities that migration can bring. It is therefore recommended that the contribution that migration can make to the country be made visible through information campaigns carried out by local authorities. An initiative of this sort should be accompanied by strategies to further the effective inclusion of the migrant population in the education system and strategies to further social harmony. The central Government and international agencies also need to work to promote respect for the migrant population among local and national authorities. One final recommendation is to work with the private sector to encourage the hiring of migrants, especially by raising awareness of regularization programmes and their long-term effects on the possibility of hiring migrants.

8.2. An inter-agency approach to public policy

Colombia's next national Government and its department and local administrations will face the challenge of designing and implementing a second generation of public policies for the migrant population aimed at including the most vulnerable migrants intending to remain in the country in social programmes and the health and pension system. As the White Book on Migration argues, local administrations must “address migration as a long-term issue rather than as an emergency” (Gobierno de Colombia, 2020, p. 126). This step will require a change of mentality to modify the time horizons of public policies and make the most of the medium-term benefits of migration.

The main policy challenge for the coming years is successfully implementing the Temporary Protection Statute. While regularizing migrants is indispensable, it alone is not enough. Even those who obtain the Temporary Protection Permit may face other barriers to accessing formal employment and joining and contributing to the social protection system. One further step, one that is much more demanding, will be to expand the registration of the migrant population with the Sisbén to target the most vulnerable migrant population in social assistance programmes. In any case, there will be migrants who do not benefit from the statute either because they are unaware of it, because they entered the country after the established deadline, or because they choose not to for personal reasons. Deciding how to respond to the needs of the irregular migrant population in Colombia remains an ongoing challenge.

Sector-specific registries of the migrant population are still very limited with regard to their estimates of the migrant and returnee population. According to data from the Quality of Life Survey, less than half of all migrant households in Colombia had access to the 2020 Sisbén. This shortfall was mainly due to the lack of valid identification documents in Colombia, which should now improve as a result of the mass registration of the migrant population promoted by the Single Registry of Venezuelan Migrants in 2021. However, it is worrying that as many as 40 percent of migrants who had already obtained a regular migration status in 2020 did not have access to the survey. This needs to be improved in parallel with the regularization process.

The Single Registry of Returnees, which tracks the Colombian population that has returned from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, is an example of the difficulties in establishing reliable measurements. This registry lists 19,161 Colombian nationals, 11,352 of whom returned in 2019. However, the total number of returnee Colombians is close to 1 million (Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, 2021).

Another major challenge is ensuring that new laws such as Act 2135 and Act 2136 of 2021 translate into real support for municipalities and departments to manage the migration phenomenon. One challenge facing mayors and governors is that the regularization process is increasing the fiscal pressure that they are under, but the resources that municipalities receive in the form of contributions from the General System of Transfers, grants and other sources of income have not increased in line with numbers of people requiring attention.

Similarly, successful socio-economic inclusion will require more ambitious strategies to promote the employment of the bulk of the migrant population, without generating clashes with the Colombian population. Programmes such as Empleo Joven [Jobs for Young People] are only implemented for limited periods, and their budgets are often insufficient. Private-sector initiatives need to be promoted to provide the migration population with training and include them in the labour market.

To date, international cooperation resources to date remain largely focused on humanitarian issues. Likewise, figures from the Regional Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants for 2021 and 2022 clearly show that, despite the fact that organizations working on socio-economic inclusion requested resources of around \$72.6 million, they received less than \$10 million. Both the national Government and the UN seek to enable a humanitarian-development nexus—to achieve this, there needs to be a paradigm shift among donors.

Recommendations. Public migration policy needs to continue being coordinated at the highest level of government. To this end, it is recommended that the Office of the President continue to spearhead the coordination of this process, and that ministries and state agencies respond in a coordinated fashion based on the CONPES documents and the strategies outlined by the central Government. It is also recommended that a strategy be implemented to gather information on the migrant population on an ongoing basis. This should be widely shared and nurtured by all state agencies, ideally with the involvement of local authorities. Another recommendation is for the work of border departments and municipalities to be better coordinated to enable them to provide information on changes in migration flows and the needs of the migrant population and to respond rapidly to these, especially given the critical situations in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela that may lead to greater waves of migration in the future. Similarly, if economic circumstances improve in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, it is recommended that the eventual return of migrants to their country be monitored.

8.3. Opportunities

Colombia has an opportunity to continue being a global example of a country that openly receives migrants and provides them with comprehensive assistance. Given the global anti-migration trend in the last decade, especially in the United States and Europe, Colombia is unusual: it is one of the countries that have made the greatest efforts to assist and regularize the migrant population, including those who did not enter the country regularly.

The Colombian Government has also identified the benefits that the migrant population may bring the country by driving productivity and economic growth. Starting with the study by Bean, Telles and Lowell (1987), it has been consistently documented that migration does not significantly affect the income or welfare of the local population. Indeed, it can bring about significant medium-term benefits by increasing the well-being of the host society.

The studies presented in this paper show that the migrant population contributes to tax revenue, increases productivity and can help improve Colombia's economic prospects. Other less well-documented effects can also be expected, such as the creation of migrant social networks to promote greater solidarity among the community and improve assistance for new migrants, as well as cultural and social benefits that go beyond these economic effects.

Furthermore, there are ample opportunities for successfully including the Venezuelan migrant population in Colombian society. Although this inclusion process entails major challenges, as noted in the previous section, the current waves of migration from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Colombia meet some of the favourable conditions for inclusion identified by Reitz (2002) in the country of origin and the receiving country: (i) pre-existing racial or ethnic relations or connections; (ii) the existence of similar institutions and labour markets in the two countries; (iii) the existence of migration-related government policies and programmes and comprehensive institutional regulation; and (iv) fluid borders. With regard to the fourth component in the list, while the movement of all vehicles and goods at the border between Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is yet to be fully re-implemented, it is positive that the movement of people between the two countries has been re-established.

Recommendations. This paper recommends that strategies be designed to further the inclusion of the migrant population in a way that allows Colombia to make the most of the medium-term potential that migration brings in terms of economic growth. To this end, a third stage in the public policy response should be considered, one that encourages migrants to stay in Colombia in the medium and long term, not just the short term. The country successfully handled the first stage of the emergency, and the initial humanitarian crisis has given way to social inclusion initiatives and integrated response to providing social assistance for migrants. Significant challenges still need to be addressed to ensure the success of the next stage in this process, but while the Temporary Protection Statute is being implemented, consideration needs to be given to the next steps in the inclusion process to ensure that this wave of migration can be harnessed in the medium and long term.

9. Conclusions

This paper describes the dynamics of migration in Colombia in recent years, examines the country's public policy responses and analyses the main challenges ahead. Venezuelan migrants account for the vast majority of migrants in Colombia, and the scale of these flows far outstrips those of other nationalities. Colombia had to tackle a massive migration emergency when it went from receiving just 50,000 Venezuelans in 2016 to receiving 2 million in 2021. The policies implemented in response to this emergency generally entailed promoting the reception, assistance and eventual regularization of the migrant population, making Colombia an example for other world regions where measures have focused on restriction and expulsion. The two massive migrant regularization processes implemented in 2018 and 2021 are possibly the most ambitious in recent global history.

In 2022, as the implementation of the second regularization process continues, new needs are arising: as more and more migrants seek to remain in Colombia permanently, they require access to services and rights protection mechanisms on par with the most vulnerable sectors of the local population. The main public policy challenge will be shifting the focus of actions from addressing a temporary emergency to providing medium- and long-term assistance and inclusion strategies for the migrant population. For this second generation of assistance policies to be successful, improvements need to be made to ensure the ongoing collection of data and the coordinated exchange of information. This will enable the provision of better services that target the most vulnerable population. The Colombian Government acknowledges the opportunities for growth that migrants are bringing the country and hopes that regularizing their migration status will help grow the labour force, increasing savings and tax revenues and boost contributions to social security systems.

One major challenge that Colombia is facing is the growth of negative perceptions of the migrant population. Although public policies continue to prioritize assistance and inclusion, there is growing opposition to this among Colombian citizens. Another source of concern is the spread of unfounded ideas that link the growth in migrant numbers to increased insecurity and the displacement of the Colombian labour force.

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