

Venezuelan exodus: Humanitarian crisis, migration, and regional responses¹

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Migration Snapshot

- **First phase** of Venezuelan emigration began 1998 and intensified after the failed coup against Hugo Chávez and the oil strike (*paro petrolero*) in April 2002 – migrants: elite and upper middle class
- **Second phase** with the expropriation and nationalization of various industries in 2006 – migrants: elite and upper middle and middle class
 - According to the Central University of Venezuela, an estimated 1.5 million Venezuelans (four to six percent of the country's total population) emigrated between 1999 and 2014.
- **Third phase** from 2014/2015 onwards when Venezuelans began to flee in much higher numbers as result of the tumbling oil price and a sharp decline in the value of Venezuelan bolivar, which led to a severe political, economic and humanitarian crisis.
- A late-2017 survey by Consultores 21 found that over four million Venezuelans had left the country due to the Bolivarian Revolution, and 51 percent of young adults said that they wanted to emigrate.

Venezuela's Humanitarian Crisis

- 2016: ½ of import spending
 - Low food availability
 - 85% of medication unavailable
 - 240,000 w/ malaria (76% increase from 2015)
 - Inflation
- 2017:
 - Arrest of 100+ political opponents
 - 70+ deaths of protesters
 - 11.4% children are malnourished
 - 10.5% unemployment
 - GDP drops 18.6% from 2014
- 2018:
 - Highest inflation in the world (1.3 million %)
 - 50% economic contraction since 2013
 - 51% living in 'extreme poverty'

¹ Presentation partly based on Freier, Luisa Feline and Parent, Nicolas. 2019. "The Regional Response to the Venezuelan Exodus," *Current History: A Journal of Contemporary World Affairs* 118, no. 805: 56-61.

- 90% do not have enough money for food

2018 Venezuelan elections-Present

- May 2018 elections:
 - 46.1% turnout (down from 80%, 2013)
- Maduro wins second term w/ 67.7%
 - Opposition, Lima Group and others do not recognize the result
- January 2019:
 - National Assembly call the results in invalid
 - NA Speaker Juan Guaidó is named acting President
- 1,600 protests in February 2019 (compared to 594 in February 2018)
- 2019: 2,820 protests for political rights
- Previous conditions continue

3,706,624

- A conservative estimate; some estimates go up to 5 million

People with regular status including resident permits

- Colombia is the highest (proximity)
- Colombia and Peru have programs to regularize status
- So does Chile, also offering higher standard of living (comparative to other LA countries)
 - this includes Argentina

Asylum seekers

- Figures based on ability to make a claim
- In the case of Colombia, there is a large proportional difference – reason: asylum seekers cannot work in the country
- Figures in the US remain one of the most outdated

Flows and trends

- Migrants engage in step migration
- Projection is set to reach levels similar to Syrian refugee crisis

Demographics: age and gender

- Further away from Venezuela, the more likely the Venezuelan migrants are:
 - Working age
 - Male
- Pioneer migration

Demographics: education

- The closer to Venezuela, the less educated (and vis-versa)

Changing demographics

- Based on Displacement Tracking Matrix #5 (for Peru), the Venezuelan profile is in fact diversifying

- More from a background of chronic poverty
- More indigenous
- More with health issues such as HIV
- Less educated
- More families – leading to xenophobia as fear that they will establish themselves grows
- More ethnic diversity – social-racial discrimination in Peru is becoming a greater risk

A mosaic of responses in Latin America

- What my colleague Feline Freier and I have argued is that the response to the third phase of Venezuelan emigration (2014-now), picking up in 2017, has been chronologically aligned to three considerations:
 - Foreign policy considerations
 - Photo: Lenín Moreno, President of Ecuador
 - Domestic considerations
 - Photo: migrant camp and possessions burnt in Pacaraima, province of Roraima, Brazil
 - Regional considerations
 - Photo: Lima Group

1970/80s Dictatorships

- Latin America's Southern Cone: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay.
- In **Argentina**, military junta led by Jorge Rafael Videla (1976-1981) set up death squads to track, arrest, imprison, torture and kill dissidents and left-wing Peronist guerrillas (known as the Dirty War).
- In **Brazil**, there was a military dictatorship between 1964-1985. Was a periphery member, but was responsible, most notably, for abductions and disappearances.
- In **Chile**, Augusto Pinochet took power following a US-backed coup in 1973. Torture, state terrorism, mass arrests. Chemical weapons such as sarin gas were also used.
- In **Paraguay**, anti-communist dictator Alfredo Stroessner ruled the country for 35 years. Torture exercises were recorded and sent to families. The most extensive archive of documents on Operation Condor were found at the Assencion police station, now called the 'Archives of Terror'.
- Highly coordinated (regional cooperation):
 - Agencies such as the Argentine Secretariat of Intelligence and Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA) in Chile cooperated in the tracking and capture of dissidents
 - Similar bilateral agreement between Argentina and Brazil, signed in 1976, to "hunt down and eliminate" opponents (according to newly declassified CIA documents in early April 2019)
- Funded and supported by the United States government (Operation Condor)
- Estimated 60,000 deaths (30,000 in Argentina), 30,000 disappearances, and 400,000 imprisonments

Mass democratization

- Discovery and practice of political rights

- Transition to civilian governance
 - Still under institutional structures of dictatorship, but incremental move towards democracy
- Political opposition becomes acceptable
 - Multi-party democracies emerge
- Freedom of assembly
- Wide breadth of rights emerges from social movements that emanate originally from the disappeared persons movement
 - Women's rights
 - Labor rights
 - Land rights
 - Immigrant rights
 - Mercosur South America trade bloc (1991) – Freedom of movement

Pink Tide

- Rises from the political freedom of the 1990s – incremental social purchase
- Leftist political parties and movements
- Starting in early 2000's, considered the “turn to the left”
 - First to come is Chavez in Venezuela
 - Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia and Ecuador follow, but nearly all South American countries engage with Pink Tide politics
 - Still in the works today (most recently with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico in 2018)
- Regional immigration and refugee policy reform, in most cases, implementing the Cartagena definition of refugee – also, 2009 Mercosur Residency Agreement
 - Born from the rejection of US migration policies
 - Reflects the Latin American reality: high emigration, low immigration (But this is changing now)

Pink Tide-Conservative Wave

- Passing from the Pink Tide (then) to the Conservative Wave (now, mostly), Latin America has inherited a legacy that defines its response to the Venezuelan exodus
- This has happened in three notable ways:
 - **Migration policies** of the Pink Tide era (which we just saw)
 - The passing on of a continental culture of **regionalism**
 - **Foreign policy** that is best defined by an ideological divide

Policy reactions to the Venezuelan exodus

- Let's take a quick look at some of the policies before analyzing the factors that drove the Latin American response

PTP and PEP: The policy yo-yo

- These two programs have gone back and forth between active, not active; changing requirements; changing deadlines; etc.
- This is possible (and legal) – they are not protection instruments, but work permits

- Countries can act with impunity (link to Turkey)

Foreign policy considerations

- In the earliest period of most recent phase of immigration, the ideologically-aligned countries of Cuba, Bolivia, and Ecuador largely denied there being a political crisis in Venezuela. Accepting a migration crisis was not an option.
- In 2017, when the US imposed sanctions on Venezuela, the three allied countries called it “imperialist interference”
- Meanwhile, the conservatively-aligned and neoliberal countries of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Peru opened their doors to Venezuelan immigrants.
- Chile’s ‘Visa of Democratic Responsibility’ sends a clear message to Caracas
- At this point, the migrant profile is predominantly:
 - Single and young men
 - Relatively wealthy
 - Educated and professionals

Rise in domestic concerns

- Brazil:
 - In August 2018, Brazilian protesters in the northern border town of Pacaraima burned down a temporary settlement, prompting 1,200 migrants to return to Venezuela.
 - In Boa Vista, the lynching of a Venezuelan migrant who had allegedly murdered a local resident during a robbery also drove hundreds to return in September.
 - A state of emergency has been in effect in Brazil’s northern border state of Roraima since February. The part of the border near Boa Vista, the state capital, was temporarily closed on August 6.
- Colombia:
 - A planned relocation of migrants by the municipal government of Bogotá drew fierce disapproval in August 2018. About 500 migrants living in an informal settlement were offered the opportunity to move to a temporary camp set up at a soccer field. Local residents blocked entry to the site, claiming that the migrants would bring diseases and insecurity to the area.
- Peru:
 - September 2018: Survey conducted by the newspaper El Comercio and the polling firm Ipsos found that 55 percent of Lima residents had negative views of Venezuelan immigration, with 46 percent citing “loss of employment” as a major concern. 58% percent of respondents said they had heard discriminatory comments about Venezuelans.

Domestic responses

- Countries have made attempts at reducing flows/increasing entry barriers
- Passport requirement: Ecuador and Peru attempted this but both were stricken down by courts
- State of emergencies: Ecuador and Brazil (securitization/criminalization paradigms are reinforced)

- Border closer: At Boa Vista (turned around by a court within a matter of hours)
- Deportations: Actual and threatened in Argentina and Chile

Regional cooperation

- Quito process: The declaration stated the signatories' commitment to combat discrimination, intolerance, and xenophobia against Venezuelans, and to protect them against human trafficking and smuggling

Need for assistance

- Response to Venezuelan migration crisis: \$738 million budget
- Response to Syrian refugee crisis: \$5.5 billion appeal